

One Nation Under War: A Sociocultural Exploration of the Psychology of Violence and  
the American Example

A Dissertation

Presented to the

Faculty of the Graduate School of Psychology

Fuller Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

(Psychology)

by

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March 2015

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by

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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents Abdy and Molouk. In my lifetime, I have often encountered terms like *unconditional love*, *sacrifice*, *selflessness*, and *goodness*. I am thankful to you two for providing the substance of what those words mean to my mind and heart. You not only gave me my life but you sustained it, nourished it, and spiritually and ethically guided it all while teaching me, both through word and deed, to follow your example and likewise give of myself to others. Thank you for living your lives through a posture that elegantly balances the tensions of faith and wonder, courage and cautiousness, acceptance and resistance, tactfulness and honesty, joy and despair, and hope and realism. This posture has taught me in ways that you will never understand and that I can never put into words. I dedicate not only this dissertation, but other major facets of my life, to you and your honor. Whatever and whomever I am and whatever and whomever I become is and will be a living tribute to you. You will live in me as I continue forth as a husband, a father, a friend, a scholar, a practitioner, and a servant of God. I am so proud to be your son and I only hope that I too make you both proud. I love you.

Barbod Salimi  
Boston, MA, 2015

## Acknowledgments

This work, along with any subsequent work I carry out moving forward, is not really mine. It does not “belong to me” as it were. To clarify, I do not mean that this dissertation is plagiarized, unoriginal, or that it results from anything other than my own exercise of imagination, intellectual thought, ethics, and spiritual exploration. I can assure the reader that the criteria for what comprises work with academic integrity have herein been met; and so in that vein, this is “my work.” But in another vein I must reiterate that it is not.

What I mean to convey here is that I see myself less as an originator of anything that may be called knowledge and more as a contributor to an ongoing conversation. As a contributor, my voice is one that can do nothing but echo the voices before me, though with a different timbre. I have not simply created ideas on my own and transferred them onto paper but instead I work as a conduit that absorbs the wisdom that precedes me and refashions it in ways that I consider relevant. The sea of truth is deep and mysterious and I do not presume to add water to it. Rather, I swim near the surface listening intently, feeling my way through, looking around me, and occasionally dipping my head underwater only to come up for air, gasp, and deliver a description of my subsurface experience. This dissertation is one such gasp and delivery and, therefore, like the sea of knowledge from which it draws, it is not mine.

In an age where the realms of truth-seeking, knowledge, creativity, art, and love have begun to find company with the realms of ownership, mass communication, consumerism, and commerce, the academy finds itself in need of terms like “intellectual property.” The assumption underneath this sort of term is that if we can be private

individuals in possession of private goods, then even our most cutting edge expressions of knowledge (in this case, the scholarly sort) fall under the domain of this type of ownership. I wish to be clear that I begin by rejecting this assumption. I begin by averting the pretentious, self-inflated, narcissistic potential that this mindset carries in assuming that creativity can come about in and from vacuous, isolated spaces. I begin by refusing to treat anything, let alone intellectuality, as *mine*, recognizing instead that the world is a gift and so are ideas that emerge from within it. I begin with a spirit of gratefulness by acknowledging this as a metaphysical reality and appreciating those who have shaped my thinking and given me the contents of my voice. I also begin with trepidation, however, knowing that I will inevitably fall short of delivering this gratitude in its necessary fullness. So, I shall say that I begin by thanking those who have taught me how to think and feel, while apologizing to the great many I am bound to leave out. In this vein, the below list is hardly exhaustive.

First, I wish to thank my beautiful wife, Molly, for her unending love, support, and encouragement. Graduate school is not easy. It monopolizes time and often renders people one-dimensional beings who, in efforts to become better thinkers, forget what it means to be fully human. Western models of education sometimes force its subjects to live in their heads, thus enabling them to forget that they have hearts. In navigating this terrain and attempting to avoid its pitfalls, I can say with complete confidence that I could not have emerged from the journey of graduate school a healthy person if it were not for you, Molly. You supported me through tangible means (i.e., working to financially support our household, cooking good and healthy food for us, helping me study for exams, etc.) as well as through the equally important intangible means (i.e., maintaining a

hopeful and optimistic attitude during tumultuous times, or reminding me that love and laughter sustain us even amidst pain and uncertainty). I am forever indebted to you. May God bless me with the strength and resolve to repay you in the next chapter of our lives. I love you so deeply and so intimately and I would not have chosen to walk this path with anyone but you.

Second, I would like to yet again acknowledge my parents, Abdy and Molouk. Though my words to them are contained in the dedication of this dissertation, I see it fit nevertheless to not let them go unthanked here. Thank you, Dad and Mom, for everything you have done and continue to do for my sake. I love you both.

Third, I would like to thank my brother, Nima, for his friendship and guidance over the years. As my big brother who is nearly six years my senior, you have helped raise me and have taught me much about some of life's biggest virtues such as hard work, determination, and perseverance. In response to your reserved, inquisitive, and intellectually rigorous disposition, I have always had a strong sense that if I were to be seen as good in your eyes, then it would somehow make it so. Thank you for pushing me to never settle for less than what is necessary and right. I owe a lot to you and I love you.

Fourth, I wish to thank my dear friend and mentor, Al Dueck. I arrived at Fuller for my doctoral studies knowing full well that I desired to study under your direction. What I did not know was just how profoundly meaningful and formative that relationship and process would prove to be. I came in seeking education and academic guidance on the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of psychology as well as a sound, theologically-couched orientation through which to negotiate the study of human behavior and the practical dimensions therein. I now stand on the verge of graduation

having indeed received that while also having received so much more from you. Your friendship has been invaluable and is something I will forever cherish. Your wisdom has influenced me in ways that you are probably unaware of. Your heart for people has inspired me to become a better person, husband, friend, and neighbor. And finally, your faith has demonstrated for me what it means to embody theological truth. I cannot go without mentioning what is perhaps the most meaningful way in which you have had an impact on me. As you know, I have at times felt out of place and alone at Fuller, given its evangelical Christian milieu. The advice you gave me amidst this was never to “religiously conform” but to embrace my particularity, my theological heritage, my cultural history, and my narrative identity. I write this with the utmost gratitude towards you, a Mennonite, for confronting me with love and hospitality rather than exclusion and hostility. If it were not for your attitude of embrace over the years, I am not sure where my spiritual life would be today. Thank you, Al, for being the ideal mentor. I love you.

Fifth, I would like to thank some very dear friends who have profoundly enriched my life. I can say with certainty that this dissertation would not be what it is without each of your being who you are. To my best friend, Jonathan Orara: thank you for your part in keeping our sense of deep, unconditional friendship intact despite the “curveballs” that life has thrown us both. It is incredible to think that we were twelve years old when we first came to know each other. Since then, our bond has strengthened with each passing year as we yearn, struggle, stumble, and grow alongside each other while maintaining our mutually-infectious senses of humor that sustain us through it all. Thank you for all you have been for me and my family. I love you, my friend. To Jonathan Williams: you are the one of the most unassuming and kind people I know. Having you as a friend has been



so valuable for me and I am thankful for your resilient yet carefree spirit. You have taught me so much about life. Thank you and I love you. To Kimani Lovan: I never thought I could be so close to someone who is so similar to me in so many ways (you would think I would get sick of *myself* after a while, right?). In all seriousness though, I think it is actually those traits you possess that make you *unlike* myself that I admire and respect most about you. Thank you for your ongoing friendship and encouragement. You are a great man and a great friend, and I love you. To my cousin Arash Rahbar: thank you for never settling for a superficial relationship with me, your younger cousin. I have gleaned so much from watching you and the way you navigate life with an intricate blend of intensity, lightheartedness, loyalty, and concern for others. I love you. Lastly, I will, for the sake of brevity, simply list by name some other dear friends who have touched my life over the years. I am grateful to each of you for your constant friendship as well as all that you have poured into me: Rex Andrade, Brian Wahlstrom, Paul Adams, Ernesto Salinas, David Choi, and Jeffrey Ansloos.

Sixth, I would like to thank two of my former track and field coaches: Don Jones and Paul Kinder: you have both been a source of inspiration for much of my life. I rarely do much in life without remembering important lessons I learned from being coached, guided by, and mentored by you two. Thank you for always believing in me, pushing me, and recognizing my potential.

Seventh, I want to extend gratitude to the wonderful family that I inherited through marriage: my parents-in-law, Brian and Julie and my sister-in-law, Megan. The three of you have, in various ways, supported Molly and me throughout the years and I am so appreciative of that. Thank you for always encouraging us and providing support

whenever and wherever we have needed it. I am honored to call you family and you are all dearly loved.

Eighth, and on behalf of myself and Dr. Al Dueck, I want to thank the other members of this dissertation committee: Drs. Alexis Abernethy, Tommy Givens, and Glen Stassen. Glen: may you rest in peace. Even though we lost you prior to the formal defense of this dissertation, I still wrote the contents of this project with your voice echoing in my head. Thank you for teaching me ethics through your life and through your thought. Alexis: you are one of the most intelligent and compassionate people I have ever had the privilege of meeting. Thank you. And last but not least: Tommy: thank you for rescuing me from the menacing thought that theology was a dead discipline. Students of theology are often reminded of the wordplay joke that “Seminary” can end up being a “Cemetery” in that it can “kill” the faith of its students. I must admit I was on the verge of this spiritual death on several occasions and it was always through interactions with you, either in classrooms or one-on-one conversations, that my faith was resuscitated. Your refusal to separate the often separated realms of everyday life, intellectuality, faith, family, community, culture, theology, ethics, and social justice has been a breath of fresh air for me to witness. Thank you for being that integrated person and for being a friend and mentor.

Ninth, I would like to thank all of my students as well as the administrators at Azusa Pacific University. During the course of my doctoral studies, I have had the good fortune of maintaining an adjunct professorship in the department of psychology at APU. There-through courses I taught on the history of psychology, the integration of psychology and theology, the philosophy of psychology, and peace psychology—I was

able to be stretched by my students and exposed to new horizons of seeing. My teaching philosophy is always predicated upon collaborative learning and Socratic dialogue. In that sense, I am humbled to say that I would wager with supreme confidence that I have learned more from my students than they have from me. Furthermore, I am indebted to Dr. Annie Tsai for her steadfast faith in me as a professor as well as her willingness to let me teach courses that align with my interests while using pedagogical methods that I see fit.

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One Nation Under War: A Sociocultural Exploration of the Psychology of Violence and

the American Example

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## Abstract

In both academic and non-academic spheres, the problem of human violence in general, and war in particular, is commonly thought of in terms of nature versus nurture. These approaches are deficient in that they disregard the holistic quality of human psychology. Neglecting this holism becomes problematic for psychological theorization on violence and war because its mistaken dualistic assumptions (such as that between mind and body or that between self and context) establish the fallacious view that the human psyche is something that functions independently from embodied-cultural life. If carried out without these dualisms, however, psychologies of war can then be understood through holistic considerations regarding cultural context, embodied practice, and phenomenological ethics. The author's goal is to first critique prevalent theories on psychology and violence, or warlikeness, and then to provide an alternative methodology that reorients the discussion towards this more holistic realm. This approach to understanding the psychology of war is then applied to U.S. American culture. It is argued—because psychology and warlikeness are to be understood as issues pertaining to context and embodiment—that capitalist culture, rather than some private, abstract, transcultural notion of the human mind, shapes the American psyche of war. A theological discussion ensues on how humans can avoid becoming psychologically shaped into agents capable of warlikeness, whether through action or attitude.

*Keywords:* violence, war, culture, embodiment, psychology

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**Opening Remarks and Autobiography**

**Situating the Problem: What Psychologies of War Neglect**

Like many disciplines, psychology is fraught with dualisms. Often, psychologists construct and posit binaries in efforts to illustrate theories and advance modes of understanding human behavior. Contrary to the assumptions of many, dualisms are not subject to absolute philosophical “proofs,” as it were, that either affirm or falsify their tenability and/or utility. In other words, one’s tendency or decision to perceive phenomena through a dualistic lens is just that—a perception. Dualism (and its counterpart of monism for that matter) is thus an issue of presupposition; it is a starting point. Whether one carries the banner of dualism or monism is not a question of irrefutable truth but rather a question of where one begins his or her disciplinary activity. One’s starting point, where (and how) one begins on the quest toward deeper understanding, therefore, may have more to do with personal intuition than rational foundation.

A different question, however, is the question of necessity: are dualisms necessary? This question must be answered on a case-by-case basis with sensitivity to topic and context. Rather than reverting to the above-noted, grand, philosophical question of dualism versus monism in its rational-foundational sense, a more immediate practical consideration may be situationally employed that determines the need, or lack thereof, for invoking certain binaries. This draws more on Ockham’s principle of parsimony than, say, Plato’s metaphysics and in turn engenders questions that sound less like “What is the nature of the universe and its materiality?” and more like “What is the simplest, least



convoluted way of describing a particular phenomenon?” Psychology has historically stumbled in this regard, offering universal, causally-laden (and thus overly dualistic) proclamations on human behavior as opposed to contextual, phenomenological (and thus more holistic and unified) expositions. And so, psychology’s “questions” have tended to carry far too much unacknowledged metaphysical baggage and, as a result, have neglected particularized, more unified descriptions of human behavior and experience.

Naturally, psychologies of war and violence have followed suit. The question, “Why are people warlike?”, has been asked from out of the sort of dualism described above. Psychologists of varying stripes have approached the problem of war and violence with an overemphasis on one or another element of such presupposed binaries. This has resulted in theories of warlike or violent psychology that pinpoint one dimension of reality as the culprit. This has rendered explanations of war and violence as originating either from some intrapsychic realm (commonly thought of in terms of a “self”) or from out of some extrinsic realm (commonly thought of in terms of social stimulus). This trend encapsulates the age-old “nature-nurture” debate, which will be explored in more depth in chapter 1. And while the discipline of psychology has veered away from that language (i.e., nature versus nurture), the residual binaries have been quite difficult for many to tear themselves away from. Even when the nature-nurture paradigm is seemingly avoided, psychologies of war have tended to be causally reductionistic in that they steadfastly locate the roots of war and violence in one determining variable such as human instinct, political attitudes, economics, religion, etc. To echo the sentiments from above, we may ask whether this is necessary. An alternative, and less dualistic, tactic in

exploring war psyche would thus refrain from reducing it to one part of perceived reality and attempt to describe human behavior more holistically.

What then does a more particularized, more holistic psychology of war, which avoids unnecessary dualisms splitting human behavior into parts, include? What must it account for? The answer to the question that I wish to propose in this dissertation is this: sociocultural embodiment. That is, the way in which human beings are physical entities whose psyches and ways of making sense of the world emerge from within their particular, concrete ways of being and becoming in the world. Society and culture (or the “world out there,” as it were) need not be thought of as distinct from the human entities that comprise it, and vice versa. When concepts like the self, culture, psychology, ethics, and value are split apart from, and assumed to have causal power over, one another, we are left with unnecessary, dualistic modes of thinking that orient us towards describing human behavior in very limited ways. Psychologies of war that enact this splitting neglect the notion that self and culture are really linguistic expressions used to describe specific instantiations of experience as opposed to ontologically distinct components altogether. To reiterate, “self” and “culture” may be thought of as distinct words that are invoked for descriptive purposes and not distinct entities that occupy separate spaces in reality.

The whole of what I am describing here will be fleshed out in Chapter 2. For now, my intent is to set the stage for what psychologies of war and violence have neglected: the unity of self and culture, the importance of understanding human psychology through actual explorations of embodied life, and the ways in which human psyche emerges out of a unified, non-dualistic co-construction of thought and action.

### **Examples of Neglect**

As mentioned above, the most pronounced way in which this neglect has occurred in psychological literature on war and violence has been through the paradigm of nature-nurture. Therefore, I shall devote extra attention to it in Chapter 1. For now, and in order to situate the intent and direction of this project, I wish to highlight some of the ways in which this neglect runs rampant when it comes to the psychology of violence and war.

Social sciences in general, and psychology in particular, have maintained a track record of neglecting the holistic unity of self and culture when exploring the question of war. At times this occurs by virtue of the central questions contained within the research. For example, researchers may be interested in exploring the psychological impact of war and thus establish research designs that, de facto, neglect the question of what gives rise to a psychology of war or violence. At other times, this neglect happens more implicitly in that the dualistic presuppositions undergirding one's way of asking questions altogether drive the research aim. For example, the assumption that human beings have an inherent predisposition may establish research designs that attempt to locate warlike psychology within the individual, as demonstrated through neuroscientific findings. Such an approach neglects the unity of self and culture by positing a fixed, identifiable, ahistorical psyche that functions independently (and thus split off from) a person's particular sociocultural location and activity. So, whether administered explicitly, through the type of question being asked, or implicitly, through the philosophical assumptions shaping the very anatomy of the questions being asked, psychologies of war have persisted in this mode of neglect. Below, I will provide brief examples of such neglect by exposing how psychologies of war and violence have been framed.

**Psychology set on course.** The influence that pioneers have on the trajectories of particular disciplines can hardly be overstated. In academic circles it is not uncommon for dialogues to carry on in response or reaction to what has originally been laid out.<sup>1</sup> Thinkers who arrive subsequently to scholarly discussions are already bound up in the parameters set in motion by the originators of the discussions. The topic of discussion, the language employed, the limits of imagination, and so on, are all, in some way, constricted by the boundaries set forth by the pioneering thinker. In this vein, it is irresponsible to ignore that which the pioneers of psychology proclaimed on the matter of war, violence, and their psychic origins. In Chapter 1, much space will be devoted to the thought of Sigmund Freud. For now, I will provide a glimpse into how Western psychology was set on a course of neglecting holism as to the question of war. Renowned by many as the father of American psychology, William James asserts:

The plain truth is that people want war. They want it anyhow...the born soldiers want it hot and actual. The non-combatants want it in the background, and always as an open possibility, to feed the imagination on and keep excitement going. Its clerical and historical defenders fool themselves when they talk about it. What moves them is not the blessings it has won for us, but a vague religious exaltation. War is human nature at its uttermost. We are here to do our uttermost. We are here to do our uttermost. (1904/1926, p. 258)

Many have described James as a brilliant psychologist and philosopher. And here he is making clear that the “plain truth” is that human beings “want war” by virtue of expressing their inner nature. James, who is otherwise interested in varying modes of

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<sup>1</sup> I am reminded here of Whitehead’s comment that the whole of the European philosophical tradition “consists of a series of footnotes to Plato” (1929, p. 39).

human experience such as religion and culture, neglects the role of the outer as a mutual facilitator of the inner. He makes this clear by declaring how people “fool themselves” by venturing into alternative explanations. In James’s view, then, warlike psyche occurs because it is part of the inherent structure of human psychology from the start. What might subsequent generations of this discipline (i.e., psychology) take on as their ways of thinking in response to proclamations of this pioneer?

**Personality and aggression.** Psychological literature has attempted to connect aggression and/or violence with already existent personality traits. For example, Thomaes and Bushman (2011) have explored the linkages between narcissistic personality and aggression, regardless of covarying factors such as age and gender. They conclude their survey by making recommendations that future researchers “begin to study...self-traits that may reduce aggressive behavior” (p. 215). Though their desire for a diminishment in aggressive behavior is admirable, their methodology typifies the sort of neglect outlined above. By linking aggressive behavior to dimensions of personality, the nuts and bolts of embodied social and cultural life become ignored. By instating such an oversight, aggressive behavior (and furthermore warlike psyche) becomes a phenomenon whose very construction goes unquestioned. It is noteworthy how Thomaes and Bushman seem not to explore how/why aggression exists as an appropriate option in the first place. Rather, they merely present empirical support for how aggression is concomitant with certain personality types. There are several problems with this way of theorizing on the psychology of violence. First, it possesses little in the way of explanatory value. Are instances of aggression always directly related to the rate or amount of expression of particular personalities? It would seem apparent, *prima facie*, that aggressive behavior

happens across personalities of different substance and type. However, even if their data are accepted as scientifically valid, the construal of those data assumes that one's bodily encounter with the world has less to do with the cultivation of aggression than does something like "personality." What is personality? Is it an abstract predisposition or a concrete feature of one's bodily maneuvers and rhythms? If the latter, then it stands to reason that "personality" must be a variable that is made more substantive with what one actually does from an embodied, non-dualistic standpoint. Merely linking aggression with a certain inner predisposition does very little to advance our knowledge of the genesis of warlike mentality.

**War and national psychology.** Other studies have aimed at viewing the incidence and/or nationalistic support of war through the lens of predominating political-psychological forces. McFarland (2005) writes about the ways in which authoritarian and social forces, as perceived by the mass of American citizens, play a major role in not only the public support of war but also reduced concern for the ill effects of war on a human level. McFarland's methodology may be categorized in the subcategory of social and political psychology. He examines public perceptions of government and authority and uses them as explanatory variables for the attitudes of war that exist. Though such an approach is intriguing and not altogether wrongheaded, it nevertheless engages in the neglect of the human person as a unified, embodied-psychic being. By positing social and political variables (such as authoritarianism and social dominance), McFarland essentially puts forth a view of human psychology that is passive. If warlike attitudes are activated merely by the external force of authoritarian, socially dominant stimuli, then the human psyche is hardly more than a passive recipient of all that it encounters.

McFarland's analysis leaves little in the way of holism: socioculturally negotiated moral meanings that are shaped by the embodiment of certain ways of being which give rise to particular psychological attitudes. Rather, such an analysis enacts what much of social psychology tends to: a dualistic way of accounting for human psychology. The unity and co-construction of self, society, and culture is yet again neglected.

### **A Proposed Response**

In this section, I have outlined what I perceive to be the problem. Namely, psychologies of war have operated far too dualistically and, as a result, unnecessarily neglected some of the most basic and practical dimensions of human psychology, such as the way in which the psyche is part and parcel of sociocultural embodiment. Because this holism is frequently neglected, psychological theories of war and violence have tended to ignore discussions on the concrete reality of particular ways of being. Instead, psychologies of war have rested too comfortably in the realm of the abstract (which posits assertions on what human psyche is, a priori), in the realm of unquestioned assumptions (such as those that simplistically link personality with moral-ethical action), or in the realm of the incidental (such as those approaches that investigate the psychological impact of war rather than its genesis). A new way of discussing the psychology of war is in order. This new psychology of war will avoid unnecessary dualisms and will focus on concrete considerations of how the psyche emerges from out of particular ways of acting. It is neither a social psychology nor a neurobiological psychology. It is a performative psychology that takes the social and the biological seriously, yet sees them as dimensions of being human rather than all-determining causes. The realms of the self and the social-cultural must therefore be explored as co-

constructing dimensions of what it means to be a bodily-psychological being. War and violence are things we do, not predispositions we have inherently or responses to external stimuli we express. A psychology of war that adopts this holism, rather than unnecessary binaries that split human psychology into parts, will, I think, be an improvement.

### **Preliminary Thoughts: What is Possible in Psychology?**

Broadly speaking, this dissertation is about the psychology of violence. More narrowly, it is about the psychology of war. But my words are already problematic for there is no such thing as psychology in any sense of the term that would warrant my use of a definite article like “the.” A better and more honest way of speaking would give rise to a word like psychologies and steer clear of the tendency to ascribe universality to the supposed conclusions derived from data collected within the field. Psychology, in this vein, cannot and should not be considered a true science. Why not? Because in its contemporary charge, science requires its activities to capitulate to the standards of testability, replicability, and predictability. However, human minds (which are the focus of psychology) are far too inscrutable, subjective, and unpredictable to adhere to such standards. Gone should be the days where psychology as a discipline is considered to be in the category of science, whether of the hard or soft variety. Psychology (or psychologies), therefore, is (or are) better suited to be thought of as a type of hermeneutic, interpreting human behavior while making good use of those experiential aspects of life that are particular, aesthetic, familial, interpersonal, social, cultural, political, ethical, spiritual, historical, and so forth.

I think Carl Jung (1946) had it right when he bemoaned the state of the psychology that was contemporary to his time:



Theories in psychology are the very devil...we still know so very little about the psyche that it is positively grotesque to think we are far enough advanced to frame general theories. We have not even established the empirical extent of the psyche's phenomenology: how then can we dream of general theories? No doubt theory is the very best cloak for lack of experience and ignorance, but the consequences are depressing: bigotedness, superficiality, and scientific sectarianism. (1946, p. 7)

It should be noted that Jung is most likely using the term "theory" here in the scientist's sense. Theories in science are somewhat misnomered in that they are synonymous with the explanations assigned to repeated experimentation or observation as opposed to being mere conjectures about the workings of the natural world. Laypeople are often mistaken in saying of science that it is built on nothing but a plethora of theories as though "theories" in this sense amount to nothing more than guesses. In science, however, theories are not just guesses but firm pronouncements of the best available explanation for a set of repeatedly observed events or phenomena.<sup>2</sup> So, Jung is reminding us here that engaging in the formulation of theories of this sort in the realm of psychology is a rather audacious exercise.

As a psychologist I am not, therefore, a "scientist" and this dissertation should not be read as a scientific theory about violence or war and its relation to the human psyche. Rather, it should be read as a different sort of theoretical exercise: the kind not constricted by the limits of scientism. Rather than insisting on the detection of objectively

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<sup>2</sup> I would like to make clear that these sentences are not meant to be taken as a staunch, apologetic defense of scientism: the view that the only truth that exists is that which is acquired through the use of science. On the contrary, I vehemently reject this view. Rather, my intention in making these distinctions is only to clarify that psychology is ineligible for inclusion under the powerful yet limited scope of science.

observable “facts,” this alternative brand of theoretical work welcomes and appreciates subjectivity as one of the most primary modes of understanding meaning and human behavior. And rather than setting aside considerations and contributions that may be made by disciplines such as philosophy, ethics, religion, literature, and art, this sort of theoretical work upholds these disciplines—often referred to as soft disciplines—as strong and essential to any conversation about human psychology. So although this theoretical dissertation is not “scientific” in nature, I nevertheless see it as capable of capturing more in the way of understanding violence, war, and the human psyche than it could if it adopted the methodologies of modern science. To this end, this dissertation will intentionally avoid what Jung refers to above as “bigotedness, superficiality, and scientific sectarianism” for the sake of digging deeper (and thus more humanly) at the problems that I set out to explore pertaining to the psychology of violence and war.

### **Autobiography and Personal Narrative**

I hope it is clear at this point that I am not presuming to be a scientist who neutrally observes empirically verifiable “facts” about violence, war, and the human psyche but rather a theoretical hermeneutist who employs a multidisciplinary approach towards examining human behavior. In this vein, it stands to reason that I, as a non-neutral interpreter and theorizer, should situate myself and announce what I perceive to be my own biases. I should acknowledge what to me seems obvious: that I am speaking as myself and not as a detached onlooker. I will embrace my particularity rather than attempt to overcome it (as a scientist might attempt to do in his or her work). In so doing, I intend to display, to the extent that I am consciously able, my biases rather than pretend they are nonexistent for the illusory sake of strengthening the exterior that merits

something to be considered “scholarship.” The arguments advanced herein are not done so from a bird’s eye view that attempts to make general claims but instead from a personal, subjective view that offers a perspectival interpretation. This is not to say that I believe it lacks truth or force and that it must be relegated to the realm of that which is relative. Rather, it is my way of taking ownership of the work in its fullest sense and avoiding the unrealistic pretensions of claiming to be a neutral observer. So I should say that in the subsequent dissertation, I write of the psychology of violence in general and the American psyche of war in particular in terms of the ways that I see things. The operative word here is I – not for reasons of narcissism but for reasons of intellectual honesty. So, who is the I? The reader has a right to know.<sup>3</sup>

It seems most appropriate for me to begin with my ethnic and religious background. I say this because those categories carry with them force of an ancestral variety that not only chronologically precede but in many ways also supersede the more immediate, but certainly interwoven, categories contained within my family system and subsequent life journey. Too often, academics who are in pursuit of knowledge (as well as laypeople attempting to uncover any semblance of identity) gloss over the importance of narrative and history. For this reason, it seems fitting to begin an autobiography with

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<sup>3</sup> I am reminded here of scholars and professors who boldly claim that they write and teach, whether on science, humanities, art, literature or any other discipline, without bringing themselves into the work. I am not only claiming that this is methodologically impossible but going one step further in claiming that it is also indicative of bad scholarship. Keeping one’s own biases out of one’s work may sound responsible on one hand but it illuminates a profound misperception on the other. People in general, and scholars in particular, do well to think deeply on and announce their biases rather than attempt the unreasonable task of keeping their biases out of their work. The adage here would not be to check one’s baggage at the door but rather to grab ahold of and acknowledge as much baggage as possible and move forward with it firmly in hand. Without this, academic work becomes sterilized, boring, disingenuous, and outright dishonest because it neglects to account for the subjective nature of human perception, which lies central to any discourse on knowledge. So, I begin here by making clear that I *am* indeed bringing myself into this work rather than presuming that anything else is even possible.

narrative-historical sensitivity in order to properly account for my ways of seeing the world.

**Ethnicity, politics, and historical family narrative.** I am a full-blooded Iranian<sup>4</sup> man. My parents emigrated from Iran to the United States in the late 1970s during a time of political strife in their home country. Because the specifics of what led to this time in Iranian history often go unmentioned in the West, I shall delve into some of them here.

During this time, Iran was reeling from generations of Western interference spearheaded by both British and American presence that was in pursuit of the region's valuable natural resource of crude oil. In the early 1950s, Iran's prime minister, Mohammad Mosaddegh, established the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC), which nationalized the country's natural resources that had, since the early 1900s, been under the Western foreign control of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC). Mossadegh's move proved to be costly, as he soon thereafter became the target of a 1953 plot led by British and U.S. intelligence to be removed as Iran's primary political and economic reformer. Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (the Shah of Iran at the time) agreed to and supported Mossadegh's overthrow after heavy pressure was placed upon him by the US, , helping bring it to its full fruition. This led to the solidified perception among many Iranians that the Shah was a puppet of the West. Less than three decades later, as a result of these and other such perceptions, the Shah was overthrown in what became the Iranian revolution of 1979.

Having both been born in the 1950s, this timeline marks the era in which my parents were growing up in Iran. In 1978, seeking a more stable life for their children (my

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<sup>4</sup> From here on, I am liable to use the words *Iranian* and *Persian* interchangeably, though some within my ethnic community would take exception to this.

older brother who was an infant at the time and myself who would be born several years later), my mother and father decided to move to the United States. Settling down in the southern state of Oklahoma, where they decided to emigrate to, was not easy for them. They did not know the language, the culture, the politics, the food, or other essential things that many take for granted. They regularly experienced racism, prejudiced behavior, and maltreatment since, by the time they had fully settled into their new home, many Americans had cultivated ill will towards Iranians stemming from the US-Iran hostage crisis. By the time my parents had me and moved to southern California less than a decade later, it was safe to say that I lived in a household in which our ethnicity was a stable source of personal pride while it also incited social tension at once. My being Iranian has thus never only been a matter of racial, national, or geo-biological identity but also a matter of sociopolitical anchoring.

**Religion.** Having been raised in modern day Iran, my mother and father were raised as Shia Muslims. For much of their adult lives, they practiced Islam and taught me to live in accordance with its virtues. Though I was never steeped in intensive study of the Quran or the religio-ritualistic dimensions of Islam, I nevertheless grew up with an implicit sense of self-understanding as a Muslim, often identifying myself as such among friends. By the time I was an adolescent I was equipped with a somewhat simple<sup>5</sup> religious understanding of the world that informed my metaphysical views of reality: I believed in a personal, transcendent, and loving god; I believed that creation was good, that life was good, that creatures were good, and that all things possessed a divine essence that called for a sense of reverence; I believed that god was to be worshipped,

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<sup>5</sup> As opposed to “simplistic.”

thanked, and relied upon; I believed that through prayer and through being in nature I could be in communion with god; and finally, I believed that amidst this all, god commanded us to a peaceful existence among and towards others.

These metaphysical views and beliefs did not arrive by chance. They must have been directly and indirectly related to my parents' understandings of Islam and the transmission of those understandings onto and into me. Though by institutional standards neither my parents nor I would be considered to be practicing Muslims today, we are nevertheless shaped by the religio-ethical frameworks passed on to us from a 20th century, Iranian brand of Islam. Of course, frameworks are not without historical and religious contexts of their own. Islam is no exception to this fact as it is chronologically subsequent to and theologically rooted in two other Abrahamic faith traditions:

Christianity and Judaism. I will not flesh out these socio-historical dimensions of Abrahamic theology here. Rather, it is wise to simply take note of them and their roots in my Iranian-Muslim identity. Moreover, as modern day Iran is ancient day Persia, it is crucial to point out that Zoroastrianism flows as a stream from which each of the Abrahamic faiths drink. Cleanly separating Zoroastrianism (the ancient Persian/Iranian religion that many scholars believe to be the first of the monotheistic faith-systems) from Judaism, Christianity, and Islam is highly problematic. As historian of religions Bryan Rennie (2007) has observed, the ancient, pre-Hebraic religion of Zoroastrianism played a major role in the formulation of early Jewish conglomerations of theology:

Seeking textual support for eschatological ideas, the polyglot communities of the Near East could turn to the Hebrew texts—locally and *already tinged with Iranian ideas* (my emphasis added in italics), although not thoroughly transformed by

them. Little surprise in this context would be a novel religious tradition that *relied largely on Iranian* [emphasis added] eschatological ideas but with a textual basis in the Septuagint (p. 5).

Rennie rightly notes that Zoroastrian ideology impacted the early, formational periods of the Abrahamic faith traditions while also not overtaking them. So, there is a balance struck between influence and remaining distinct. Thus, one must be careful not to collapse distinct expressions of faith, no matter the extent of their shared roots or conceptual similarities, into one another. Nevertheless, these same expressions of faith must not be divorced from one another in terms of their philosophical theology. My point in exploring this issue for autobiographical purposes is only therefore to acknowledge that as an Iranian with a religious narrative tied to these roots, it would be hazardous to deny the Zoroastrian threads of influence that shape me (or any Jew, Christian, or Muslim for that matter) theologically and ethically. So, this dissertation is written with these religious and ethical underpinnings both consciously and unconsciously stimulating my sensibilities.

**Iranian in America: Familial and personal narrative.** As with my preliminary remarks on the problematic state of “Psychology” (as opposed to psychologies), I also must not presume the generalizability to describe what it is like to grow up as an Iranian in America. So, my statements should, again, be read as personal, subjective, and meant only to capture threads of my own narrative. Still, in the spirit of being intellectually honest, the narrative should be shared to at least some degree.

From an early age, I felt pressure to iron out what I now look back on as insoluble questions of identity: how would I balance the tensions that I felt from being both Iranian

and American? Did I need to pick one or the other? Was this even possible? These questions are difficult for anyone, but they come with extra complexity when the person asking them is a child. From as early an age as I can remember, I have always been aware that I was different while also being aware that I wanted to be accepted. This showed up in precarious ways. While it was “cool” to be able to speak a language that was millennia old, it was “uncool” to speak it in front of my friends. While Persian cuisine was, and to this day remains, my favorite, it was embarrassing to navigate the elementary school game of “trading lunch” with other students when my mother had packed for me food that to them was unidentifiable and different-smelling. While being given a unique and distinctive name (even within the Iranian community) was and is an honor, it complicated my interpersonal life to have a name that nobody could pronounce phonetically.<sup>6</sup> The point I am making is this: being Iranian in America in many ways made for a burdensome and complicated existential state.

These tensions only grew more pronounced when they intersected with social and political issues. An example of the social is when my grandmother came to America from Iran to visit our family in the early 1990s. Some of my elementary school classmates, upon seeing her, teased me for her looking like “an old, wrinkly Little Red Riding Hood,” referring to the headscarf she wore covering her hair in consistency with her Islamic beliefs. The tensions took form in political ways as well. As I came of age, I began to sense that although I was in many ways a typical, happy, fun-loving, sports-playing,

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<sup>6</sup> For most of my life, I evaded these awkward social encounters by conforming and going by the anglicized name of “Bobby.” I always loved my real name (Barbod) and felt somewhat guilty for not resolving to use it. Ironically, it was after matriculating at a predominantly white, evangelical Christian seminary for my doctoral studies that I felt enough was enough and, at the age of 26, began insisting that people call me by my given name. Since that decision, the sound of “Bobby” being directed my way has become to me akin to nails on a chalkboard.



school-hating southern Californian kid, I was also atypical in many other ways. I became interested in things that other kids my age seemed not to devote any thought to at all, such as war and geo-political conflict. I recall, in 1991 at the age of nine, having my ears perk up from constantly hearing phrases like “The Persian Gulf War” blaring from the television. “Persian? I am Persian. Is there something that I need to know or understand?” I recall thinking. It was around that time that what would become a (still-standing) tradition in my household began – having intense one-on-one conversations of the philosophical, sociopolitical, and psychological sort with my father. I distinctly recall asking him to explain to me what and where this “Persian Gulf” was and whether I should be worried about the wellbeing our family back home in Iran. He sensitively and sharply, yet somewhat jokingly, pointed out that the war involved Iraq and that even though that word sounded similar to Iran and many Americans did not know or care to know the difference, that it was indeed a different country and not to worry too much.

My father’s momentary reassurance proved ineffective, but not because of any sort of deficiency in his words. He did his best to explain things honestly and straightforwardly to his nine-year-old boy and in that sense his parenting was impeccable. But it still did nothing to extinguish the flames of concern that had ignited within his young son’s heart and mind. No matter what he said, it was already too late; my foundations, my perspectives, my priorities, and even my very spirituality, had been shaken to their core. As parents often find out, they cannot (and should not) shelter their kids from the world. I was no longer sheltered from war. I had thereby been damaged, however negligibly, by war. In hindsight, I now understand that it was the sick feeling in the pit of my stomach, coming away from that interchange with my father that led me

then and there to embrace a position of pacifism with regard to geo-political warfare.

“Sure, I can relax in knowing that my family in Iran was okay for the time being but what about the Iraqis? Were they going to be okay? How many other people around the world have been or are being harmed or killed because of war?” I wondered. The questions, along with the profound sense of injustice, were unrelenting. The emotional weight of it all was overwhelming. I had not even lived a decade. My life would never be the same.

**On leaving home and coming home at the same time.** As was mentioned already, the tension of growing up Iranian in American came with its share of burdens and complexities. One of the ways I found to resolve these issues of identity was to give in to the urge to push the non-American aspects of myself into the background. This is not to say that I resented my Iranian culture and everything that came with it. On the contrary, I loved so much about my family, our origins, our history, and our heritage for all of its beauty and splendor. Still, I was a kid with certain priorities that made for resistance towards various aspects of being Iranian and, therefore, being different. This resulted in two realities. Firstly, I developed a tendency to avoid speaking our language, Farsi/Persian. A common occurrence in the home was for my parents to speak Farsi to me only to have me respond in English. Secondly, I developed a tendency to view my identity through lenses that were not ethnic or national. So, for example, my parents would show me a newspaper article about a successful Iranian and say things like, “You should be proud that an Iranian did this.” To which I would resistantly and snidely respond, “I am proud that a human did this.” Such behaviors illustrated an inability and unwillingness on my part to carry the tensions of being both Iranian and American at once.

So although I was in many ways a “proud Iranian” I nevertheless carried this sort of tension with me through the formative years of adolescence. Before too long, I had arrived at my mid 20s and met the woman who is now my dear wife, Molly. From the start, there was something refreshingly different about Molly. Her first visit to meet my parents in their home was preceded by a detailed conversation, started at her insistence, regarding what she needed to know about Persian culture. “How do I say hello in Farsi and how should I greet your parents?” she inquired. Perhaps slightly worried that the woman I was falling for would somehow be scared off, I reluctantly explained to her that it was customary to greet people with two kisses (one on each cheek) and that it would be best if she spent some solid time sitting and talking with my parents while enjoying the tea, fruit, and sweets that they would undoubtedly offer her. I also mentioned that even though my parents were not terribly conservative, handholding and any other displays of affection towards me were best to be avoided. Molly “passed” the initial test with flying colors as my parents fell in love with her instantly.

For a good while, I assumed that Molly was like most people in general and “typical” women in particular. This meant that I assumed that she enacted all of the Persian assimilation because she wanted to impress me or my parents. This presumption was soon corrected when, further along in our relationship, she continued to embrace Persian culture. She insisted on learning Farsi to the level of fluency. In fact, one of the several key reasons for her doing so, in her words, was so that my parents did not feel like they had to change or alter their culture for her sake. “If they tend to speak Farsi in their home then I want them to continue doing that even when I come around. Why should my presence change what they do in their home? If they are hospitable to me, the

least I can do is adapt to them rather than have it be the other way around,” she firmly commented. I was deeply moved by this. This was one of the first indicators of the thing that made me fall in love with Molly – her heart. Her generous heart did more than make me fall in love with her, however; it also shined a light on my own relationship with Persian culture. What ensued was a process of revitalizing an Iranian identity that had by then become somewhat watered down.

The process of navigating what it means to be Iranian in America had started all over again. This time, however, I was privileged to be accompanied by my wife and her incredible encouragement. So, just as during my childhood and later formative years, I was faced again with the challenge of negotiating the tensions of carrying threads of identity that are seemingly disparate in so many ways. Getting married to Molly and beginning a new life together has opened up an exhilarating and emotional new tension since we are working out what it means for ourselves to be an Iranian-American family. Establishing my new home while reclaiming the roots of my first home has been so humbling. It represents a paradoxical gift of leaving home and coming home at the same time. For this gift, I am forever indebted to Molly as it is she who has explicitly and implicitly encouraged me to speak for and from my culture. “This is who you are and it, in such beautiful ways, informs where you are going,” she constantly reminds me. I am a carrier of an ancient tradition. The voices of my Persian ancestors are inside of me and they speak through me. They occupy deep spaces in my heart and mind, even as they are often unconscious and sometimes go unacknowledged. I thus hold my heritage in high regard as I sincerely and constantly seek a deeper understanding of the infinitude that it is.

**In the home, in the academy, and beyond.** I wish to close out these autobiographical remarks by making a few observations on how this dissertation, as well as my overall scholarly approach, takes its cues from my familial-cultural background as well as my educational background. Furthermore, I will provide some additional comments on the impact that I hope this work and my future vocational endeavors have on my own trajectories as well as those of the global community in general and the academy in particular.

As was somewhat touched on above, I began talking about life's big questions at an early age. However, intellectuality was never split off from the spheres of emotion, spirituality, and ethics (that is, how one ought to live). Thought and action, understanding and doing, were theological and ethical categories in my household that did not exhibit duality. Intellectual conversations with my father would often be accompanied by passion, intensity, pain, joy, sorrow, and hope. Emotional connections between my mother and me as well as conversations that she and I would have about matters of faith, relationship, or the heart were never devoid of rationality. Discussions with my father would often begin rationally and end emotionally while conversations with my mother would begin emotionally and end rationally. Of course I recognize my own bias, but I perceive that my parents were quite balanced and holistic in these regards. In fact, that (balance) is one of the most essential ideals that I recall my parents always advising me to strive for. "Life is almost always about balance, Barbod," they would often exclaim. The older I become, the more correct I realize they were all along.

So, it is part of my pedigree to live without the all too common disjunction between thought and action, rationality and emotion, or what one says or believes and

what one does. Moreover, stemming from this, my parents taught me that balance is a quality worth striving for and cultivating. This way of seeing the world serves as a foundation from which I have navigated the educational or academic threads of my life. My pursuit of a Ph.D. in psychology is accompanied by my pursuit of an M.A. in Theology. My practical-clinical training is augmented by my immense interest and training in philosophy, religion, and social theory. I at once become enlivened by psychoanalytic thinking while also getting chills when reading a good poem or novel, hearing entrancing music, or standing before a moving piece of art. When I encounter a new theory that tickles my intellectual fancy, I almost always feel it in my gut. When I feel something in my gut, I almost always try to understand it in more fullness. The crux of what I am articulating here is this: my familial-cultural and home life has shaped me in such a way that the territory of the mind and the territory of the heart occupy the same space. As such, my academic style cannot help but follow suit, as I also perceive rationality and spirituality to be closely related. This dissertation will therefore sometimes contain expositions on philosophy, psychology, and social theory and at other times attempt to evoke the domains of that which is spiritual, ethical, and existential. And while this may seem disjointed, unnecessary, or ill-advised to some readers I can only reiterate, based on what is explained above, that for me it simply is not.

Along those lines, I would also like to mention some virtues and pillars of life that are present in my familial-cultural background. Growing up in an Iranian home, a tremendous emphasis was placed on community and hospitality. These emphases carry with them major implications. For instance, the other takes precedence over the self. This entails that one's responsibility is to make sure that the needs and preferences of those

around them are being met prior to attending to personal needs. This also means that people are to be welcomed, embraced, invited, and honored. To the Iranian mind and heart, making sure one's family, friends, or guests are content is perhaps the most important virtue in life. So, radical otherness and hospitality rest as cornerstones of my familial and cultural background. Worth mentioning as well are the emphases placed on spiritual and existential expressions of humanity as found in things like food, art, poetry, music, humor, and politics. Persian gatherings often include food, intellectual conversation, joke-telling, music-making, dancing, and tea-drinking into late hours of the night and into the following morning. This almost always happens organically and without pretension. These are examples of virtues, pillars of life, and values and priorities that have gone a long way in shaping my ways of seeing the world.

**Direct relevance of my autobiography.** The maneuver of having situated my ethnic, religious, familial, social, political, and ethical locations is hardly a groundbreaking one. Since the academy has experienced its postmodern turn, a good many scholars have increasingly embraced subjectivity. To this end, my providing an autobiographical narrative has thus far accomplished one of two things. First, it has clarified not only my own particularity but also the ways in which that particularity informs my subjective modes of thought, analysis, and critique. It has, in other words, delivered acknowledgment at the outset that I carry biases, both of the conscious and unconscious sorts. To reiterate, this is nothing unique or innovative as I am not the first to invoke such a scholarly poster. However, the second important accomplishment of such an autobiography comes in the form of what one might call a methodological capability that it affords me. This component of the autobiography I have provided is less obvious

and extends beyond the realm of mere subjective acknowledgment into the realm of subjective interpretation and/or utility. As such, I shall devote some attention toward elaborating on this point since its lack of explication thus far may be generating a curiosity on the part of the reader as to the relevance of providing such personal information.

Acknowledging one's particularity is one thing; interpreting its influence is another. Though it is intellectually responsible to embrace subjectivity, it may be less apparent to subjects as to how their particularity actually plays a role in their work. It is in this spirit that I interpret my own autobiography as being relevant to the core methodological and analytical approaches taken in this dissertation. In subsequent chapters, I will not only critique existing theoretical material in favor of adopting theoretical steps I argue are sounder, but I will also go on to apply these sounder modes of thought to the analysis of American culture as it pertains to violence and war. As I will go on to argue, cultural modes of being are so deeply embedded in human behavior that it is not a stretch to refer to them as frequently possessing an unconscious or unreflected aspect to their outplaying. In other words, we are often unaware of the ways in which our culture shapes us. We are also so often unaware of how central the role of culture is to our embodied modes of being and becoming. Given that this dissertation will eventually offer analysis on U.S. American culture, it is fair to wonder how I, as one who lives in and among American culture, am capable of such analysis. If the embodiment of culture occurs in ways that are largely unconscious, how could it be that I might submit conscious commentary on such phenomena while simultaneously speaking from within



said culture? The answer to this question is found in the secondary, and interpretive, dimension of the autobiography that has been provided.

U.S. American, cultural modes of being and becoming are not, in my estimation, as unconscious to me as they might be for others whose personal autobiographies contain a richer or longer standing American pedigree. That is, inasmuch as my cultural location is “American” given that I live in the United States, my deep, cultural sensibility is Iranian. While many Americans may be unconscious of their internalized American cultural modes of being and becoming, I, as one whose unconscious is shaped more Iranianly than Americanly, do not have this experience. Many aspects of American culture that go most unquestioned and unreflected upon are in fact sources of conscious questioning and reflection from within my cultural lens. Though I am an Iranian-American, it is precisely those ways in which I am so deeply Iranian that make me aware of the ways in which I am so deeply not American. Though I grew up in the United States embedded in American culture, I navigated life with a sense of conscious awareness of ways in which being Iranian left little room for certain American modes of life.

Specific features of these American modes of life (e.g., individualism, progress, etc.) that I go on to reflect upon with regards to psychology, violence, and war, are in fact those modes of life with which I do not resonate due to my cultural particularity. And so my providing an autobiography to usher in this dissertation is intended not only as an act of intellectual honesty by acknowledging my own subjective stance, but also as an act of methodological disclosure by noting that I simultaneously exist within and apart from American culture. Therefore, the autobiographical thread that runs implicitly through the

present work is one that potentiates particular forms of cultural critique that the reader will encounter.

**My audience and myself.** Finally, I would like to close this section by conveying some hopes that I have stemming from this dissertation and my subsequent vocational undertakings. Firstly, I would like to say that this dissertation is written for academics and laypeople alike who are interested in questions about violence, war, and the human psyche. I hope that this work will play a role in sparking a shift in the way these questions are being investigated both in the academy and within lay circles. The extent of what I mean here can be found in the introduction so I will just leave it at that for now. Secondly, and on a related note, I hope that this work will catalyze something in the form of sociocultural change pertaining to violence, war, and human affairs. Karl Marx (1845/1998) famously remarked that the purpose of philosophy is not merely to interpret the world but to change it. I think this is right. And so I hope that this work will engender not only a significant change in how the psychology of war is understood but also contribute to the concrete arrival of more peace in the world. Lastly, and again relatedly, I recognize that this hope will need to begin with my own personal responsibility. The sort of “change” towards peace that I am envisioning and hoping for here can emanate only from the power of collective action and deep sociocultural transformation. These things require that individuals take responsibility for themselves as members of communities small and large, local and global. As Jesus of Nazareth taught: “...first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s (or sister’s) eye” (Matthew 7:5, NASB). With this said, I recognize that my hope for peace

begins personally and that this dissertation's message is written as much for myself as it is for the world whose violence I hope it can help to abate.

One Nation Under War: A Sociocultural Exploration of the Psychology of Violence and  
the American Example

**Introduction**

**A Culture of War**

**Preliminary reflections on American culture.** Perhaps more than ever before since the inception of the United States, Americans today are living in a peculiar sociocultural landscape. Consider for a moment the following dimensions of U.S. culture which, by and large, go unquestioned and are not perceived as problematic: the American legal system defines and assigns public service as a form of punishment; The American government claims to treat homelessness as a crisis while the White House contains over 130 rooms, most of which remain empty at night<sup>7</sup> (whitehouse.gov, 2014; Shakur, 2003); The American military sends young people overseas to engage in atrocious acts of killing then, in collaboration with mental health diagnosticians, refers to any negative psychological effects of this behavior as “disordered ” and stemming from “traumatic stress.”<sup>8</sup> With the varying analyses and interpretations of these observations aside, one cannot help but notice their peculiarity when conceived of in certain ways. What becomes immediately obvious at first glance is that such considerations carry with them implications of morals and ethics, values and norms, community and interdependence, basic health and holistic well-being, and so on; all vital facets of what can be referred to as “culture.”

<sup>7</sup> I borrow this observation from the deceased, socially-conscious, revolutionary rap artist Tupac Shakur who once proclaimed in an interview during the Ronald Reagan administration, “How could Reagan live in a White House, which has a lot of rooms, and there be homelessness? And he's talking about helping...Why can't he take people off the street and put them in his White House? Then he'll have people from the streets to help him with his ideas. Not helpless! Homeless! Not helpless. They haven't been homeless forever. They've done things in society. The White House would be tainted because he doesn't want to get dirty. [sic]” (Shakur, 2003)

<sup>8</sup> Indeed, “PTSD” has become part of the accepted vernacular of both the professional psychological community and the lay culture at large.

Such considerations also bring to the fore puzzling characteristics of this culture (American culture), which has perhaps gone morally astray and become confused. In such times, it helps to use clear language that reorients our minds so that we might accurately assess the circumstances rather than explain them away using ambiguous words laden with denial. Hence, amidst such aforementioned reflections, we may begin to ask pointed questions using honest words like these: what sort of a culture considers service to one's community to be on par with a disciplinary threat or a punitive activity? What sort of a culture tells its citizens that all people deserve a roof over their heads while some roofs, including that of the nation's central political building, are far too big and the excess warm rooms beneath them remain empty on cold nights? What sort of culture glorifies adages like "support our troops" yet fails to acknowledge the healthy moral compass possessed by those very troops who exhibit heavy psychological disturbances after witnessing or committing murder, choosing instead to call such people "disordered"? What sort of culture then turns around and pumps millions of dollars<sup>9</sup> into clinical research attempting to learn about and "treat" Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), instead of recognizing the troops' beautiful humanity as they manifest with

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<sup>9</sup> I once heard the phrase: "If you want to discover what a civilization's priorities are, look at where it spends its money; look at what it invests its energy and resources into." As I write this, the United States has spent 1.5 trillion dollars (and counting) in combined costs since 2001 towards the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan (NationalPriorities.org, 2014). Meanwhile, debates are aplenty within the senate and congress as to whether or not the United States ought to have a universal—or even a more affordable—healthcare program for its own citizens. Some opponents of these healthcare propositions refer to them as "unAmerican." From a budgetary perspective, therefore, it seems that what currently counts as "American" involves spending money on foreign wars rather than on the medical wellbeing of the nation's own people. The government has in fact spent trillions of dollars on war and millions of dollars on PTSD research. Why not invest more resources in education, goodwill, peacemaking, foreign diplomacy, domestic healthcare, moral development, and the overall wellbeing of American people so that they might not become government contracted murderers? In other words, why not preempt war PTSD (so as to preclude the possibility of its ever even occurring to begin with) with resourceful, judicial, and economic prioritization of life rather than the incessant promotion of death? At the risk of sounding trite, why not peace rather than war? We may thus ask this cultural question: Just what are American priorities? I am thankful to Tommy Givens for illuminating the subtle point that even such a critique begins to play into the grave mistake that human lives are able to be spoken of in quantifiable, monetary terms. Politicians and public citizens often speak of war in terms of the tragedy of "how much it costs" rather than the moral reprehensibility of how much blood is unnecessarily spilt. This is not only part of the problem but is fundamentally emblematic of the underlying moral problem itself. I hope to explore this a bit further in chapter 4.

emotional and spiritual torment stemming from the atrocities of which they were a part. We should realize that it is healthy to be traumatized by committing and observing murder. How else would we expect and want someone to feel after participating in a war? Do we really want people to come back without “posttraumatic stress”? Or, after having returned from a war, would we truly want them to “come to terms with” and “process through” what they have seen and done only to move on to pursuing the American dream and integrating themselves into “civilian life” as though nothing ever happened? Why should we seek the “deprogramming” of such a healthy reaction to murder? What sorts of humans is such a culture really after here? And, when it comes to the most troubling issues facing humanity, such as violence, why is culture so rarely spoken of?

**The notion of culture.** You (the reader) may already be noticing two trends in my approach, both having to do with the notion of culture. First, I have already begun to personify the term “culture.” I have given myself license to use verbs like “considers” or “tells” in referring to what culture “does.” I realize that this is a maneuver that many will question at the outset. However, I use these words carefully and by choice in order to show upfront that I do not perceive culture as a static, non-fluid entity with no active influence of its own. This approach will be infused throughout the methodology of this dissertation, which will be further expounded upon in Chapter 2. For now, I will simply make a brief case for what I mean by this personified use of culture.

Culture is a force whose power and impact cannot be fully anticipated and/or analyzed in the ways that inanimate objects usually can. This anthropomorphic way of approaching culture will presume that “social science” is something of a misnomer since the fabric of sociality as made apparent in culture is simply inaccessible through merely scientific means or methods. We cannot, therefore, speak of culture in the same way that a geologist would speak about a rock formation. Though a rock may contain certain

physical forces (e.g., gravitational inertia) hardly anyone—geologists included—would say that these physical forces have subjective, creative, or meaning-making influence of the personal sort over other entities. A rock’s mass might cause me to trip over it while I stroll through the environment it dwells in, but it will not in its own nature compel me to contemplate the meaning of life. Culture, on the other hand, can (and does) do that. It can do so by furnishing its inhabitants with reflective (and non-reflective<sup>10</sup>) modes of thought that ground the very questions of meaning. This often comes through, but is not strictly limited to, the use of language and symbols, the implementation of rituals, and embodied patterns of being<sup>11</sup> that give something of a rhythm to people’s lives and the meaningful understandings thereof.

Culture, therefore, can lead me to a place of subjective existential experience in a way that a rock cannot. This sort of distinction is what led nineteenth century German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey to notice an inadequacy in studying human activity through the methods of natural science<sup>12</sup> (Orange, 2010). For this reason, I assign a type of

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<sup>10</sup> In the sentence immediately preceding this one, I spoke of meaning-making. My parenthetical use of the word “non-reflective” here suggests that what I go on to refer to in this sentence as “modes of thought” are not necessarily conscious. In other words, culture can furnish people with meaningful ways of being that are not necessarily products of careful, conscious decision-making. The term “modes of thought,” therefore, is not meant to refer to thought that is always occurring actively and deliberately.

<sup>11</sup> Again, as touched on in the previous footnote, embodiment and rhythmic ways of being here can refer to unconscious sources of meaningful living. For example, a manual laborer may derive a certain qualitative meaning from his or her work through the embodiment of the work as opposed to a deliberate reflection on or about it. I am arguing that this, despite its unconscious style of reflection, still serves as a “cultural” source of “meaning-making” and/or “thought.” So, the meaning of people’s lives can be consciously or unconsciously enacted.

<sup>12</sup> In his work multi-volume work *Gesammelte Schriften* (1914), Dilthey distinguished between the natural sciences (*Naturwissenschaften*) and the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*). The former, according to Dilthey, operates primarily by principles of causality while the latter rests on uncovering meaning through relations of parts and wholes. In fact, the German *Geisteswissenschaften* translates literally as “spiritual science,” thus highlighting the importance of human meaning in the examination of something like society or culture.

subjective, even personified, potentiality to culture and perceive it as dynamic in its relation to human behavior.<sup>13</sup>

The second trend that may already be apparent in my use of culture is perhaps more subtle but nevertheless incredibly vital. Namely, I have used the term culture more than I have used terms like selves, persons, or individuals. This is not because I think selves, persons, or individuals do not exist but because I see cultural analysis as something in great need of elevation. Culture, and its relation to human behavior, has been more or less glossed over in the history of Western scholarship ranging from philosophy to psychology in favor of studying humans as individuals. Even within disciplines such as anthropology and sociology, the predominant underlying assumptions seem to be that people are isolated selves with individual psyches who intermingle to form things like societies or cultures. This approach assumes a clean distinction (or dualism) between part and whole, self and society, person and culture. This will most certainly not be my approach. My emphasis on culture throughout this dissertation will be partly reactionary and partly philosophical. I say reactionary because a whole tradition of scholarship precedes me that assumes people are atomized selves with private identities who simply amalgamate to form cultures. In this dissertation I will reject this unnecessary, yet commonly held, scholarly assumption. I say philosophical because I shall attempt to demonstrate how this approach is lacking and flawed and that no such methodological distinction or dualism (between self and culture) should be firmly assumed and adhered to. Again, I will attempt to flesh out these issues (including further defining what is meant by “culture”) in Chapter 2. For now, I will simply say that culture

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<sup>13</sup> I will elaborate on this conception of culture in Chapter 2 where I more clearly spell out the methodology of this project.



rests at the core of this dissertation's forthcoming analysis for what I think are very good reasons.

### **The Focus of the Dissertation**

Thus far I have devoted considerable time to directing attention to American culture and a few of its unquestioned malaises. I have also acknowledged my admittedly undeveloped (at this stage) bias upfront in examining human behavior through the lens of culture rather than exclusively through the lens of individuality. At this point, I shall attempt to lay out the purpose of this dissertation, the problem underlying and giving rise to it, and some other considerations that I feel are worth mentioning to set the stage for this work. Having already called for an (over) emphasis on the importance of culture, I will now turn my attention to the scope of the dissertation and the specific problem I wish to address from within this emphasis.

**What this dissertation is not.** To say that this dissertation is on the psychology of violence and war is accurate, but it is also far too broad. Any scholarly or non-scholarly exploration of violence and war, as it pertains to human beings, inherently invokes psychology, for we are psychological creatures. This is the case even if the focus of a discussion falls upon some other disciplinary category such as economics, political systems, conflict resolution, etc. Each of these (and countless other) arenas of human activity involves the human psyche. Acknowledging this begins to frame the understanding that "psychology of war" is a term that is far from nuanced. And so, it seems helpful and necessary here to provide a delimitation of what this dissertation is not. This dissertation is not, in its formal sense, an attempt at understanding psychological dimensions of war itself. That is, the varying cognitive-emotional mechanisms at play

during the very act, or situation, of war is not a focus of this project. Along the same lines, the psychological impact of war will not be explored herein either. Questions of psychology and war are asked in terms of potential more so than concurrency and/or effect, potential that is not merely hypothetical but already an embodied reality. Rather than asking what war and violence are like as psychological phenomena, this dissertation attempts to advance the understanding of what sort of mentality gives rise to a warlike disposition.

In navigating this focus, the notion of culture will be touched upon heavily-handedly throughout the dissertation. Culture, too, is a broad term. It can be employed as a catch-all of politics, economic systems, technological capabilities, religious narratives, and so on. My analysis will not neglect these components of culture, but it will also not magnify them in any thorough or specialized sense. In other words, while these subcategories will be invoked and explored to some degree, they will not be fleshed out to produce anything resembling other scholarly work that carefully dissects them specifically in relation to the realities of war or violence. And so, this dissertation will not provide economic discussions on war that encourage our attention more onto the dollars and cents of the matter than on the humanity of it. In the same vein, while political content will certainly make its way into the discussion it will not do so in a way that resembles political science that reduces the conversation of war to a geo-political manifestation of certain governmental interactions.

The question driving this dissertation, then, is not one that adds to the disciplinary compartmentalization of how war is often discussed. My intent is not to begin with a set of categories or methods and then apply them to the question of war. Rather, my aim is to

uncover a new way of understanding the very psychological texture of what drives persons to war in the first place. How is it that many human beings are so warlike? What psychological realities enable human beings to seek war, choose war, carry out war, and even support war from afar? By examining the human psyche and culture in particular methodological ways, these questions, rather than compartmentalized ones that begin with war as already existent, will be asked. What ensues in this dissertation is not, therefore, a study of the impact of war, an evaluation of the economical or religious dimensions of war, an analysis of the political makeup of war, or an offering for resolution strategies. The question is more fundamental: how and why, are human beings warlike?

Since this question will be dealt with in a way that takes seriously the power of culture, it stands to reason to provide a delimitation in that regard as well. To begin with, it is important to note that I use “culture” in the least superficial way possible. The term is not meant to merely convey preferences that exist in the public arena such as fashion, entertainment avenues, or whatever else. Though these realities are important, and to a large extent suffused by deeper dimensions of human experience, they are not, in themselves, adequately representative of these deeper dimensions. For example, the popularity of a particular style of music may itself be part of “culture,” but the meaning-laden quality of what makes it popular drives to a deeper human question. And so, “culture” is a term meant to explore the profound aspects of human behavior rather than the outward expressions of these aspects that, in effect, seem like matters of taste. A more nuanced unpacking of the term “culture” and how it is used in this dissertation will be provided later. The final point of delimitation that seems necessary is to clarify that this

dissertation will ultimately fall into exploration of U.S. American culture. What follows is not a set of ubiquitous remarks on human culture and war in some broad or abstract sense. Instead, I will ask the question of human psychology of war with particular emphasis on American culture. This presents challenges, of course, in that a risky tendency to essentialize American culture becomes attractive. I will say more about this later as well. For now, I wish to provide the key delimitation that this dissertation is not about “cultures” in general but about American culture and how it plays an instrumental role in shaping a particular type of warlike psychology.

Put succinctly, this dissertation will examine American culture<sup>14</sup> as a culture of war both through action and attitude. This means that I will argue that the culture literally creates warriors (action) and war supporters (attitude) alike. In turn, such created “selves” go on to reinforce and further create culture, enacting a mutual feedback loop. In essence, I will argue that human beings become violent and warlike (again both actively and attitudinally) through the embodiment of cultural ways of being rather than as a result of non-contextual, individual propensity. A well-elaborated version of my overall thesis, along with a chapter outline containing the progression of the argument, will be presented later in this introduction. For now, it is worth noting that keen readers may already be forming the following critique in the form of a question: is culture not the product or

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<sup>14</sup> Throughout the remainder of the dissertation (as has been done already), I will use the term “American culture” in what may appear to be a monolithic or reified manner. This is not because I think culture is in this way reducible but rather because I use the term to convey only what I mean it to convey: Namely that there are aspects of American social and political life that are potentially unavoidable independent of subcultural allegiance or particularity. In other words, I use this term only to refer to what may be considered to be essential to the American way of life regardless of intra-American variance attributable to diversities such as ethnicity, gender, region/geographic location, political affiliation, socioeconomic status, etc. Of course, such sources of diversity are important and worthy of consideration, but my use of the term “American culture” is meant to capture those aspects of being American that all people are exposed to regardless of the particularity they exhibit in and through these sources. “American culture” in this sense will serve as material to be explored in Chapter 3.

creation of individual selves who just happen to be collectively formed? That is, if you are suggesting that culture “makes” humans violent then what of the fact that it is humans who “make” culture? Do we not eventually arrive back at the privatized, individualized notion of selves who autonomously co-inhabit and collaborate within their environments and, through this collectivization, give rise to culture? Is not the psyche or nature of the individual still the culprit?

At first glance, this seems like an airtight philosophical case against the methodology I propose to implement in this dissertation, namely that it is culture that creates agents of violence in the form of warriors or war sympathizers. However, this style of argumentation only holds if culture itself is reified and perceived as a static “thing” that is created by humans rather than as a dynamic and contingent entity whose influential force is largely unforeseeable and somewhat uncontainable. In other words, we must think of culture itself as something that becomes its own subjective third party in the equation that contains two (or more) subjective, interactive agents, such as selves. For example, if two people come together and create a culture, that culture then begins to take on meaningful quality and in turn dispenses influence over the two people in ways that are both distinct from and irreducible to the two original progenitors of it. Though culture is a product of collectivization, it is too simplistic to then think of its own quality as being reducible to that which gave rise to it. In this sense of describing how culture comes to be, the quality of culture must be seen as far more dynamic and subjective in its own right as a third entity stemming from two antecedent<sup>15</sup> subjectivities.

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<sup>15</sup> My use of the word *antecedent* here is already off the mark. As I will go on to suggest near the end of the following paragraph, the issue is not so much chronological as it is substantive. Thinking of culture as something that is born out of preceding events already splits it off from said events. In this sense, my use of the word *antecedent* is only meant to paint a picture for the reader rather than a conceptual-philosophical framework from which to operate.

Moreover, there is simply no reason to perceive culture merely as the collectivization of individuals. Why begin with the assumption that individuals are atomized? We have no historical, biological, ethical, sociological, or philosophical reason to make this our starting point. This type of analysis (of wholes as compared to parts) has been considered in the history of thought extending back to the time of the Greek natural philosopher Democritus, to the epistemology of Immanuel Kant, on through to the early 20th century Gestalt psychology movement (Schultz & Schultz, 2012). The problem, however, is that these analyses have led to unnecessary and unwarranted dualisms. As such, culture must neither be thought of as static nor as merely reducible to its parts. Furthermore, individuals must not be thought of as in any profound way separate from culture, and vice versa.

The culture-self (to be developed further in chapter 2) paradigm is therefore impervious to the categorical distinctions found in the critiques I am anticipating here. These mistaken distinctions or dualisms expose detractors' critiques as being unfounded. Skeptics assume that, just as in the well-known 'chicken and egg' riddle, asking "Which came first?" regarding self and culture is a devastating question to the methodology I am employing. But self and culture are concepts that are not analogous or amenable to "chicken and egg" thinking. Though most certainly related to them, chickens are nevertheless quite distinct from their eggs. Selves, however, are not in this way distinct from their cultures. Though conceptually and taxonomically different, self and culture are not mutually exclusive in the way that chickens and eggs are as components of the famous riddle. One simply cannot and does not exist without being informed by the other. The issue is not, therefore, a chronological one as in "Which came first" but an ontological one as in "Are they really so distinguishable from one another to begin with?"

With chickens and eggs, the trickiness of the riddle lies in the fact that they are separable; but with selves and cultures, one needs not assume such distinctions to begin with.

For more comprehensive understanding, perhaps we do well here to explore how others have approached this matter. Psychoanalyst Thomas Ogden has commented on the irreducibly subjective and mutually formed space of reality as it occurs within the context of psychotherapy. His work lends itself toward understanding something like culture as conceptually distinguishable from its subparts while maintaining a contingent reliance on those subparts. So the “culture” and the “participants” of psychotherapy, as Ogden explains, are their own conceptual entities with their own forces but at the same time they are utterly nonexistent without being mutually and simultaneously co-created and reinforced by one another. Naming this phenomenon “the analytic third,” he argues that: “This third subjectivity...is a product of a unique dialectic generated by (between) the separate subjectivities of analyst and analysand within the analytic setting” (Ogden, 1994). Notice Ogden’s immediate use of the word “subjectivity” in referring to the analytic third (or that which is co-created by the two members of one-on-one psychoanalysis). He implies that this third element—again what we may think of here as the “culture” of the psychoanalytic encounter—actually has its own characteristics that are irreducible simply to the workings of the analyst and analysand. However, it is vital to understand that neither the analyst nor analysand knows themselves independent of this analytic third. The entire model is one of holism rather than atomism. To drive this point home Ogden (1994) goes on to write:

The analytic process reflects the interplay of three subjectivities: that of the analyst, of the analysand, and of the analytic third. The analytic third is a creation

of the analyst and analysand, and at the same time the analyst and analysand (qua analyst and analysand) are created by the analytic third (there is no analyst, no analysand, and no analysis in the absence of the third). (p. 16)

Ogden's "analytic third" provides us with an elegant way of thinking about culture on a larger scale and beyond the parameters of psychoanalytic psychotherapy. In this vein, and to import some of Ogden's language, while we may fully acknowledge that culture is "a creation of" the relationality of individuals or selves, we must "at the same time" recognize that these selves are "created by" the culture. Substituting Ogden's use of the words, "analyst," "analysand," and "third" we may take his parenthetical remarks above and consider things as follows: there is no self, no other, and no interpersonal interaction in the absence of the culture. To reiterate the thrust of the previous paragraph, correctly grasping the ontological point here precludes us from needing to answer the chronological critique of "Which came first, self or culture?" As Ogden helps us understand, self and culture co-constitute, mutually reinforce, and collapse into each other. To ask which came first or which created the other is to neglect their ontological interdependency in favor of unnecessary and unwarranted dualisms.

It is important to note at the same time that Ogden uses psychoanalytic terms to describe something that some prolific thinkers have previously noticed about human psychology. For example, Jewish philosopher Martin Buber based the foundation of his thought on the notion that relationality is what comes first for human beings (Buber, 1923/1970). Human beings are never disembodied from the relational culture but are rather, from the start, inextricably bound up in it. People negotiate their worlds, their senses of self, and their behaviors, as well as those of others, through ongoing and



irremovable lenses of culture. Culture in this sense is active rather than passive, dynamic rather than static, and, perhaps most strikingly as Ogden's words remind us, agentive rather than inanimate. It has ongoing formative power in the making of selves and individuals into who and what they are and come to be. Culture, despite its own uniqueness and force, is not distinguishable from individual personhood and the reverse may be said as well.

It may already be becoming clear what the positions are of those who disagree with the approach I am taking in this dissertation (that violence in the form of war is a created psychological issue that must be considered through the lens of culture rather than only through the lens of the individual). There are two main categories of skepticism for those who may be critical of my argument as it has been described thus far. The first type of critic would argue that the problem of war is located in the individual psyches of human beings (i.e., that human beings are inherently violent or warlike). The second type of criticism is that which has already been addressed to some degree in the above paragraphs. Such a detractor would argue that even if it is granted that it is in fact culture—rather than some innate characteristic(s) of being a human self—that forms people towards warlikeness, this culture is nevertheless a product of many human selves. In other words, what is culture if not the creation of individuals with certain psychological predispositions?

Both of these positions arrive at the same conclusion: that warlikeness is something contained within the individual human self. This brings us back to the difficult philosophical and psychological considerations that have already begun to be explored regarding self and culture. These considerations will be further fleshed out in chapter 2.

In a broad sense, I may say for now that the main foundation of this dissertation will be to join the likes of Ogden, Buber, and others, who challenge and reject the dualistic trends, which separate self and culture. In so doing, I hope that my contribution will enable a reorientation of the way that philosophers, anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, biologists, and laypeople alike have tended to approach the problem of human violence in general and the psychology of war in particular.

### **Why Rethinking Culture is Crucial**

Though I have already begun to lay out the focus of this dissertation, this section will further articulate the scope and gravity of the problem that stands behind the project. To do this I will describe two coalescing facets that, when taken in tandem, help provide the impetus for this work. The first facet may be referred to as anecdotal while the other may be described as largely academic.

**The (ir)relevance of culture: Anecdotal reflections from the dinner table.** As far back as I can remember, I began to pay close attention to the “taboo” conversations that occurred at dinner tables. I am sure you (the reader) know the ones I am referring to. Families, friends, and acquaintances gather for meals, often during the holidays, and are usually taught by the societal superego to avoid certain topics in order to maintain a level of calm and civility. These off-limits topics usually include politics and religion. Prudence is often overlooked, however, and people frequently find themselves participating in or witnessing heated discussions about things like geo-political war. To my mind, these moments are what make dinner tables (and even the holidays) in America particularly interesting. Why? Because these are the times when the all too familiar superficial facades of commercialism, over-indulgence of food, and feigned politeness

take a backseat to people's truest and most visceral perspectives on life, humanity, morality, and each other. As a lifelong "psychologist," I have (even from a young age) been fascinated by the intersection of human behavior, religion, spirituality, philosophy, ethics, history, science, culture, language, and politics<sup>16</sup>. Perhaps nowhere are such intersections more clearly on display than at these proverbial dinner tables.

Sometime ago, I began to notice a pronounced trend in these dinner table conversations when it came to the topic of war, at least within the American dinner tables that I was a part. The recurring trend typically went as follows: people would gradually build into their points by beginning with some off-hand comments about this or that politician. They would then take a firm stand on the most recent and highly publicized war or geo-political conflict (this would typically lead to fierce debate, argument, and disagreement). Before long, there seemed to be something of an impasse followed by an agreement reached between the two parties that were previously at each other's throats. This agreement usually came in the form of a statement sounding something like this: "Well, we can argue about politics all day but the fact remains that there is just something inherently violent about human beings and that, in the end, is the problem." This statement, no matter who would make it, always appeared to garner consensus from the table, as though it were an afterthought or a clear matter of fact.

After observing this trend recur time after time, I began to ask myself if people in fact believed and accepted the concluding statement that humans were innately violent. A litany of questions came rushing to my mind. Is that it? Is that really the end of the

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<sup>16</sup> I do not see the items on the list contained in this sentence as distinct entities but rather as parts to the whole of what comprises selves and societies. My listing out of these concepts is only an attempt at clarity for the sake of writing rather than being based out of an assumption that they in fact occupy neat, independent categories. Indeed there is so much overlap that identities can never truly be stripped apart and examined through the lenses of these manufactured subcategories.

conversation, figuratively and literally? Are people truly satisfied with resigning themselves to the conclusion that human beings are inherently war-makers? Why and how are people so willing and able to accept this as a point of consensus? What are the ethical and practical implications and consequences of perceiving human beings in this light? The questions can continue on, but my main concern can be explicated through the use of a sport analogy.

I grew up a sports fan with my childhood and adolescent years coming in the 80s and 90s. Given that era, I was an absolute fanatic when it came to the former NBA great Michael Jordan. By the time he had been cemented as the top player in the game, Jordan's fame and prestige had risen to unprecedented levels. In terms of game strategy, casual and serious fans alike would often hear analysts use phrases like: "On the basketball court, you cannot stop Michael Jordan, you can only hope to contain him." Phrases like these depicted basketball commentators' ways of capturing the level of Jordan's skill and the inevitability of certain in-game consequences of that skill. To be specific, opposing coaches would often devise plans to be sure that Jordan could not take over a game with his superiority. They might have uttered things like: "Michael Jordan is going to get his 30 (points) but we just want to be sure he does not drop 50 on us!" Beneath such game strategies lay a deeper truth that was being recognized. Namely, this truth was that Michael Jordan's scoring and significant all around effect on the outcome of a game was simply inevitable. There was nothing one could do to prevent him from making a big impact. Rather, the goal was to prevent him from having a huge impact. Why was this such a pervasive truth about the game of basketball during the Jordan era? Because of the inherent fact: Michael Jordan was an immensely talented basketball

player. So while the extent of his influence over the next game was yet to be determined, the fact of the matter was that there would be at least some influence because of what Jordan inherently was: a great basketball player.

Let me now connect this sport analogy to the discussion at hand in this dissertation: violence, war, and the human psyche. Through the use of similar language as in the Michael Jordan example, we may begin to notice significant implications. We may also begin to wonder to what extent this analogy falls short in describing the psychology of war that is often the topic of the aforementioned and described dinner table conversations.

Is violence in the form of war inevitable? Is it something that, like Jordan's basketball prowess, "we cannot stop but only hope to contain?" If so, then the task of humanity is not to seek peace but rather to restrain violence. Just as Michael Jordan was bound to at least get his 30 points, wars are bound to happen in their due time. Just as it is preferable to limit Jordan to 30 points rather than 50 points, it is preferable to limit wars to once every ten years rather than anything more frequent. Just as Jordan is an unstoppable force on the basketball court, human warfare is an unstoppable force on earth. And we should recall here, as logic along with the wise words of NBA coaches and analysts have taught us, that you cannot stop an unstoppable force; you can only hope to contain it. Is human violence in the form of war an unstoppable force? Are we justified in saying that human beings just are violent, warlike beings? Is that just the way it is?<sup>17</sup> People at dinner tables seem to readily agree that it is. But those who seek peace, true peace, are dissatisfied with such a concession. Many lovers and makers of peace are not

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<sup>17</sup> My italics are designed here to draw attention to the finality of these modes of description. The human being is seen in fixed terms rather than dynamic ones if these commonly held perspectives go unchecked.

so quick to think of human beings as creatures of inevitable destruction and war. Is there another way to have the conversation at the dinner table, a way that is both intellectually viable and existentially hopeful?

This dissertation's aim is to proclaim that there is another way to consider the psychology of war. In all of the dinner table conversations I have witnessed about war, not once have I ever heard mention of culture and its role in our lives. People assume not only that human beings are inherently violent (and therefore warlike), but also that culture is a secondary phenomenon that has little to no bearing on the true core of what makes us who and what we are. Both of these assumptions are problematic. As the likes of Ogden and Buber have argued, the culture plays a role, perhaps the role, in furnishing us *prima facie* with our senses of self and personhood. Culture is not peripheral but central. To be human is to be cultural, public, and dynamic, not individual, private, and static. Culture is, therefore, not irrelevant to the dinner table conversations about war; it is crucial to it.

**The (ir)relevance of culture: Academic perspectives.** Culture has been misperceived as irrelevant not only in the context of laypeople's dinner table conversations about the psychology of war but also in the academy. Western scholarship has tended to focus its social research on the concept of the individual as opposed to the concept of the shared or the communal. While it is true that certain disciplines, such as anthropology, take the role of culture seriously (and even as basic), western models of research have tended to employ modes of Aristotelian logic in analyzing the relation of selves and cultures. In fact, and as already suggested, this very dualism (i.e., conceptually splitting selves from culture for the purpose of analysis) reflects a bias towards dialectical and decontextualized ways of understanding propositions as distinct from one another

rather than by attending to larger fields of overall context (Peng & Nisbett, 1999). This sort of dualistic maneuver reflects the habitual tendency within Western scholarship to follow Platonic systems of discourse about truth and knowledge. For an eloquent illustration of this trend we may turn to the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) critique of anthropology:

So long as he [sic] remains unaware of the limits inherent in his point of view on the object, the anthropologist is condemned to adopt unwittingly for his own use the representation of action which is forced on agents or groups when they lack practical mastery of a highly valued competence and have to provide themselves with an explicit and at least semi-formalized substitute for it in the form of a *repertoire of rules*...It is significant that "culture" is sometimes described as a *map*; it is the analogy which occurs to an outsider who has to find his way around in a foreign landscape and who compensates for his lack of practical mastery, the prerogative of the native, by the use of a model of all possible routes (p. 2)

Bourdieu's analysis is as sobering as it is forceful. In essence, he implicates scholars (particularly those in social sciences such as anthropology) in exporting what he has elsewhere<sup>18</sup> referred to as the "scholastic point of view." By fragmenting and categorizing entities that may not, a priori, have any necessary reason for being fragmented and categorized, social scientists oversimplify and distort human behavior for the sake of fitting it into their own disciplinary modes of understanding. This often leads to an overemphasis on individual selves as being studied over and against or distinct from culture rather than as members of a whole cultural system. Heeding this critique of

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<sup>18</sup> See Bourdieu's (1998) *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action*. Beginning in the sixth chapter, Bourdieu adopts the term "scholastic view" from British philosopher J. L. Austin. He uses the term to refer to the over-systemization of scholarly work, which presumes the ability to describe "facts" about that which is observed for the sake of making rule-like truth claims about human behavior. Bourdieu exposes and challenges this assumption and insists that social scientists need to grapple with its implications.

Western scholarly activity will allow for the psychology of war to be explored as a cultural phenomenon of embodied practice rather than as an exercise of analyzing individual, private minds. Notice how this does not assert that individual selves are nonexistent but rather that their behaviors should not be understood as something independent of culture, as though culture is something that could even be teased out in any firm conceptual sense. Again, the role of culture must be elevated in order to make way for better understanding of the psyche of war.

What has been conveyed thus far in this section should make it unsurprising that Western academic theories about violence, war, and the human psyche have tended to either neglect culture altogether or misconstrue it as incidental and ontologically different<sup>19</sup> from the self. In this sense, laypeople's dinner table conversations about the psychology of war have tended to mirror the ivory tower academic conversations of scholars on the matter since culture, in both contexts, has been construed as a separate, peripheral force. The problem with this construal is that culture becomes hidden, as though in the background and the individual becomes elevated, as though central and paramount. This leads people to not ask about deep questions of the formative potential that culture has as it locates itself and its values character-logically into the psyche of individuals but rather to ask questions about fixed human nature or innate tendencies.

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<sup>19</sup> There are two important considerations to make here: one is philosophical while the other is stylistic and pedagogical. Philosophically speaking, the word "ontological" is to be distinguished from the word "ontic." The former refers to the very *nature* of existence (or being) while the latter has to do with physical, empirical *manifestations* of existence (or being). For example, two siblings may be ontologically similar in that they are both human while ontically distinct in that they are gendered differently. So, my critique of scholars who regard self and culture as wholly different is ontological and not ontic. This leads to my stylistic point. The reader will notice that I have already begun using such terms (self and culture) separately. This is not because I see them as entirely distinct but rather because there is no other way to refer to them given the context in which I find myself writing. I am, after all, writing from within a context that has given rise to conceptual and verbal categorizations of things like selves and cultures. So on one hand I speak of them as ontically and taxonomically different only to, on the other hand, make the claim that they are ontologically one in the same. My use of the categorical terms, therefore, comes out of pedagogical necessity in order that my approach may even be coherently laid out and understood from the start.



Culture and self, too often it seems, are split apart rather than seen in symbiotic confluence.

Why has this Platonic tendency overtaken academia just as it has the dinner tables? Are these understandings of human behavior reflective of how human behavior really comes to be? Is the insistence on deriving compartmentalized observations that may be systematized into comprehensible facts about behavior really enhancing, at bottom, our insights on humanity? To ask the questions in different ways using an everyday example, we might ask: is running really the same as an explanation of running? Do systematized explanations of running tell us more about runners than what could be known if we studied the actual embodiment of running (i.e., the cultural rhythms of running) or if we just ran? When approached carefully and straightforwardly, it seems obvious that the answers to such questions are “no.” So, what might it look like to examine the psychology of war with sensitivity to context, culture, and embodied habit, while avoiding the implicit Platonic dualisms that are too often adopted within Western theories on the matter? This dissertation, through a methodological rethinking of culture, represents a tangible attempt at answering this question while providing one possible explanatory theory on the American psyche of war.

### **The Central Thesis**

This dissertation will consist of several chapters, each containing its own sub-thesis and agenda. Taken together, these sub-theses will combine to support the following argument, which will run as the central thesis of the entire dissertation:

Given that human beings are historically and contextually embedded, I will argue that violence, made manifest through war, is not a psychologically innate and inevitable

aspect of individual human nature but rather a learned cultural value. This learned value thus manifests through the constant and ongoing embodiment of socially constructed ways of being as well as culturally furnished existential values that, when unchecked, unreflected upon, and unresisted, serve to create both agents capable of war and agents who attitudinally support war. As such, “warlikeness,” both through action and attitude, must be conceived of not as an inborn characteristic of the individualized human psyche but as a culturally manufactured one. United States culture exhibits this by virtue of its most deeply engrained values, which are propagated and perpetuated through capitalism. In turn, capitalist American culture produces individuals who embody certain ways of being. Moreover, in rejecting the clean, dualistic split between self and culture, I will culminate my argument by showing that the embodiment of American capitalism gives rise to, and emerges as, a psychology of war (that is, a psyche capable of making the ethical decision to enter or support war). Moreover, I will attempt to submit for consideration something of a remedy for this diagnosis by arguing for a form of mystical cultural reorientation that will render humans impervious and resistant to those violent cultural ways of being (such as American capitalism) that run the risk of engendering a psyche of war.

This thesis statement will no doubt raise many questions. I hope to be able to anticipate and address most of them in the subsequent chapters. For now I will devote the last piece of these introductory remarks to providing a brief outline of what will be contained in each chapter. Preceding this outline, however, I see it necessary to delve into some clarifications on terminology, comments on stylistic issues, and explanations of the

scope of the dissertation. Because I assume that these issues may have already raised concerns for some readers, I will take them on below without any further ado.

### **Key Considerations and Chapter Outline**

My aim in this section is to briefly explain the use of certain terms that will be central to the overall sweep of the dissertation. I will also provide a few comments regarding stylistic concerns in the dissertation. Additionally I will speak to the scope of the dissertation, outlining its general goal, acknowledging its limitations, and highlighting some of its expected implications. Finally, this will give way to a chapter outline. There, I will give an overview of each of the chapters and the intentions therein. To be clear, these overviews may, at this stage, appear to contain some questionable, unproven, and unsubstantiated assertions. I can only acknowledge this upfront and make clear that if this is the case, it is as a result of an attempt at introductory brevity rather than sloppy scholarship. It is my intention that the most significant methodological and propositional claims of this dissertation will be made in a meticulous and well-argued manner. Of course, this attempt will have to occur in the actual chapters rather than in the context of the condensed chapter outline that is to appear below. With this said, I ask readers to reconcile any instant disagreements with the contents of the chapters themselves rather than the preliminary sketches that will be provided below.

**My use of certain terms.** It would be far too ambitious to clarify each of the terms, and my uses thereof, that may bring about ambiguity on the part of the reader. Language use is at its core far too contextual to warrant any excessive consternation on my part towards making sure each of the major words I use is clearly and articulately defined. One needs only to attempt to define terms in collaboration with other people in

order to notice this perspectival problem.<sup>20</sup> Ten people are likely to present 10 different definitions of a term, if pressed to. These definitional problems arise when language is overly and unnecessarily analyzed rather than simply used. Searching for “the right” definitions is often fruitless as it deadens words and relegates them to the realm of that which is closed and complete as opposed to that which is open and unfolding. In his later work, Ludwig Wittgenstein (1953) taught us as much by arguing that language derives “meaning” from its ongoing utility and practical use rather than from any timeless, logical, or representational structure, as he previously thought. The meanings or definitions of words, therefore, are grounded in their uses, and their uses are always contextually and culturally regulated. Any such contextually laden conception of language renders singular “definitions” highly problematic.

Moreover, aiming for “the definition” of words sends language users down unneeded paths of rigidity by focusing them too highly on the abstract versus the concrete. Words mean different things in different contexts and to provide a one-dimensional definition for them is simply to enact a grave misunderstanding of language at the outset. Even with this all said, however, I find it necessary for the reader be at least generally aware of my definitional use of certain terms as they are central to the whole of the dissertation. In other words, and as per the above points, I will briefly outline how

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<sup>20</sup> To again use sports as a parallel, one can notice the subjective nature of “defining” words by engaging in social experiments of sorts. For example, get a room full of people together and ask them to define the term *sport*. What criterion, or set of criteria, determines whether or not some activity can be referred to as a sport? Some will insist it has to do with a minimally required level of physical exertion. But then would golf or bowling be ruled out? If so, why? Would it be due to deviations in heart rate or blood pressure? If so, what if someone’s heart rate or blood pressure were to rise during the act of golfing or bowling; would they then be considered to be playing a *sport*? Others will insist that sports are comprised of physical games people play against one another in the spirit of competition. But then would chess or poker be ruled out? Again, why? Is the physicality (i.e., picking up and moving pieces or cards with one’s hands) involved in these competitive games not frequent or pronounced enough? Who determines the standards for such criteria? Thus, who determines what is or is not a *sport*?

certain words are used in the context of this dissertation. Thus, below I will mention and define a few terms that are instrumental to this project insofar as they will be, and already have been, used throughout it.

The first instance of this is my use of the term culture. Throughout this work, my use of the term culture is meant to refer to that which exists for absorption in the realm of social possibility for human beings. That is, if, as I assume, human beings are cultural beings, it is through the culture that they take in their senses of self, morality, responsibility, obligation, passion, priority and so on. Culture, therefore, is what contains the possibilities from which selves can draw. Culture and the meaning found within it includes, but is not limited to: established and ongoing sociobiological modes of expression, however superficial or deep-running (the color of one's hair or how one dresses may be considered superficial while one's sexuality or gender is clearly deeper-running); social and political modes of expression (which play roles in the ways people perceive civics, community, power, authority, law, etc.); religious, theological, or spiritual modes of expression (which ground people's understandings of transcendence and/or metaphysical reality); institutional modes of expression (which shape people's ideologies through educational discourse, among other things); and economic modes of expression (which govern the ways that people perceive property, labor, value, and various resources). Culture, therefore, is an all-encompassing term representing that which grounds the sources that provide meaning and identity to selves. Clifford Geertz (1973/2000) in his most eminent book, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, defines culture in this way:

The concept of culture I espouse...is essentially a semiotic one. Believing, with Max Weber, that man [sic] is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. It is explication I am after, construing social expressions on their surface enigmatical (p. 4).

Although Geertz—as a Western anthropologist operating with a set of implicit methodological biases—through his insistence upon explaining human actions ultimately ends up in this work committing the very error that we earlier saw Bourdieu warn against (the anthropologist’s error of describing behavior that cannot be actively understood based on a lack of mastery), his insights are nevertheless useful in providing an operational definition of the word culture. Human beings are, in the Geertzian sense, creatures that are “suspended in” self-created “webs of significance” of the sorts that I outlined above. Culture, therefore, is not a term meant only to conjure up images of popular trends. It is rather the vast social space that people share and negotiate in efforts to extract sources of importance and meaning for their lives.

A few final, and reiterative, remarks on my use of the word culture are in order. As mentioned before, culture and self need not be seen as mutually exclusive. Moreover, culture possesses subjective force in that it has unforeseeable and unintended influence on the selves who take it in. These philosophical issues, which extend beyond my mere use of the term as defined above, will be further explored in chapter 2. Moreover, it is important to note that, while infrequently, I may on occasion (as in the title of the dissertation) use the term sociocultural and even the term social to mean the same thing

as what I have above defined culture to mean. My hope is that the reader will absorb the thrust of what I am claiming in this project to the extent that this interchangeability will prove to be unproblematic.

The second point of clarification is of my use of the term American (or America). I will use this term throughout the project to refer to the particular culture about which I am speaking, namely that of the United States of America. The term is therefore not meant to denote North America as a whole, South America, or Central America. Instead, for all intents and purposes in this dissertation, I refer to cultural considerations about observations of the United States only. This is what is meant in my use of the term American.

The third point of clarification I would like to provide is of my use of the term capitalism. In this dissertation (but particularly in chapters 3 and 4), I will use this term to refer to the sociocultural fixtures of American life. If this sounds broad, it is by design. Capitalism will not refer only to a particular system of economics but also, and more concentratedly, to a set of norms that comprise the whole of Western society in general and American society in particular. These fixtures and norms will be enumerated and expanded upon in chapters 3 and 4, so I shall not devote too much space to that here. Instead, I will borrow and import for the remainder of the dissertation a definition of capitalism offered by the Dutch Economist Bob Goudzwaard. Just as I have already begun to suggest above, Goudzwaard (1979) also notes that a conceptual definition of capitalism needs not be restricted merely to the realm of Marxian economic philosophy when he writes:

One final comment...concerns my use of the word capitalism. I employ it to describe the main features of the structure of western society. I could have chosen another word to describe that structure, but since every key descriptive term is loaded with unintended meanings, a measure of arbitrariness in choice can hardly be avoided...I do not employ the term capitalism in its classical Marxist sense...Moreover, I do not want to give the impression that the entire structure of western society can be fully described by a single word (p. xxvii).

In later chapters I will invoke a bit more of Goudzwaard's work in order to help unpack my use of the term capitalism while also highlighting its concomitant implications. For now, I wish to reiterate that capitalism will not be used merely as an economic term in this dissertation but as one that "describes the main features of the structure" of American culture. Moreover, I proceed with the same carefulness that Goudzwaard espouses by acknowledging that "the entire structure" of American culture cannot be "fully described by a single word."

The fourth term, or set of terms, in need of clarification are violence, aggression, war, or warlikeness. It is almost unnecessary at this point, given my remarks at the beginning of this section, to mention that violence is a broad term with much relative potential. However, certain terms necessitate this reminder more than others and violence, I feel, is one such term. Depending on context, to an obvious extent, and moral framework, to a less obvious extent, definitionally conceptualizing the term violence generates much in the way of disagreement and variance. Some will insist on consigning it to that which is immediately physical, such as bodily harm, while others will thicken its



breadth to include that which is psychological, such as emotional abuse.<sup>21</sup> Some will insist that violence is something that is directly interpersonal and at least partly premeditated, such as deliberately hurting or killing someone with use of body parts or weapons, while others will expand its range to include actions that are indirectly interpersonal and unpremeditated, such as purchasing products built at the hands of unfairly waged practices that oppress laborers. The takeaway here is that the term violence can and does mean many things.

In this dissertation I will connotatively use the term violence to capture this broadness. In this vein, the reader can usually assume any of the above articulated conceptions of violence and still discern the thrust of my arguments. However, the narrow focus of this dissertation is on the psychology of war. Therefore, the term should more readily be taken to refer to violence in the form of geo-political war or warfare. So in the pages that follow, I ask that readers take the terms aggression, violence, war, or warlikeness to refer to the behaviors and attitudes undergirding geo-political warfare (though, again, they may be taken in a more broad sense despite this not being the focus of the present work). Moreover, and given that my argument will center on American culture on the whole, this sort of violence should be understood to refer not only to any and all acts of war (like those carried out by military personnel, soldiers, and the politicians who authorize them) but also to sympathetic attitudes towards war (like those held by people of a highly patriotic bent who seemingly devote unconditional loyalty to the foreign activity of the American military). In fact, I am inclined here to add a third

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<sup>21</sup> My goal here is not to make any heavy-handed distinction between physical and psychological (or body and mind). Rather, I am using the terms referentially regarding concepts that are different. Philosophically speaking I can fully acknowledge that “the mind” exists and that its conceptual characteristics are *different* from those of “the body” while simultaneously refusing to see mind and body as ontologically distinct or mutually exclusive.

category that in essence may fall somewhere between these aspects (active and attitudinal) of the psychology of war. This would refer to the types of actions that are not “traditionally” thought of as warlike but are nevertheless destructive toward those against whom they are waged. This may include modern day technologically-based war activities such as remote drone operation. The most striking example of this category comes through, though is certainly not limited to, economic warfare in the form of sanctions.

As I write this, the United States’ government is actively imposing this form of violence or war against my country of heritage, Iran. As a matter of fact, the US has been orchestrating such warfare against Iran since the late part of the 1970s. Most recently, these sanctions have been publicized as attempts on the part of America at “peaceful resolution” within the nuclear situation with Iran. People in favor of this approach tend to insist that sanctions of this sort comprise benign measures that need to be taken in the negotiation process regarding Iran’s nuclear weapon status. They insist that Iran’s developing a nuclear weapon is unacceptable and dangerous for the wellbeing of the world.

Amidst these circumstances, it is compelling to ask certain questions and sit in bewilderment at their honest answers. For example, we might ask: what moral authority gives certain countries (such as the United States, Israel, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, etc.) the right to have nuclear weapons at their disposal while other countries may not? A viable answer has never been given and is apparently not forthcoming within the global community. Since this treads towards the topic of global security and danger we might ask: which country was the first (and only) to ever actually use a nuclear weapon?

The answer here is: the United States, twice.<sup>22</sup> There are those who will be unfazed by such facts and assert that these uses were carried out under “just” means. Such detractors are quite often patriotic loyalists who can hardly be argued out of their positions. It may thus be intriguing to pursue yet another question: when was the last time Iran actually attacked another country? The answer is: over 200 years ago.

However, these questions and answers hover closely over the web of geo-politics, a web that is easy to get caught into and distracted by. We must explore, then, whether or not war tactics of this third variety (e.g., certain types of economic sanctions, as in those against Iran) are in fact reflective of peaceful negotiation and action or if they are in fact worthy of inclusion under my use of the term *violence* as well as *war* and *warlikeness*. Economic sanctions toward Iran, as recently led by the U.S., have resulted in direct negative impact on the lives of everyday Iranians while apparently doing little to deter the very nuclear development they are supposedly designed to target. Since the implementation of these sanctions, the value of the rial (Iran’s primary form of currency) has plummeted, leading to skyrocketing inflation, a staggering increase in the price of food, and a lack of access to basic and essential medicinal needs. Simply put, ordinary, non-governmental Iranian citizens are falling into poverty, malnutrition, illness, and death at the hands of these sanctions. Does this not constitute violent action, a form of geo-political war, or warlike practices in general? I say it does.

So, I will use the terms violence, war, and warlikeness somewhat interchangeably in order to refer to those forms of behavior that occur actively, attitudinally, and even tactically (in a subtle or less obvious sense as explored with the Iran example above),

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<sup>22</sup> Once on August 6, 1945 in Hiroshima, Japan and once on August 9, 1945 in Nagasaki, Japan. These two detonations resulted in the deaths of over 200,000 people, most of whom were civilians.

which manifest as violence on a geo-political scale. As the title of the dissertation suggests, these terms will refer primarily to exploration of the American psyche of war that is required to deliberately carry out and maintain these acts and attitudes of war.

Finally, I wish to give clarity to my use of the terms psyche, psychology, and/or psychological. These terms will also be used somewhat interchangeably to refer to the mental or psychic aspects of human behavior. These terms should be understood broadly rather than narrowly. So, rather than honing in on uses of these terms that may be proffered by varying and formalized approaches to the academic discipline of psychology (such as cognitivism or behaviorism), I will use the terms to refer to those aspects of human behavior that are not reducible simply to biology. It may be thought of in this way: a body (and its basic hardware) is biological by virtue of its being a physical organism. Furthermore, a body's attributes (such as hands, teeth, or hair) are biological even if those attributes possess behavioral expressions (hands or palms can sweat, teeth can grow, hair can shed or discolor). However, a body becomes psychological when these behavioral expressions appear to be reflective of a process other than biological propensity (as with sweaty palms, growing teeth, or graying hair). Biological propensities, in this sense, imply that there are predispositions that are impervious to certain factors such as: conscious or unconscious thought, genuine and nondeterministic decision-making, habit and character formation, the development of subjectivity, personal tastes, and/or moral ways of seeing, etc. These factors belong to the realm of the psyche or the psychological in that they are different<sup>23</sup> from the body's basic hardware and attributes. This does not mean that the psyche is separate from the body but that it is

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<sup>23</sup> In this sense, I am roughly equating psychology and consciousness.

conceptually irreducible to the parts that make up the body. Just as the Gestaltists claim that the whole is different than, though not independent from, the parts, we may here claim that the psyche is different than, though not independent from, the body and its parts (i.e., its hardware, its attributes).

These are very complex philosophical issues that indeed must be further developed. I will devote considerable space to their reiteration and clarification in chapter 2. For now, and for the sake of clarifying terms, the reader should keep in mind that my use of the terms psyche, psychology, or psychological is in reference to those aspects of human behavior, which are not reducible to biology.

**Some remarks on my academic approach.** As mentioned in the autobiography that appears early in this introduction, I am writing from a particular perspective. I do not presume to be carrying out “science,” in the proper sense of the term, that which may be demonstrably “proven” or replicated. Rather, I am writing about violence, war, the psyche, and American culture as I see it. My hope is that this dissertation’s contribution will be to reframe the way that violence and war are conceived of in lay contexts and academic contexts alike. With this said, it is only wise to exercise discretion and state clearly what I do acknowledge about my approach and methodology. I write as an Iranian man with certain religious, ethical, and political sensibilities. I am shaped consciously and unconsciously by my ancestors. I carry within me inextinguishable flames of Zoroastrian and Islamic wisdom, ancient Persian metaphysics as found in music and poetry among other things, as well as cultural and family traditions that give rise to values such as radical hospitality. These threads of my being undoubtedly shape the way

I think (please see the autobiography preceding this introduction for a more detailed exploration of these issues).

At the same time, I exist and write from within a context of a different sort. I write this dissertation in the School of Psychology at an American Christian seminary. This means that I have certain affinities such as engaging in academic discourse largely through the lens of western philosophical traditions. It also means that I will have certain tendencies such as assuming that I can communicate clearly and coherently while holding what on the surface may seem to be disparate identities: Iranian ethnicity, American nationality, middle eastern wisdom traditions, a love for western philosophy, graduate level training in Christian theology as well as academic psychology, to name only a few. If this is a “problem,” I cannot presume to be able to solve it (or surpass it). What I can do, however, is acknowledge it and proceed anyway. So, I write from a particular heritage using the academic tools furnished by a different heritage. I write of the American psyche of war from the perspective of an American national who does not feel like an American patriot. I write as an Iranian with a Muslim background using concepts informed by an academic institution with western Christian roots. And I hope to do all of this humbly yet without apology. My perspectives are therefore not meant to be taken as matters of fact but rather as what I myself, from within my particularity, think is in fact the matter with America as it pertains to violence, war, and the psyche.

**The scope (and limits) of my argument.** I once presented a paper on the psychology of religion and violence at a conference of the American Academy of Religion. During the question and answer portion of my panel conversation, a gentleman asked me: “So are you trying to get at a theory of everything?” I hesitated, not because I

did not know the answer (which was clearly “no”) but because I did not really understand the question. How could I possibly have been giving a theory of everything? My paper was offered on a specific area pertaining to psychology, religion, and violence; how could it have been a generalized theory of everything? Furthermore, how could it even have been a generalized theory about violence on the whole? That would have been far too ambitious and presumptuous—and probably more so academically foolhardy and arrogant—on my part. In this sense, I wish to be clear upfront that this dissertation has a particular scope and intent accompanied by particular limits and non-intents.

To be clear, however, I firmly believe that the methodology I propose (then go on to use) in this dissertation is universal. This means that I believe all instances of human warfare, regardless of context, arise as a result of the same process that I put forth in chapter 2. Namely, the argument that war is not a psychologically innate and inevitable aspect of individual human nature but rather a learned cultural value that manifests through constant and ongoing embodiment of socially constructed ways of being as well as culturally furnished practices is an argument that I claim has universal applicability across humanity. However, the focus (or scope) of my dissertation will be to apply this universal methodology to the particular context of American culture. So while the conceptual approach has universal utility, its behavioral incidence must be explored with particularity and scholarly sensitivity towards limits. This work, then, does not attempt to posit a theory of everything in general or even a general theory about war or violence in particular. Instead, in its narrowed scope, the purpose of this dissertation is to propose a theory about the American psyche of war.

**Chapter outline.** This section will bring an end to the introductory remarks of this dissertation. My goal here will be to provide an admittedly abridged overview of each of the chapters and what I attempt to accomplish within them. For the necessary purposes of brevity and readability at this introductory stage, I will refrain from clearly elaborating on the key issues or defending with any depth any of the arguments presented below. With this in mind, I again urge the reader to avoid the temptation of interpreting this section as containing unfounded assertions. It will be my task in the chapters ahead to substantiate the claims that run central to the progression of this dissertation. Therefore, I encourage readers who may possess opposing views to what is below outlined to square them with the contents of the chapters themselves rather than with these cursory introductory remarks.

In chapter 1, I will review and argue against the position that is commonly held by scholars and laypeople alike: that violence and war are inherent parts of human nature. To do this I will interact with the perspectives offered by three prolific thinkers who, I think, argue strongest in favor of this view, though they arrive at it using differing disciplinary and methodological techniques. As such, my interlocutors will be: the renowned psychoanalyst, Sigmund Freud; the Nobel Prize winning zoologist and ethologist, Konrad Lorenz; the prolific sociobiologist, E. O. Wilson; and philosopher and evolutionary psychologist, David Livingstone Smith. Each of these writers submits that aggression, violence, and war are innate parts of the human psyche. To be sure, each is concerned, to greater or lesser degree, with the role played by environmental factors. However, they only take note of these factors insofar as they jibe with their otherwise biologically-based methodologies.



This segues into the age-old “nature versus nurture” debate, which I will also explore and critique as unhelpful and overly dualistic and dichotomized. Moreover, I will argue that traditional views of human behavior, whether “nature” or “nurture” oriented are too deterministic and reductionistic and also fail to take into account the most vital dimensions of human psychology and personhood. These overlooked dimensions are captured in conceptual models such as shaping, formation, and becoming. Providing sound critiques of inadequate models on the psychology of violence will lay the groundwork for chapter 2, which will consist of my suggested methodology that focuses not on biological determinism (as in “nature” models) or social determinism (as in “nurture” models) but instead on cultural embodiment as a mode of becoming.

Chapter 2 will thus contain an elaborate exposition of the methodology I am putting forth and implementing in this dissertation. As will be evident after the departure from chapter 1, this methodology differs greatly from traditional approaches towards understanding violence, war, and the human psyche. The goal of this chapter will be to propose a view of personhood that is not fixed but dynamic. This means that the language of “human nature” is inherently problematic because it both narrows and neglects the constant role that culture plays in the ongoing, iterative, and never finished process of becoming a person. Human beings, in this vein, must never be construed as closed, completed, static entities whose “nature” can be described. Rather, human behavior must always be understood in light of the possibilities of personhood that are furnished by culture through avenues such as language and embodied ways of being. I will propose a notion referred to as the culture-self and argue that its holism makes for a better understanding of human psychology. If argued convincingly, the takeaway that this

chapter will have established moving forward is as follows: human beings cannot be spoken of in fixed, vacuous ways that are devoid of the substance that is culture and its embodiment. Moreover, this philosophical emphasis on embodiment will give way to the following takeaway: that, psychologically speaking, human beings are what they do. The notions of both culture and self, in this sense, will be fleshed out to a great extent. We will go on to see that this has major implications on how the psychology of violence and war is understood: namely in that violence and warlikeness quickly must shift away from being understood as abstract, private, individual, disembodied, and innate matters of psychological investigation towards being understood as concrete, public, sociocultural, embodied, and historically situated ones instead.

Chapter 3 will shift gears to some degree by examining certain features of American culture through the lens of what has already been, and will continue to be, referred to as capitalism. By doing this, and as per the already established methodology developed in chapter 2, the tone of the dissertation will be one that seamlessly begins to describe the type of human beings constantly produced by American culture. To reiterate, and to remain consistent with what will be the established methodology, it will be important to note that human beings are “produced” by and through culture by habitually and continually embodying particular ways of being. In other words, the human psyche manifests its subjectivity through that which is done in an embodied sense. Thus, the primary aim of this chapter will be to explore certain features of the American culture of capitalism so that we may begin to explore what the practices and values (or lack thereof) associated with them are. If established clearly, we will be able to enter the next chapter equipped with a deeper understanding of these features and their corresponding practices

and values so that we may examine them over and against the American psyche of war and warlikeness.

In chapter 4, the connections between American capitalism and the American psyche of war will be explicitly articulated. The methodology of this dissertation will come to full fruition here as I will attempt to show that the cultural fixtures that drive the capitalist culture are the same fixtures that, when embodied, drive the psychological aspects of warlikeness. I will explicate the analogous nature of these fixtures by arguing that their ideals (both articulated and unarticulated) are one in the same. Thus collapsing, rather than dichotomizing, self and culture will have led us to a new realm of understanding the psychology of violence not merely as a nature versus nurture issue but rather as one of shaping, formation, becoming and cultural embodiment.

Chapter 5 will explore what may be considered something of a prescription for the diagnosis that will have been made through the coalescing of previous chapters. In essence, I will be arguing and calling for a reorientation of human beings towards ways of being that may be described as mystical in nature. At first blush, this may seem to be either out of place or disjointed given the progression of the dissertation up until this point. Moreover, some readers, by virtue of the very word mysticism, may react with dismissiveness. I will respond in detail with what I anticipate to be at the center of these concerns in the context of the chapter itself. For now, I wish only to urge readers that just as one must not judge a book by its cover, one must also not judge a chapter by its introductory summary. With this said, I hope that I will succeed in arguing that a mystical reorientation is what lies at the heart of any hope for peace in our contemporary globalized context. A functional definition of the terms mystical, and mysticism will be

provided so as to prime us for an exploration of literature in the arenas of religion, ethics, philosophy, theology, existentialism, poetry, and art. This exploration will make clearer, I think, the thrust of what I mean in claiming that a mystical reorientation must rest as the foundation of a new, embodied way of being peaceful amidst the negotiation of cultures of war and violence such as that of America. Mystical life, therefore, will be proposed as giving rise to a nonviolent alternative that cultivates peaceable existence that is impervious to the potentialities of culturally furnished, warlike modes of being and becoming.

## Chapter 1

### **The Dinner Table and the Academy: A Critique of Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Violence, War, and the Human Psyche**

*The condition of man [sic]...is a condition of war of everyone against everyone.*

-Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651/1904, p. 87)

*Maybe there is a beast...maybe it's only us.*

-Golding, *Lord of the Flies* (1954, p. 80)

A few summers ago, my wife and I had the opportunity and privilege of traveling to Israel and Palestine as members of a peacemaking delegation comprised of graduate students and faculty members. The purpose of our visit to this holy land was manifold; however, the main intention we had in traveling to the area was to listen to local peoples and learn about the contours of the conflict. Over the course of two weeks, we had the distinct honor of meeting with political and religious officials, conflict resolution experts, scholars, peacemakers, and members of the public from both Israeli and Palestinian narratives.

One afternoon, in the city of Hebron, we met with a local son of a rabbi (let us call him David) who had found a creative way to engage Israeli and Palestinian youth and encourage them to interact with one another. A former American football player, David started an intramural football league that placed Israeli and Palestinian kids on the same teams. This functioned not only as a sort of after school program, but also as a way for the next generation of Israelis and Palestinians to grown up with more integrated interpersonal contact than their parents before them would have had.

As we sat listening to David, something struck me about the way he described the benefits of his football league. He remarked confidently: “We have had so much war and conflict in this country over the last few decades; football is a way to prevent war and conflict.” As if anticipating that his audience would want him to elaborate on this point, he continued on: “Here is how I know that; these kids have to have some sort of outlet for their natural aggression. If they do not channel it into something, in our case football, then they will end up channeling that natural violence and rage into each other. Not having an outlet for that natural violence is what has gotten us nothing but political conflict all these years.” David then went on to quote the Hebrew Scriptures. He referenced a passage from the Book of Genesis and stated that Adam and Eve, when they disobeyed God, were in fact behaving out of this inherent rage and violence that he had just spoken of.

I found David’s commitment and resolution to improving relationships between Israeli and Palestinian children to be quite admirable. He was a man devoted to cultivating peace in the way he best knew how to; there was no question about that. What did strike me as questionable, however, was what I might refer to as his philosophical anthropology—that is, the fundamental way that he conceived of the human person. David was convinced that human beings were innately violent and warlike. His own work, therefore, was committed to the task of finding a way to curb that inevitability by channeling its appetite into something less destructive, such as football. This philosophical anthropology did not stop there; in fact, it hermeneutically informed the way that this son of a rabbi read the Genesis story of Adam and Eve. His view of human nature shaped the way he saw the children with whom he worked while also informing

the way he read and interpreted the Bible. As I listened to his words, I noticed that he uttered them with an unbridled sense of sureness. I could tell that, as far as David was concerned, his perspective represented the fact of the matter. Moreover, his words attracted head nods of agreement from virtually everyone in my group.

I disagreed with David's (and the head nodders') philosophical anthropology. On the bus ride back to East Jerusalem, I pondered what I had just heard and witnessed: the statement that human beings are innately violent; the emphatic and instantaneous concurring of almost everyone who listened; the Biblical assertions that streamed out of this view. I had heard this sort of argument and thought about it many times before. This time, however, I began to think long and hard about the practical consequences of such an outlook. Did it matter how we thought of ourselves? Could our philosophical anthropology actually play a major role in whether or not we behave violently?

### **Preliminary Remarks**

It has become something of an afterthought for people of all stripes to attribute violence, war, and destructiveness to an inherent human appetite. Considerations about violence and the human psyche have thus tended to operate on the assumption that "human nature" is to blame for the ills of war. As noted in the introduction, this assumption has firmly couched the discussions on war that laypeople have during dinner table politics while scholars and academics have proceeded forth with similar leanings.

While this (what I will refer to as the innateness view) has occupied a more popular and readily appealed to end of the spectrum<sup>24</sup> of theories on war and the human psyche, the other end has been occupied by what may be referred to as the socialization view. The socialization view, though less frequently embraced, assumes allegiance with the latter half of the nature-nurture debate in positing that human beings behave violently in response to social stimuli as opposed to natural predisposition. As is the case with many afterthoughts, however, these too need to be rethought.

It is necessary to recognize at this point that contemporary social scientists have begun to avoid the terminology of “nature versus nurture.” Still, the general trend of recent scholarship has nevertheless followed this binary. Psychological theories have continued to employ methodological biases toward the nature-nurture paradigm despite not pronouncing themselves as such. The contemporary views of human violence considered the most viable tend to be those proffered by evolutionary psychologists and cognitive scientists who are very much prone to invoke terms like “human nature” and “environmental stimuli.” Even those theorists considered interactionists (invoking both innateness and socialization views) operate from out of the starting point laid out by the binary paradigm of nature-nurture by assuming that human beings function dualistically. That is, innateness, socialization, and interactionist theories alike contain within them a methodological presupposition that human behavior is governed either by what is

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<sup>24</sup> I wish to emphasize that there is indeed a spectrum. Theories on aggression, violence, and war have varied largely and cannot always be cleanly categorized into either nature or nurture. For example, Freud’s theory (which will be expounded upon later in this chapter) offers no “source” for aggression apart from its grounding in psychic instinct. So, even though he considers violence and aggression to be innate, one can only deduce that he means this in relation to something biological. Thus, although his view may not fall all the way in favor of nature on the nature-nurture spectrum, he nevertheless occupies a place on this spectrum that warrants his categorization within the innateness view. For reasons like this one, I will proceed in this chapter by assuming these categories rather than unpacking the variance that exists within the spectrum itself, though some amount of that will organically occur in the midst of my critiques.



instinctive (nature), conditioned (nurture), or both. I will go on to explore such theories in this chapter. A holistic methodology that presumes no such distinctions between the inner and the outer, the self and environment, will be proposed in Chapter 2.

Therefore, the central questions driving this chapter will be: what good reasons are there to accept the innateness view? Along those lines, what contributions have eminent thinkers made in support of this view? What philosophical problems exist within these views? Are socialization views less problematic? What is missing from or unaccounted for within both the innateness view and the socialization view, regardless of the varying expositions of them that exist? And, alternatively, is there a better way of viewing the human person in light of these problems? My intent will be to demonstrate that both of these approaches contain grave flaws and fail to stand up to philosophical muster.

I will begin by providing sketches and critiques of eminent innateness views that appropriately represent the last century or so of scholarly activity on the matter. These overviews will include theories across disciplines ranging from psychoanalysis and ethology to sociobiology and contemporary evolutionary psychology. The thinkers whose work I will delve into represent arguably the strongest proponents of the innateness view. Though methodologically different, each of these proponents renders the same conclusion: that violence, aggression, and thus war, are inherent qualities of human nature. Having fleshed out those approaches, I will then shift my attention to a brief survey of eminent socialization views as well. This will set the stage for Chapter 2 where I will propose an alternative philosophical and anthropological method of understanding

human psychology that I hope will pave the way for a fresh approach towards examining violence, war, and the human psyche.

As such, I will argue, in this chapter, that prevailing theories on violence, war, and human psychology, whether nature or nurture in orientation, have fallen short. I will go on to show that this is due to their determinism and reductionism as well as the implicit philosophical dualisms that they assume either between mind and body, self and context, or both. Determinism and reductionism are problematic because they negate the notion of authentic free will and choice in the ethical sphere of war and warlikeness by causally linking expressions of violence to some preceding nature or event. Both the innateness (nature) views and socialization (nurture) fail to account for the formational quality of becoming human in the psychological sense of the term. These philosophical and methodological considerations will be expanded in Chapter 2. For now, this chapter's purpose is to present and critique the prevailing theories on violence, war, and the human psyche.

### **Eminent Innateness Views**

**Freud and inherent human drives.** Forever cemented as the father of psychoanalysis, it would be virtually uncontroversial to include Sigmund Freud's name on a short list of the most influential Western thinkers of the modern era. Freud's work has in many ways been instrumental in the rise of contemporary psychotherapy, preliminary to modern research in neuroscience as well as other behavioral sciences and influential in the humanities, philosophy, and social sciences since his time. An intellectual giant, Freud's penetrating theories have changed the way human beings in the west are understood both within and outside of the academic realm.

Trained as a physician, Freud's foundations were laid down with an emphasis on anatomy and physiology. It was during the early phase of his work as a neurologist that he first began to take interest in psychological phenomena. This early fascination led him down the path of a fruitful and prolific career as a clinical and personality theorist. From the start, therefore, Freud viewed human psychology in terms and conceptual frameworks attached to the bedrock of biology. His clinical formulations were inextricably connected to the presuppositions that he retained from neurology (Wollheim, 1971). This should immediately equip us with the ability to detect certain methodological biases that are prevalent in Freud's way of theorizing about human behavior.

In 1920, after having already been extremely active in clinical-analytic and theoretical work, Freud's approach took a turn with the publication of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Though it is widely recognized as Freud's most difficult text to understand, it nevertheless clearly introduces an unprecedented component of his conceptualization of human psychology—the existence of a second drive. Up until that point, his theories had posited that behavior is driven by a single, biologically-based sexual instinct, or life-instinct (eros or libido). In this book, Freud went beyond this original formulation to submit a second category of drives, that which stems from the death-instinct (thanatos). It is from under the umbrella of this newly introduced death instinct that Freud began to explore the phenomenon of human aggression (S. Freud, 1920).

According to Freud, these two instincts are fundamentally linked to the biological makeup of human beings. Keen readers of Freud may take notice of disconnect here, however. Though he heavily emphasizes the role of biology throughout his career, his

entire corpus consists of observations of the behavioral or psychic sort. So while Freud never explicitly separates the mind and body into ontologically distinct entities, he nevertheless implicitly operates according to such a distinction. This dualism is apparent through not only his subtle use of core analytic concepts such as the conscious versus the unconscious but also through the way that he invokes separations when speaking to the paramount role of the body as the predominant source of knowledge regarding human behavior.

My point here is not only to draw attention to the more obvious dualism contained in the very creation of these two categories of the psyche but to illuminate Freud's rationale in doing so to begin with. Because it seems very plausible that human beings have conscious and unconscious components to their psyches, the problem is not merely the dualism contained in proffering two categories. Rather, the more telling piece to this puzzle lies in exposing where Freud grounds the two categories. Throughout his writings, he seems to connect the unconscious to the biological while ascribing the conscious to the social, cultural, and familial. In so doing, Freud operates with an implicit assumption: the body and the mind are not only separate but they apparently also function according to different laws and/or influences. This helps us see how Freud represents the culmination of the rationalist, Enlightenment tradition catapulted centuries earlier by René Descartes who, of course, explicated that indeed mind and body, as distinct substances, are each governed by different laws.

In fact, in the often overlooked but key final pages of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud (1920) tips his own hand when, in a moment of hesitation about the certainty of his own aforementioned formulations, he writes:

On the other hand, we wish to make it quite clear that the uncertainty of our speculation is enhanced in a high degree by the necessity of borrowing from biological science. Biology is truly a realm of limitless possibilities; we have the most surprising revelations to expect from it, and cannot conjecture what answers it will offer in some decades to the questions we have put to it. Perhaps they may be such as to overthrow the whole artificial structure of hypothesis (p. 78).

This passage represents why it is so problematic to commit the common error of presuming to have a firm understanding of Freud despite having never read his own words. Freud is often considered in the academy as a pompous, self-assured thinker who put forth his theories with an air of utter certainty about himself; surely many secondary sources and college textbook summations of his work portray him in this light. Though some degree of this may be true, what we have here is a different glimpse of the man. He essentially claims that his theories amount to little more than “speculation” and “hypothesis,” though of the type that is “enhanced in a high degree” by “biological science.” Freud’s scholarly hesitancy is quite apparent here in that, at the end of his carefully thought out treatise, he somewhat consigns himself to the realm of theoretical uncertainty.

Still, and to be represent this fairly and accurately, it is important for me to note here that Freud does in fact go on to insert a self-congratulatory set of remarks only a few lines after the above quoted hesitation. He writes,

If that is so, someone may ask why does one undertake such work as the one set out in this article, and why should it be communicated to the world? Well, I

cannot deny that some of the analogies, relations and connections therein traced appeared to me worthy of consideration (1920, p. 78).

Perhaps tempering his hesitance with a strong vote of personal-theoretical confidence, here Freud does something that he does intermittently throughout many of his writings by appealing to his own analytical experience as being more or less on par with scientific inquiry. This is evidenced, to some degree, by his pointing out that the contents of the book “appeared” to be worthy of consideration. As further evidence, elsewhere he affirms the credibility of his own psychoanalytic theories by directly referring to the scientific principles of repeatability and observability contained within them when he writes, “the teachings of psycho-analysis are based on an incalculable number of observations and experiences, and only someone who has repeated those observations...is in a position to arrive at a judgment of his [sic] own upon it” (Freud, 1938/1949, p. 9). It is clear therefore that no matter his level of intellectual humility, Freud very much considers himself to be carrying out scientific work and theorization.

But (and to return to the point of Freud’s Cartesian tendencies) these considerations do more than just show Freud’s humility or his hubris, whichever it is that predominates his thinking; it also displays a more important consideration for our use here: the dualism that he presupposes within his theoretical formulations. As a result of this philosophical presupposition, different categories (the body and the psyche) become implicitly constructed and one (the body) actually begins to take on more importance within the theoretical framework. Freud’s words illustrate something very telling about his methodological approach towards understanding the human person. Namely, he

points out that the prevailing arbiter with respect to formulating theories on human behavior is the truth of biological science.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud spends an entire book's worth of energy theorizing about his new, two-level conception of the human psyche only to essentially claim in the end something to the effect of: but I am not sure and only biology can and will prove whether or not what I have written here is correct. This shows just how reliant on the observations and techniques of physical science (in this case biology) Freud is when formulating psychological theories. But his words do more than show this reliance; they also further reveal the aforementioned dualistic tendencies that may be called into question. For example, why should one assume such a clean methodological distinction between biology and environment? Freud constantly indicates society and culture as key fixtures that are interactively at play with the human psyche but at the same time he speaks of those fixtures as being distinct from the individual. This distinction appears to occur both on the level of categorization as well as the level of prioritization. In other words, Freud not only assumes a clean, ontological distinction between self and culture but he also assumes that the only self that counts (or at least the one that counts most) is that of the instinctual (or biological).

In this vein, Freud, whose psychoanalytic theories were largely influenced by the groundbreaking work of Charles Darwin (Sulloway, 1979), appears to violate a basic Darwinian tenet by analyzing features of a species in a way that ultimately minimizes the role of environment on the whole organism<sup>25</sup>. That is, Freud implements evolutionary thinking only insofar as it plays a role in the biology (and unconscious) of the human

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<sup>25</sup> I will try to show later in the chapter that this same mistake has also been made by scholars in the arena of ethology, sociobiology, and evolutionary psychology in the years since Freud.

being. The conscious mind, which is negotiated by and through the already distinct force of society and culture, seems to implicitly be excluded from Freud's firm conceptions of behavioral development, viewing it instead as peripheral. What then does he explicitly put forth regarding the conscious and/or sociocultural mind? Referring to both the pleasure principle (i.e., eros or the life-instinct) and the death-instinct (thanatos), Freud suggests that social and cultural factors are in fact separate from the activity of the human organism. He writes, "External stimuli...are regarded as dangers by both kinds of instincts" (Freud, 1920, p. 83). Sociocultural factors, then, seem to be "external" such that the biological basis for the psyche is left to negotiate them and their involvement in what he goes on to refer to as the "task of living." In other words, the real mind is the unconscious mind that takes its cues from that which is biological and utterly instinct-based. The conscious, socioculturally-based mind is incidental and therefore not as real, it would seem<sup>26</sup>. Philosophically speaking, the dualistic problem therefore becomes somewhat compounded since Freud not only creates a conceptual distinction between self and culture, but also between mind and mind in that one is unconscious (and rooted in the biological reality of selfhood) and the other conscious (and rooted in the cultural reality that the psyche must negotiate).

Thus, we see that Freud's dualistic presuppositions section off things like the conscious mind, societal force, and cultural influence into a different arena that takes a back seat in the mental vehicle whose engine is powered by biology. Therefore, and as he himself asserts, any psychological theory (even his own), if it is to prove viable and true, must ultimately be corroborated by what is a priori presumed to be the superiority of

<sup>26</sup> It is easy to see how, in accepting this sort of theoretical foundation, neo-Freudians like Winnicott (1960a) went on to formulate personality concepts such as "true self" and "false self."



biological science. This conceptual framework lies beneath the book in which Freud's most glaring pronouncements on violence, aggression, war, and the human psyche are made: *Civilization and its Discontents*.

Written nearly a decade after *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930/2010b) contains perhaps the most sobering reflections ever written by Freud regarding the human condition. Elaborating upon the previously established (and now two-leveled) instinct theory, throughout this essay he remarks on the state of human individuals against the overlay of civilization. True to the core of his already inaugurated instinct-based approach, Freud devotes much of this work to the task of showing how human behavior is to be understood as being primarily driven by immutable propensities, namely those of sex (eros) and aggression (thanatos). Further developing ideas that he flirted with in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, he claims that forces present in society and culture serve as obstructive impediments that prevent people from full instinctual gratification. One of these instinct-based propensities is described as an inherent need for destructiveness. Freud (1930/2010b) declares:

In all that follows, I take up the standpoint that the tendency to aggression is an innate, independent, instinctual disposition in man, and I come back now to the statement that it constitutes the most powerful obstacle to culture...The natural instinct of aggressiveness in man, the hostility of each one against all and of all against each one, opposes this programme of civilization [sic] (p. 102).

Not only are aggression and the hostility of human beings against one another innate but also it seems to run independent and counter to the project of culture (or civilization) in Freud's view. It again becomes apparent that although he recognizes the role of the

external, he sees self and culture as ontologically distinct. To him, individuals are inhibited by culture; their biologically-based instinctual drives toward destructiveness are not allowed to manifest. In the Freudian approach, the ideals of culture and the ideals of the human operate both separately and antithetically, creating a repression of sorts.

**Implications of Freud's views.** Before we take aim at some of the concerns and deficiencies within Freud's psychological theories on violence and the human psyche, it may be helpful to take a moment to lay out some of the implications contained thereunder. The first takeaway to consider is that Freud's thinking is couched in and predominated by an emphasis on the biological aspects of being human. Though his theories on human psychology explore that which is sociocultural and non-biological (as in the conscious), the crux of where he grounds the ultimacy of behavior lies in that which is innate, instinctive, and biological. For Freud, therefore, the "reality" or "truth" of psychological theory is to be detected and confirmed through the hard science of biology.

Another takeaway to consider in Freud's analysis is that the biological aspect of human behavior is not only prioritized but that it contains two basic drives: the sexual-libidinal drive and the aggressive-destructive drive. These drives are innate and part of the biological infrastructure of what it means to be human. In this sense, the psychic world of human behavior hinges on a constant conflict between what is inherently and biologically the case (that humans are violent) and what is ideally and culturally the case (that humans ought not to be violent). With its own set of moral truths, culture, according to Freud, at most stands apart from and in contrast to the innate drive of aggression that is

simply part of human behavior. Culture therefore is not only peripheral but also in fact antithetical to the inherent violent, war-making state of human nature.

And yet another takeaway that has been established in examining Freud's approach to violence and the human psyche is that philosophically it assumes and relies on a type of dualism. From an ontological standpoint, self and culture are seen as entirely distinct. In Freud's view, the self is a behavioral entity whose manifestations are heavily dependent upon and determined by biologically-based drives while culture is posited as a somewhat detached (and almost abstract) entity with virtues and priorities that are contrasting and opposing to those of the drives. So, in this view, self and culture are distinct, not just conceptually but ontologically. The implications of Freud's approach result in two main dualisms: one between his notion of the conscious mind and the biological body and another between the psychological self and the culture.

**Philosophical problems with Freud's approach.** Having established the implications of Freud's theorization of violence and the human psyche, we are now in a position to examine some concerns and problems that come along with them. Thus, in this section I will spend some time on each of the above delineated implications.

First, we have good reason to call into question Freud's overemphasis on biology. What justifiable reasons, scientifically, philosophically, or otherwise, might there be to begin an inquiry into psychology by partitioning the human being into different categories (one of which in this case being biological)? Moreover, and along the same line of questioning, why, after having made that move, would one of those categories assume dominance over another? In short, we may ask why Freud found it necessary to divide the person into a biological self and a conscious self only to overemphasize the

former as paramount and the latter as conflicted, confused, and even illusory. Freudian scholars and classical psychoanalysts who hold his theories as sacrosanct are doing so more out of allegiance and presupposition than out of any sort of ethical, rational, or philosophical case. In other words, those who argue for a heavy reliance on something like a “biological drive” are simply using the Freudian assumptions that they begin with in order to confirm the Freudian criteria with which they operate. The outcome is a bit of a circular mode of logic. This sort of circularity will be highlighted in the following section exploring the work of Konrad Lorenz. For now, I will just say that Freud makes the same logical errors that Lorenz will soon be critiqued for making.

To be fair, the case I have built towards thus far that has culminated in my description of an “overemphasis” on biology on the part of Freud needs clarification. Freud’s instinct-based models favor the side of biology as distinct from the side of conscious psychology, but they are not identical to the theories of those before him who similarly argued in the realm of instinct. Freud did not determine instincts as being exclusively biological but more so primarily biological. In other words, despite his emphasis on its force, he recognizes that there is more to human behavior than mere instinct. As Erich Fromm (1973) points out, “Freud’s ‘instinctivism’ was very different from traditional instinctivism” (p. 81). Fromm outlines that Freud took seriously the psychological nature of behavior and that, unlike those who came before him, he did not perceive biological instinct to be the only thing worth consideration.

Nevertheless, Freud can still be described as an instinctivist who views aggression as something contained within the drives that are biologically inherited by human beings. Fromm’s clarifications only go so far as to remind us that Freud was not careless enough

to leave culture and environment unaccounted for altogether in his theoretical work. They do not, however, usher in an emphasis on culture that requires us to consider it as something that can actually change the inherent nature of the drives. So even in heeding Fromm's points we see that although Freud may have had a more sophisticated approach than traditional instinctivists, he still ends up giving the final weight to the biological-instinctual drives that undergird one's conscious, situational, contextual, or cultural life. Fromm (1970) himself has elsewhere written:

Freud saw man [sic] as a closed system...Freud's man is the physiologically driven and motivated homme machine. But, secondarily, man is also a social being, because he needs other people for the satisfaction of his libidinous drives as well as those of self-preservation...Man is primarily unrelated to others, and is only secondarily forced...into relationships with others (p. 45).

So in Fromm's estimation, sociality (or culture) only appears on Freud's radar as a gateway for appeasement of what is basic to the "physiologically driven" human being, who is, at its core, a "closed system." Culture may appear in theoretical terms but it has no bearing on the actual "nature" of what makes humans behave as they do. But there is no philosophical reason, even in observance of Darwinian evolutionary theory, to assume that the biological and the sociocultural-psychological maintain different ontological bases. In this vein, biological evolution is inadequate as compared to sociobiological evolution. Freud seems to neglect this in his overemphasis on biology and instinct as standing apart from the realms of sociality, conscious mentality, and culture.

Related to this biological overemphasis is the next area in which we have good reason to question Freud's views on aggression, violence, and the human psyche. After

having postulated the split between biological drives and all else, he goes on to simply make assertions about what the biological sphere contains. He assumes upfront that these biological-instinctual drives are not only there to begin with, but that they are fixed and determinative. Freud, however, offers no argumentation to support his perspective. He simply announces that the self is fundamentally (and primarily) biological and that this biological state of existence must have certain characteristics that perpetuate it.

As mentioned before, Freud's Darwinian leanings come to the fore here as he appears to allow his particular evolutionary presuppositions<sup>27</sup> to get in the way of a more careful way of conceptualizing human behavior. This would seem to explain why the two drives he submits are sexual and aggressive in nature. While the latter of these drives would conceivably play a role in the survival of an organism we must, at the same time, note that evolutionary theory is not only about survival. With that said, it is important to point out here that the term "survival of the fittest," which I am indirectly channeling, is not in its first use Charles Darwin's term. The phrase was coined by the philosopher, economist, and biologist Herbert Spencer (1864/1872) who, in his book *Principles of Biology*, wrote:

This survival of the fittest, which I have here sought to express in mechanical terms, is that which Mr. Darwin has called 'natural selection, or the preservation of favoured [sic] races in the struggles for life.' That there is going on a process of

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<sup>27</sup> This is meant to be taken in context only as a critique of Freud's particular use of, or reliance on, evolutionary principles. The reader should not mistake my critical attitude here for a rejection of Darwinian theory on the whole. On the contrary, my views are quite aligned and compatible with contemporary evolutionary theory. My critique, therefore, is not meant to sound unsympathetic to evolutionary thought but rather to Freud's implicit misuse of it in his refusal to take into account the whole person in favor of merely biological concepts.

this kind throughout the organic world, Mr. Darwin's great work...has shown to the satisfaction of nearly all naturalists (p. 444).

Although Spencer inaugurates the use of the term "survival of the fittest," he does so out of respect for and in appeal to Darwin's already established key principle of natural selection. In later editions of his famous and groundbreaking *On the Origin of Species*, Darwin seemed to adopt and assimilate Spencer's term to his own understanding of evolutionary adaptation. Despite this apparent approval on the part of Darwin himself, contemporary biologists tend to avoid the Spencerian term for reasons of scope. The term "survival of the fittest" limits the scope of evolutionary biology with the connotation that the perpetuation of species has only to do with their ability to survive. Though important to the process, survival is only a part of the equation and the practicality of reproduction is also critically important. Species, therefore, do not only need to survive; they also need to procreate.

Freud's drive theory is tightly connected with these Darwinian (and Spencerian) principles. The engine behind Darwin's natural selection is one that necessitates reproductive activity and sustaining activity. In certain circumstances, therefore, it would make sense to arrive at a theory of organismic behavior embracing these key forces. In Freud's case, reproduction and sustainability are assimilated into a psychological theory of sexuality and aggression. The former is the life drive, ensuring procreation while the latter is the aggressive drive, ensuring something like protection from a harmful world. In the third chapter of *On the Origin of Species* titled "Struggle for Existence," Darwin (1859) puts it very clearly, "A struggle for existence inevitably follows from the high rate at which all organic beings tend to increase. Every being...must suffer destruction during

some period of its life” (p. 63). Darwin’s coupling of the concepts of procreation and destruction are almost eerily similar, and apparently antecedent, to Freud’s later articulation of sex and aggression as being rooted in the human organism’s biological makeup and therefore in its everyday psyche.

But Darwinian theory, rightly understood, must have at least something to do with environmental factors. Throughout his work, Darwin himself alludes to examples of plants and animals whose physical characteristics seem to be directly related to environmental conditions<sup>28</sup>. At one point he even alludes to the “wonderful fact” that all organisms are “related to each other” (Darwin, 1859, p. 117). This environmentally-based interrelation may well be paralleled with the concept of something like culture. However, thinkers who are contemporary and subsequent to Darwin, like Freud, have tended to overlook sociocultural phenomena in relation to the human psyche in favor of focusing on the examination of biological-instinctual features. In the end, it is this sort of philosophical maneuver and presuppositional stance that leads Freud to the following open and shut observation: “Among these instinctual wishes are those of incest, cannibalism and lust for killing” (Freud, 2010a, p. 9). From here, he does indeed go on to discuss culture, but only as something that suppresses these instinctive human urges.

Using the term “civilization” here to refer to cultural force, Freud (1927/2010a) writes:

There are countless civilized people who would shrink from murder or incest but who do not deny themselves the satisfaction of their avarice, their aggressive urges or their sexual lusts, and who do not hesitate to injure other people by lies,

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<sup>28</sup> Perhaps the most famous instance of this is in his pointing out in 1845 that finches of the Galapagos Islands had different beak structures based on different physical needs in relation to food sources.



fraud and calumny, so long as they can remain unpunished for it; and this, no doubt, has always been so through many ages of civilization (p. 11).

So although culture plays a role in the psyche for Freud, its impact is ultimately rather insignificant in that it does not really change the inherent nature of the individual's "aggressive urges." Rather, culture's only function, as something ontologically distinct from individuals, in this view is that it serves to restrict, repress, or refashion these basic, instinctive urges. Freud paints a picture of human beings whose "true colors" of destructiveness will come shining through regardless of the minuscule (and separate) impact of culture. So, as an environmental reality, culture is a negligible factor in Freud's particular Darwinian model of the human psyche. For whatever reason, he chooses not only to elevate the role of biology but also to make assertions about that "biological-instinctual self" that is in the end essentially impervious to and distinct from the influence of culture.

We can now take aim at one final (and again related) problematic aspect of Freud's theories on violence and the human psyche; namely, that of the dualism that runs deeply throughout his approach. As stated already, the implications of Freud's approach result in two main dualisms: one between his notion of the conscious mind and the biological body and another between the psychological self and the culture. Focusing here on the second type, we can see that this sort of dualism results in uninformative conclusions in psychology because "behavioral truth" is relegated to the dimension of that which is physiological, thus leaving out the essentiality of that which is social, cultural, and political.

If, as Aristotle claimed, “man [sic] is by nature a political animal” (Lord, 1984, p. 4), then psychological theories do well to take full account of this political<sup>29</sup> component. Refusing or neglecting to do so leaves this statement to read as, “man [sic] is by nature an animal.” This is the sort of oversight that leads Freud to his analysis of human behavior through predominantly animalistic, biological, and instinctual terms. His ad hoc invoking of sociocultural factors serves only to interact with his already established, biologically-based theories. The role of sociality is not for Freud, as it is for Aristotle, central to what it means to be human. Therefore, his dualistic approach towards examining violence and the human psyche leaves little room for any serious consideration of culture and its role. This leaves Freud in the precarious position of making pronouncements about human behavior over and against the separate entity of culture rather than exploring psychological phenomena as socioculturally-embedded to begin with. By beginning with and emphasizing biology, Freud splits off and eliminates that which makes human beings perhaps most unique: sociality and culture. Any attempts on his part to include sociocultural comments after the fact, are poorly timed at best and futile and ultimately inconsequential at worst. In the following chapter, I will propose a methodology that avoids this mistake.

**Lorenz and innate aggression.** Like Freud, Konrad Lorenz argues a perspective that locates violence and aggression as a biological-instinctual characteristic of human behavior. A Nobel prize-winning zoologist and ethologist, he arrives at similar conclusions as Freud, though through a different methodological approach. In contrast to

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<sup>29</sup> Aristotle’s use of the term political, in Book 1 of his *Politics*, is clearly an allusion to the whole system of a person’s social existence. The Greek word *Polis* is worthy of consideration in that it encompasses the whole of city or civic life, and thus may just as well render Aristotle’s words as stating that “human beings are social animals.” Thus, political is not meant to be read in a rigid or narrow sense here.

Freud's emphasis on the psychological dimensions of humanity in particular, Lorenz's focus is on instinctive behaviors of all species in general. Through this broad approach to understanding animal behavior on the whole, he goes on to narrow his focus in making claims about human instincts; that is, his theoretical work on the social behavior of humans marches side by side with his views on the social behavior of all animals. This thread runs central to Lorenz's quest to give rise to a new science, called ethology<sup>30</sup>, which emphasizes the biological basis of all social behavior (Vicedo, 2009). Stemming from this is Lorenz's theory on human aggression as a social instinct that can be explained through appeal to biology.

Lorenz explores human instincts in several of his works, but the most powerful analysis of violence is advanced in his renowned book *On Aggression*. As expected given the above-conveyed methodology, the goal of this book is to explain human violence and aggression in evolutionary and biological terms. Aggression, which is defined in the opening of the book as "the fighting instinct in beast and man [sic] which is directed against members of the same species," is, in Lorenz's estimation, "an instinct like any other...to ensure the survival of the individual and the species" (Lorenz, 1966, pp. ix; x). For Lorenz, as with Freud in his implicit use of Darwinian principles, survival instincts are at the core of the discussion on violence. We should, however, be curious about his use of the term "instinct" here as it sits at the heart of his entire corpus. Is instinct something that is formed alongside environment, society, or culture? As a Darwinist, Lorenz's answer to this question is clearly "yes." But rather than stop there, we must

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<sup>30</sup> This science garnered Lorenz much acclaim and recognition. In 1973 he, along with colleagues Niko Tinbergen and Karl Von Frisch, were awarded the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for the development of ethology; that is, the science of studying animal behavior through the lens of instinct.

press forward with further inquisitiveness as to where these “instincts” are grounded in his view.

In a chapter of *On Aggression* titled “The Great Parliament of Instincts,” Lorenz (1966) provides a deeper breakdown of how instincts generate and function when he explains that:

A functionally uniform behavior pattern...is always achieved by a very complicated interaction of many physiological causes, whose systemic function has been “invented” and thoroughly tested by the two constructors of evolution, mutation and selection (p. 87).

Here, we begin to notice that Lorenz is biased toward biology in his discussions on human behavior. Through his insistence that behavior patterns, such as aggression, result from interactions of “physiological causes,” we can clearly detect that, just as was observed with Freud, Lorenz boils everything down to that which is biological. The outcome of physical “mutation and selection” is what determines an organism’s (in this case the human organism) survival. In the Lorenzian view, therefore, instincts are to be understood as complicated byproducts of a concert of biological drives.

What then does Lorenz have to say about violence and aggression vis-à-vis those aspects of human life that, according to his framework, are non-biological such as society or culture? In response to such an inquiry we again notice similarities between his conclusions and those of Freud. That is, the sociocultural domain becomes secondary, peripheral, superficial, and essentially powerless in the face of biological-instinctual drives. He writes, “Undeniably, there must be superlatively strong factors which are able to overcome the commands of individual reason so completely and which are so

obviously impervious to experience and learning” (Lorenz, 1966, p. 237). Here, Lorenz firmly speaks to the instinctual propensity towards aggression that cannot be altered or lessened by anything in the way of “experience and learning.”

In fact, it is clear that he views the innate tendency towards aggression as something that is not only “impervious” to the realms of sociality, reason, culture, or anything of the sort, but also as something that is altogether separate from those dimensions. In other words, the violent and aggressive biological instinct of humanity stands apart from culture and is in no way mediated or informed, let alone mitigated, by it. He shores up this point when he writes, “Human behavior, and particularly human social behavior, far from being determined by reason and cultural tradition alone, is still subject to all the laws prevailing in all phylogenetically adapted instinctive behavior” (Lorenz, 1966, p. 237). All human behavior is subjugated by law-like antecedents contained in the organism’s genetic makeup. For Lorenz, therefore, culture appears to be incidental, uninvolved, and more or less futile as it pertains to violent behavior.

Near the end of his treatise on violence and aggression, Lorenz offers something of a moral recommendation in response to the dark picture he has painted. Having already argued strongly that violence is an innate and inevitable feature of human social behavior, he proposes what seems to be the only optimistic recourse: that aggression be discharged in a healthy, innocuous manner (Lorenz, 1966). It is difficult to fault Lorenz for this noble attempt. Since he has spent such a great deal of energy attempting to convince us that, on the basis of ethology, violence and aggression are innate instincts fueled by biological-instinctual drives, he has little choice but to search for an ethical silver lining on the backend. He refers both to the ancient Greek knowledge of catharsis

as well as psychoanalytic theories on sublimation (Lorenz, 1966) as examples of how aggression might be channeled into nondestructive avenues. As the adage goes, Lorenz must now sleep in the bed he has made by finding some way of taming the violent human being he has constructed through his scientific exercise. The question we may ask at this point, however, is this: is Lorenz's methodology philosophically tenable?

**Philosophical problems with Lorenz's approach.** As has been mentioned already, Lorenz shares many presuppositions with Freud. Perhaps the most glaring examples of this are: (a) his heavy reliance on that which is biological as the primary explanatory factor of psychological functioning; and (b) his locating violence or aggression as an innate feature of the human psyche grounded in instinct. We might say here that Lorenz says much of what Freud says regarding violence and aggression only with ethological or zoological language rather than psychoanalytic language. Rather than rehash the same challenge to these approaches, I will refer the reader back to the philosophical critiques put forth to Freud's perspectives earlier in this chapter. However, there are some observations that Lorenz makes that are somewhat more pointed than even those of Freud. Those observations deserve attention and must be philosophically examined to at least some extent.

It seems like an afterthought for Lorenz that aggression is located in the genetic and/or physiological makeup of the human organism. As we have seen, he relies on evolutionary biology to articulate this as a viable starting point. But there are in fact good reasons to question this first theoretical move by Lorenz. We can on one hand appreciate all that evolutionary theory has done to enhance our understanding of biology and the complexity of all living things while on the other hand remaining conservative with how

far we extend its implications. This conservatism should remind scientists to resist the urge of becoming indiscriminate in their use of particular ideologies, no matter how desperately a definitive explanation is desired.

It is a lack of this conservatism that Erich Fromm (1973) notices when he writes that Lorenz's position on aggression, violence, and the human psyche "...cannot be fully understood unless one is aware of his quasi-religious attitude toward Darwinism" (p. 30). Prolific a scientist as he may be, Lorenz presumptively tips the scale in favor of what he considers to be the causal forces of evolutionary biology in order to make firm explanatory pronouncements about human behavior. Fromm (1973) goes on to point out that although their conclusions are very similar, the key difference between Freud and Lorenz is that the latter's "social and moral Darwinism...tends to obscure the true understanding of the biological, psychological, and social factors responsible for human aggression" (p. 32). In other words, we might interpret Fromm's critique to say that Lorenz is blinded to certain levels of sociocultural analysis because the veil of Darwinism that he looks through is too dense and dogmatic. And so we see that Lorenz just like Freud, neglects the involvement of culture in the developmental sphere of an organism's—in this case the human organism's—life. Though he discusses environmental and/or sociocultural factors, he only does so insofar as they fit into his prearranged Darwinian framework. In the end, Lorenz seems to think that they (cultural factors) are incidental byproducts of human behavior that claim little to no weight in the actual development of something like an instinct. Fromm helps us understand Lorenz as a Darwinian who is far from conservative and a bit too heavy-handed with his evolutionary-biological presuppositions.

Lorenz's presuppositions also become problematic when they are examined through what may be considered more of a logical lens. Here, Fromm's work is again helpful. Given that he is a Darwinian carrying out ethology, one can hardly be surprised by Lorenz's constant appeal to evolutionary theory. What is surprising, however, is the poor logic with which he invokes such principles. Fromm (1973) writes of Lorenz's tactics in attempting to prove that human aggression is innate: "The logic of Lorenz's assumption is that man [sic] is aggressive because he was aggressive; and he was aggressive because he is aggressive" (p. 18). With this critique, we arrive front and center at a demonstration of the circularity with which Lorenz thinks. His logic commits the error of *petitio principii*<sup>31</sup> that has been taboo in philosophy since the time of Aristotle. As Fromm rightly notices, Lorenz's Darwinian presuppositions set him on a course where he cannot help but beg the question.

To drive home this point, we can engage in a hypothetical interlocution with Lorenz: from where do current animals (including the human animal) receive their behaviors? "From the past," answers Lorenz. And how do we know that? "Because of the present," answers Lorenz. As we are beginning to detect, beginning merely with Darwinian assumptions<sup>32</sup> only serves to prove those very assumptions rather than to glean any rich or elegant theory of human behavior. The most vital question is, for Lorenz, simply begged and pushed aside so that he may continue on course with his project. In the end, this circularity allows us to take a bird's eye view of his conclusions on violence,

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<sup>31</sup> Or "begging the question," a form of circular logic. This occurs when a person makes a proposition that requires proof by assuming the very proof that it requires.

<sup>32</sup> I hope that I have made it clear already that I am by no means an anti-evolutionist (hence my use of the term *merely* in this sentence). If I have failed to make that clarification firmly enough, I wish to do so now. The critiques being advanced here are not meant to be taken as rejections of the very stable and fruitful science of evolutionary biology. Rather, they are meant to question *certain uses or applications* of it, such as those of Freud and Lorenz and others we will encounter in the remainder of this chapter.



aggression, and the human psyche and see them as little more than diagnoses that are inevitable in a world already containing violence. In other words, wherever and whenever violence occurs among human beings, Lorenz claims that it must be due to the biological makeup of how our ancestors were. At the same time, any future violence will be a product of the biological makeup of where and how we are now. The circular logic that Lorenz employs may seem harmless enough when it remains theoretical; however, when conceived of in practical terms, we notice that the circularity takes on a sobering real-world implication. The implication is this: if we notice violence and war around us, it is because it has always been in the world...and it always will be there.

Despite these logical missteps, Lorenz is no fool. He realizes on some level that this dire implication remains at the end of his ethological treatment of the problem of human aggression. It is no wonder that, as we have seen with his allusion to Greek-conceived catharsis and psychoanalytic sublimation, he calls for a healthy displacement of this innate aggression. Please recall here the sport example that I provided in the introduction about viewing behavior in terms of static, fixed inevitability. Why is Michael Jordan an unstoppable force on the basketball court? Precisely because of what he is: a stellar basketball player. Just as the Jordan analogy shows us that a fixed force cannot be stopped but only contained because it is, Lorenz too shows us that human aggression simply is. And since what is can neither be changed nor stopped, he proposes a way of channeling that which is. The problem is that this strikes us as a bit of an unrealistic pipe dream on the part of Lorenz. He attempts to sugarcoat an already sour piece of analysis by asserting that his brand of evolution contains a moral compass.

Amidst the final paragraphs of *On Aggression*, Lorenz (1966) writes with an apparent, though abrupt, glimmer of hope:

The great constructors of evolution will solve the problems of political strife and warfare, but they will not do so by entirely eliminating aggression and its communal form of militant enthusiasm...Invariably, the problem is solved by the evolution of a new inhibitory mechanism adapted to dealing with the new situation and obviating the particular detrimental effects of the drive without otherwise interfering with its functions (p. 298).

Who or what these “great constructors” are remains unpronounced by Lorenz; at most we may chalk his thought up as being agnostic in terms of what the “force behind the force” of evolution is. In the absence of such an identification, however, Lorenz’s words should be read as advancing a specific assurance (if one can call it that): aggression and violence will never go away, they will just become shrouded by new biological mechanisms that will hopefully diminish their noticeable or destructive incidence. He leaves the reader with this vision and with a takeaway like this: the only hope we have is to sit and wait for biological evolution to give rise to new physiological traits that can somehow suppress our innate and everlasting aggression; until then we are doomed to war. We are again haunted with the implication that violence and war cannot be stopped but only contained.

**Wilson’s sociobiology.** We do well here to ask how other members of the physical science community have reacted to Lorenz’s (and Freud’s) thought. For this, award-winning biologist E. O. Wilson is perhaps the preeminent thinker whose work we can turn to. Known as the father of sociobiology, Wilson’s work resembles that of Lorenz and Freud in that it attempts to reconcile the realms of biology and social behavior.

Where he differs from the others, however, is in his tendency to take more seriously the interplay of environment. Lorenz is not oblivious to environment; he simply views its function in a limited, rather than interactional, scope. He has written:

Every species of animal, plant, or fungus...is adapted to its environment, and to this environment belong not only the inorganic parts of a certain habitat but also all the other living inhabitants. Thus all living beings of a habitat are adapted to each other (Lorenz, 1973a, p. 15).

It is apparent that Lorenz takes environment into account but only to the extent that it acts as a canvas for the paint that is biological life. Wilson, to continue with the analogy, adopts a different approach by arguing that the canvas actually plays a role in how the paint looks and presents. Environment has something to do with which biological predispositions are or are not awakened, for lack of a better term. Here is how Wilson (1978) describes this in his own terms:

Aggression does not resemble a fluid that continuously builds pressure...nor is it like a set of active ingredients poured into an empty vessel. It is more accurately compared to a preexisting mix of chemicals ready to be transformed by specific catalysts that are added, heated, and stirred at some time later...Suppose we could enumerate all of the possible kinds of actions in all species...which could be labeled A through W. Human beings do not and cannot manifest every behavior; perhaps all of the societies in the world taken together employ A through P (p. 106).

So we notice a striking difference in Wilson's way of conceptualizing biology through a social lens as compared to Lorenz's way. Wilson is less tolerant than Lorenz, or Freud for

that matter, of words like inevitable or imminent because they leave little room for the environmental interaction needed to evoke certain biological-genetic constants.

Fortunately, Wilson quickly likens this environmental concept with a concept that is useful for our consideration in the present project: culture. From the above passage, he almost immediately goes on to write:

Which behavior particular human beings display depends on what they experience within their own culture, but the total array of human possibilities, like the monkey array or the termite array, is inherited. It is the evolution of each pattern that sociobiologists attempt to analyze (Wilson, 1978, p. 106).

We are at last confronted with a scientific theory of human aggression that gives credence to the role of culture beyond considering it merely as incidental. Wilson's approach is sophisticated enough to where he acknowledges that culture represents at least one element of a symbiotic process that gives rise to behavior. He refuses, unlike Freud and Lorenz, to simply assert that biology is the only game in town.

**Philosophical problems with Wilson's approach.** However, Wilson's conceptual and pedagogical inclusion of culture should be received with its own share of trepidation. That is, his use of environment or culture only goes so far. In appealing to some key words used in the above quotations by Wilson, we notice that we are offered a model whereby biology still reigns supreme. Aggression is after all, according to Wilson, a "preexisting mix of chemicals" that is "inherited." It is easy to see that this view too, like the views of Freud and Lorenz, is an innateness view, only with a differing methodology. Yes, Wilson sees culture as a far more interactive piece to the puzzle of human aggression than his psychoanalytic and ethological counterparts. However,

culture, in his analysis, does not itself possess any generative potential in the scheme of human behavior. Instead, he posits it only as something that plays a regulatory role in the negotiation of biologically-based behaviors, which are the primary and prevailing forces.

For Wilson too, the biological predispositions of human beings are the only true driving force behind behaviors such as violence and aggression. In this vein, the core of his approach is in fact quite similar to that of Freud and Lorenz. Any analysis of culture that he provides, despite its being more open than previous thinkers, is ultimately secondary and ad hoc. What defensible reason is there to place higher value, either in an organism's developmental chronology or within a theoretical methodology, on biology than on environment or culture? As implicit in its name, Wilson's sociobiology does account for environmental and/or cultural factors, but it does so in an absence of any sort of answer to the aforementioned question. Rather, Wilson simply picks up with biology at square one without providing philosophical justification for his doing so.

**Contextual remarks on Freud and Lorenz.** Before presenting one final version of the innateness view, it may be useful to make some observations regarding the particular place in the history of thought that Freud and Lorenz occupy. This is important on two main levels: first, in making these observations, we may illuminate some further biases or tendencies that are not so much philosophical as they are historical and contextual; and second, it is important to note that Freud and Lorenz are, in some ways, responsible for launching a scientific paradigm that contemporary and subsequent thinkers (like Wilson) interact. Scholars do not operate within vacuums; their maneuvers, interests, research questions, and conclusions often reflect prevalent forces in the zeitgeist. Therefore, taking historical-contextual issues into account may shed a bright

light on what may otherwise go shaded and unnoticed under the guise of objective, scientific fact or independently insulated trends within academia. With this said, I will briefly highlight some such considerations with respect to Freud and Lorenz.

The first key consideration to make is that both thinkers were writing in the middle part of the twentieth century. Freud's most forceful writings on aggression and violence were published in the years nestled between the two world wars. He was not only sympathetic to war on a political level as he was in loyal support of his three sons who were enlisted in the national army, but he actually sometimes used military terms—even more frequently than his famous archeological ones—to articulate certain theories (Krull & Kulikov, 2006). As a Jew living in Austria, Freud was in a constant state of fear at the hands of Nazi Germany. He was eventually driven to escape German invasion and relocate to London in the late 1930s. Lorenz, who was also Austrian, lived in Europe during both world wars and was even, during his own time as a soldier in the middle part of the 1940s, captured as a prisoner of war. He was affiliated with the Nazi party but later expressed personal regret about that chapter of his life (Lorenz, 1973b).

We may suffice it to say this at the very least: both men were impacted by and exposed to the horrific atrocities of war. This is not to suggest that their writings should be interpreted to any extreme sense as containing an autobiographical charge but rather that the milieu in which both thinkers found themselves was one where war was a reality. We do well therefore to recognize that this reality was at least in some way (and perhaps even in a substantial way) influential in their theoretical analyses of human aggression. For these great thinkers to theorize that aggression and violence are permanent features of

the universal human condition is almost unsurprising considering that the brutality of war was such a strong feature of their own historical-contextual condition.

**Evolutionary psychology: A contemporary tool for the innateness view.** The works of Freud and Lorenz were groundbreaking in that they analyzed human aggression through the lenses of two cutting edge sciences that they each had more or less created respectively. Freud (as the father of psychoanalysis) and Lorenz (as a co-pioneer of ethology) arrived at their conclusions through implementation of what they considered to be the freshest scientific tools available to them. Wilson picked up where they left off by applying his own scientific paradigm of sociobiology. In our present context, many are still arguing towards similar conclusions as Freud, Lorenz, and Wilson, though through the use of today's cutting edge science. Nowhere is this more evident than in the somewhat recent popularization of evolutionary psychology. Operating from within this field, philosopher and psychologist David Livingstone Smith has arguably been the most prominent advocate of what has been referred to thus far as innateness view. Through the use of evolutionary psychology, he (like his psychoanalytic, ethological, and sociobiological predecessors) argues that aggression, violence, and war stand as innate features of the human condition.

The very title of the book that Smith has written exploring psychology and war leaves the reader without ambiguity regarding his perspective. In *The Most Dangerous Animal: Human Nature and the Origins of War* (2007), Smith explores the state of human beings in relation to their psychological propensities towards violence in the form of war. As the title strongly conveys, he argues that the basis for war rests in the very nature of human beings, who are accordingly referred to as the most dangerous animals.

Throughout the opening pages, Smith takes the reader on a marvelously written journey that paints an understandably somber picture of the harsh realities of war as it has occurred in our global context. Before long, his methodological foundations begin to appear as he gradually sets the stage for his thesis to be argued in terms of evolutionary psychology: that war is an inherent part of human nature. He wastes very little time in putting forth a theory of human behavior that is not unlike other proponents of the innateness view. Smith (2007) writes:

Like all living things, Homo sapiens possess an ancient heritage; over the course of many millions of years, the forces of evolution have honed and sculpted our minds and bodies, and this patrimony has an enormous impact on how we live our lives today...our evolutionary legacy...moves us to kill our fellow human beings (p. 8).

This signifies a thread that carries throughout Smith's book. His survey of violence and war, therefore, is inextricably connected with his commitments to understanding psychology through the modalities of biological evolution.

This starting point steers Smith's theoretical movements. He soon proceeds to refer to war as "innate" and "natural" in that it is rooted in a "biologically based potential" (Smith, 2007, p. 36). For Smith, this means that war is a possibility waiting to happen rather than an inevitability. So although the potential for war is biologically inherent, its manifestation is always found in relation to environmental or circumstantial factors, what Smith (2007) calls "precipitating conditions" (p. 38). We notice then that Smith's way of conceiving of aggression is quite similar to Wilson's. Like Wilson, he employs a sort of potentiality model whereby environmental factors play a role in



bringing aggression or violence to behavioral fruition. We recall that for Wilson, violence lies dormant as a biologically and genetically established reality waiting only to be (or not be) triggered. Smith echoes this proclamation though in alternative disciplinary language. Like a sleeping lion whose unleashed wrath depends on whether or not it is disturbed or awakened by an outside force, violence, in Smith's view, makes its appearance only under certain external conditions.

It is important at this point to consider again that Smith's rationale in arriving at such a position is steeped in the methodology of evolutionary biology and psychology. He makes this quite clear when he writes: "To comprehend war, we need to understand the biological factors that molded us into what we are. Earlier writers sometimes mentioned biology in their discussions of war but usually did so mainly in ways that were vague and uninformative" (Smith, 2007, p. 62, my emphasis added in italics). We see here that his approach, not unlike Freud, Lorenz, and Wilson, places a special level of trust in the triumphant potential of biology over other modes of understanding. Several lines later, Smith (2007) carries this point even further:

Several decades of research have demonstrated beyond any reasonable doubt that evolutionary science gives us a uniquely powerful grasp on the dynamics of human behavior and experience. Evolutionary biology has made deep inroads into psychology, anthropology, and economics...And why not? We are organisms with a long and eventful evolutionary history...Notwithstanding our unique characteristics, human behavior is just as amenable to biological explanation as is the behavior of any other creature (p. 63).

In the above quotation, Smith spells out just how much confidence he has in the “uniquely powerful grasp” of biology to inform other disciplines. One almost gets the impression that he uses evolutionary biology as a filter to sift through all other modes of knowledge in order to see what remains of this filtration process. Though he does not use these words explicitly, it appears that “what is left” after such an exercise is, for Smith, what truly counts as truth regarding human behavior. Like those (S. Freud, Lorenz, and Wilson) in the tradition of which he is a part, Smith seems to think that one must refrain from forming conclusions about the human psyche until biology yields its superior pronouncements on the matter.

**Philosophical problems with Smith’s approach.** As has been implicitly suggested already, Smith is a modern day progenitor of the same conclusions on violence, war, and the human psyche that Wilson offered before him. While their respective areas of expertise and preferred terminologies may vary, their conclusions are virtually identical in that they both argue that violence rests as a core, but not necessarily inevitable, biological feature of human nature. As with Wilson’s theoretical approach, however, we have good reason to question the scaffolding of this argument. We may pose the same question to Smith as we posed to Wilson in the previous section: what defensible reason is there to place higher value, either in an organism’s developmental chronology or within a theoretical methodology, on biology than on environment or culture? Like Wilson, Smith nowhere provides a viable answer to this philosophical inquiry. Instead he follows in Wilson’s footsteps by arbitrarily beginning with biology as his starting point. Rather than engaging the “chicken or egg” nature of this conundrum,

however, he simply chooses one branch of the paradox and proceeds forth with his project.

But this type of philosophical maneuvering is unsatisfying and accomplishes little more than display the biases of the thinker involved. To continue with the above-references riddle of the “chicken or egg,” we may think of this circumstance in the following hypothetical interlocution: which came first, the chicken or the egg? Person A answers: the egg. And how do you know that? Person A then answers: because I am a grocer who sells eggs; that is how I think of things. Or contrarily, and in the same vein, we may think of it as follows: which came first, the chicken or the egg? Person B answers: the chicken. And how do you know that? Person B then answers: because I am a farmer and I deal with chickens all day long. At the risk of sounding absurd, these examples in fact illustrate an important point about philosophical methodology: one’s “way of doing things” goes a long way in influencing how they see that which they are doing. Hence, just as the grocer sees eggs as paramount and the farmer sees chickens as paramount, Smith sees evolutionary biology as paramount. Why? Because that is his “way of doing things.” To be fair, every scholar has his or her presuppositional or methodological biases. The question we need to ask, therefore, is not whether or not such biases should or should not exist but rather whether or not they are warranted. If they are not warranted and/or articulately defended, the thinker’s conclusions, just like their starting points, are often emerge as little more than baseless and arbitrary, no matter how compellingly they are proffered.

It is only fair to mention that Smith writes not only as an evolutionary psychologist but also as a philosopher. Given this, his reasoning is usually quite cogent.

Perhaps realizing that his insights will only end up taking him so far, he writes in the preface of his book: “These are “big” questions that just cannot be addressed meaningfully without engaging a certain amount of speculation...I would rather risk being wrong in a big way than timidly trying to be right in a small way” (Smith, 2007, p. xix). So it appears as though Smith recognizes that he is making some big claims in response to some “big questions” about violence, war, and the human psyche. He also acknowledges here, at the outset of his book that he could be “wrong in a big way.” Smith should be applauded for being a daring scholar who is willing to be vulnerable in order to tackle an issue of such importance. However, his hesitant disclaimer should speak to something other than his academic humility and/or character; it should also signify for the reader that he may in fact be correct in proposing that in the end, his analysis involves a substantial level of speculation.

For an example of such speculation, or what we may even describe as a bit of arbitrariness to Smith’s thinking, we may turn to a key section of his treatise in which he explores the evolutionary ancestry of human beings. In doing so, he makes perhaps the most forceful set of statements about war and human psychology contained in the entire book. Under a chapter subheading titled “Warring Primates,” Smith begins to draw connections between the violent behavior of chimpanzees and that of human beings. As he himself observes, the outplaying of this particular lineage has an enormous impact on the sorts of conclusions that are garnered regarding human violence from the perspective of evolutionary psychology. So that we may follow his specific line of reasoning in this respect, it is helpful to quote Smith (2007) at somewhat significant length:

Chimpanzees and bonobos diverged from a common ancestor about two and a half million years ago. A lot hangs on whether the trunk from which the two branches grew was chimpanzee-like or bonobo-like. The ancestor shared by bonobos and chimpanzees had an ancestor at the root of our own lineage. So, if the prehistoric ape that gave rise to the human and chimpanzee-bonobo lines was more like the sensual, affable bonobo than the violent, patriarchal chimpanzee, this might indicate that the heart of human nature is more gentle than truculent. The weight of evidence does not support this uplifting notion of the human pedigree. First, it is inconsistent with a great deal of what we can easily observe about our own behavior...we resemble chimpanzees far more closely than we do bonobos. Second, although we are genetically equally related to both species, there is a wealth of scientific evidence supporting the chimpanzee model of human ancestry...bonobos are something of a novelty, a side road off the main highway of chimpanzee evolution (p. 79).

To reiterate, Smith understands the weight of what he is suggesting here; indeed, as he puts it, “a lot hangs on” this particular thread of evolutionary history. In fact, so much hangs on this that it would not be a stretch to say that the book’s central thesis rides on whether or not this line of thought holds. Unfortunately, it appears that these pivotal assertions on Smith’s part are speculative and arbitrary, if not downright logically suspect.

Let us first turn to the speculative and arbitrary nature of Smith’s reasoning here. He appears to abandon (or perhaps never even take up) the dynamic quality of evolution by submitting for consideration a rather static and cleanly partitioned view of the

different apes that he discusses. In other words, he fails to take account for the large amounts of variability that may have arisen (and likely did arise) between the separate ancestors mentioned. Smith (2007) places special emphasis on the “prehistoric ape that gave rise to the human and chimpanzee-bonobo lines” (p. 79) as though having knowledge of its temperament and demeanor, with regards to violence, would deliver an antecedent indication of the warlikeness of its subsequent descendants.

But even if this antecedent ape were in fact known to be violent or warlike (which, despite Smith’s assertion, it is not), there is no reason at all to assume that all subsequent life forms would retain this trait. That is, this “prehistoric ape” could have been immensely violent and still have given rise to subsequent apes or ape-like beings who evolved to not be immensely violent. Darwinian natural selection is a dynamic, complex, and often unpredictable process. With this said, it is peculiar that Smith gives himself license to make fixed, simple, and predictable pronouncements about how natural selection actually transpired in the case of this crucial human-chimpanzee-bonobo lineage. Despite his insistence that the “weight of evidence” supports his version of evolutionary history, it is in fact his static, uniformed, and oversimplified mode of evolutionary hindsight that sways him to interpret in a way that is entirely speculative. Violent, warlike animals can evolve into nonviolent, peaceful ones and vice versa. The tremendous amount of potential for complex adaptation, over the course of millions of years of natural selection, makes it speculative and arbitrary at best for anyone—including an expert like Smith—to presume to know which way this contingent evolution unfolded.

Having shown the speculative and arbitrary quality of Smith’s evolutionary reasoning, we can now briefly turn to a logical critique of his assertions. In the quotation

above, Smith claims that positing a peaceful, bonobo-like ancestor to modern day humans is an “uplifting notion” that needs to be rejected for two reasons: firstly, because the state of human affairs today suggests that our ancestors were warlike (chimpanzee-like) rather than peaceful (bonobo-like); and secondly, because the bonobo itself is something of a “novelty.”

Regarding this first consideration, Smith essentially commits the same logical error of circularity that we earlier saw Fromm critique Lorenz for. Namely, he argues that modern day humans must have descended from violent ancestors because they are in fact violent today. To support this rationale, Smith then needs to argue in a circular fashion that the ancestor(s) of modern day humans must have been violent because we see that humans today are violent. As we observed with Lorenz’s implementation of this sort of logic, what arises is nothing more than a confirmation of the very biases put in place to begin with. At best, this circular mode of reasoning ensures that one detects what they set out to detect rather than derive some objective fact about the analysis at hand.

Regarding the second consideration (that the bonobo is a novelty within the evolutionary lineage being explored), Smith’s desire to substantiate his thesis appears to override his ability to notice his own logical self-contradiction. If, as he suggests, the more peaceful bonobo is a novelty that likely has a violent, chimpanzee-like ancestor then why could the same novelty not be applied to modern humans? Smith seems quick to assert the likelihood that bonobos evolved into a “side road off the main highway of chimpanzee evolution” but refuses to assign the same likelihood to modern day humans, despite his aforementioned insistence that they too possess chimpanzee ancestry. This logical inconsistency exposes Smith as a thinker who employs evolutionary psychology

only in ways that benefit his thesis. We see here that a glaring contradiction rises out of the remarks that he places within close proximity of each other, but his preconceived notions prevent him from noticing it. What makes this especially troubling is that the thrust of his entire book rests on the evolutionary psychology that he invokes within these remarks. So while Smith's argues that war is an innate part of the human psyche, we discover in the end that there are solid philosophical reasons to reject this thesis.

### **The Shortcomings of Innateness Views**

This chapter has so far contained an in-depth discussion of several eminent innateness views. Though through their own unique way, we saw that Freud, Lorenz, Wilson, and Smith each arrive at the same conclusion: that aggression, violence, and war are inherent features of the psyche rooted in the biological makeup of human beings. I provided an extensive overview of each thinker's particular way of arriving at this conclusion. Moreover, I have offered a comprehensive philosophical critique of each thinker's methodology. In so doing, I have systematically progressed toward a rejection of the innateness views and their implications. I hope to have shown thus far that each of the respective approaches contains its own unique theoretical flaws and drawbacks, though we have seen that at times there is overlap among the critiques as well. With this said, I will now round out my discussion on the innateness views by presenting a more streamlined set of shortcomings that any innateness view is likely to have. By the end of this discussion, I hope that I will have made a strong cumulative case for rejecting innateness views as philosophically untenable.

**Reductionism.** As has already been alluded to several times throughout this chapter, the innateness view posits that violence and war are inherent psychological



fixtures of human nature. In order to make such a claim, however, one must first be equipped with certain philosophical presuppositions about the very notion of causality. This is where the concept of reductionism comes into play. Simply put, reductionism is a philosophical or theoretical position that states that phenomena can be explained by understanding its constituent, or more fundamental, phenomena. In other words, a whole may be understood by its being broken down into parts. For example, a reductionistic description of a cookie would claim that the cookie is just a conglomeration of flour, butter, eggs, sugar, etc. The whole, or gestalt, of the cookie would be, in this sense, nothing but a collection of certain basic ingredients. The key words here are “nothing but” for reductionism presumes to have complete explanatory power over a phenomenon’s occurrence. So, the phenomenon of a cookie is nothing but its ingredients, the phenomenon of a book is nothing but its many pages, the phenomenon of a water molecule is nothing but one hydrogen and two oxygen atoms, and so on. Scottish physicist Donald MacKay (1974) has referred to this as “nothing buttery” (p. 21).

It is easy to see how the innateness view of violence, war, and psychology is deeply reductionistic. Proponents of the view argue that violence is nothing but a phenomenon or product of the biological parts that comprise human nature and instinct. From Freud and Lorenz to Wilson and Smith, reductionism is a detectable philosophical theme. Freud and Lorenz argue for the “hydraulic model” which submits that aggression and violence are innate, instinctual constants that seek to be released. The reductionism in this rests in the contention that violence can be boiled down to basic drives or forces that are inherent to human beings. Wilson and Smith, on the other hand, argue for more of an interactionist model that stipulates that biological instincts tend only to manifest

behaviorally when they are provoked in the environment. Reductionism exists here as well in that any instance of violence could be accounted for by appealing to its basic parts which, in this case, go on to involve both biology and environment. Reductionism only takes into account upward rather than downward causation. This means that violence and war would never be examined in terms other than what exists at bottom (e.g., genes, instincts, stimuli, etc.). But so long as it is even possible that phenomena other than the bottom level sorts exist and contain causal potential in the world, the reductionism implicit in the innateness view renders it unworthy of acceptance as a viable way of understanding the psychology of violence and war.

There is one final problematic feature of reductionism with respect to the innateness view. If in fact violence and war can be thought of as “nothing but” parts that make up the behavior then the moral and ethical dimensions of violence become utterly absent. Regardless of the circumstances, an act of violence cannot be considered morally right or morally wrong because we are inclined to think that something like “choice” is involved in our ethical decision-making. If all human behaviors, including the violent or warlike ones, are reducible to constituent elements, an infinite regress of this pattern leads us to a place of complete moral relativity. On the other hand, if one wishes to argue that violence and/or war represent moral and ethical issues then the reductionistic quality of the innateness view presents a considerable problem.

**Determinism.** Related to reductionism is another philosophical issue concerning causality known as determinism. The deterministic approach would claim that any behavior, such as violence or war, is merely the product of an antecedent cause or string of causes. Though there are different varieties of determinism, our inquiry into the

psychology of war necessitates that we focus on the variety sometimes referred to as human determinism. Human determinism theorizes that life essentially consists of causes and effects (Honderich, 2005), or what we might also think of as stimuli and responses. This is a behavioristic account of human activity that would contend that no subjective states of consciousness exist. Rather, on determinism, our actions are always determined by prior causes that propel us to act without exercising anything that would resemble true volition. So as with reductionism, a major ethical issue comes to the fore in the deterministic approach because human beings cannot ultimately be said to be genuinely responsible for their actions, good or bad. Ethics, in this sense, is illusory at worst or a made-up word used to describe stimulated behavior at best<sup>33</sup>. If ethics is illusory, then the moral implications of violence and war are also illusory.

The innateness view's implicit determinism prevents it from taking any moral stance on the violence it examines. So although Freud, Lorenz, Wilson, and Smith differ in small methodological ways, their emphases on biologically-based instincts render their approaches as deterministic since the phenomenon of war is always conceptualized in light of its antecedent causes. For this reason, neither of these thinkers is in a philosophical position to ethically denounce the human behaviors that they analyze since their deterministic methodologies strip them of such value judgments. Violence and war, therefore, are in the end seen only as products of prior events that bring about and actuate their existence. The psychology of war, in this sense, is an amoral consequence of

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<sup>33</sup> For a compelling and well-argued case against reductionism and determinism that takes seriously philosophical ethics and neuroscience, see *Did My Neurons Make Me Do It? Philosophical and Neurobiological Perspectives on Moral Responsibility and Free Will* by Nancey Murphy and Warren Brown (2007).

something like an ongoing regress of causes and effects. The determinism contained within the innateness view trivializes war.

**The limits of biology.** Finally, I wish here to explore one additional way in which the innateness view is deficient: it conceptually constrains the bounds of what it means to be human. This, of course, is a point of critique that is built upon, and in close accordance with, the above described issues of reductionism and determinism. Proponents of the innateness view venerate biology as the fullest and most robust way and means of describing the human being. Each of the four thinkers whose work has been dealt with thus far in the chapter relies heavily on their interpretation of biological science as the cornerstone of their inquiries into violence, war, and psychology. In other words, because these thinkers regard the physical science of biology as the preeminent mode of deriving truth about what it means to be human, the scope of what can be said about being human is narrowed onto the limits of biology. This is problematic because the limits produced by biological reductionism and determinism subsume and take hold of what can or cannot be said about what it means to be human. The question we may ask in light of this monopolization is this: is there more to be said about human behavior and existence than what can be said through biological science?

Even in its most sophisticated versions, the innateness view appears to neglect much in the way of human behavior. Let us take, for example, Wilson's sociobiology or Smith's evolutionary psychology. These approaches, unlike the one-dimensionality contained within the Freudian and Lorenzian emphasis on biological-instinctual drive, underscore the importance of the environment (or culture) and its interaction with biological predispositions. However, even with this methodology adopted, the image of

the human being that is displayed is one that removes certain forces from relevancy on any serious, formative level. So those forces that are social, cultural, political, or ethical, to name a few, fall by the wayside in that they ultimately have no impact on the core of what makes people who they are. Even though this approach may take into account the interactional potential of certain nonbiological spheres of human life, those spheres are not given equal weight when compared to their biological-instinctual counterparts. In fact, those nonbiological spheres are often either reductively characterized by already existent biological categories.

For evidence of this conceptual and methodological bias, we may turn to a later work of Wilson's co-authored by fellow biologist Charles Lumsden. In describing what culture is, Lumsden and Wilson (1981) write:

Gene-culture theory leads to the inference that laws governing culture qua culture must exist, but they can be synthesized from the principles governing the mind. The derivation of social pattern from biologically grounded individual cognition is not just logical; it appears to provide the only method for gaining knowledge of the organic mechanisms underlying such principles (p. 177).

This very telling passage conveys the extent that biology reigns supreme in Wilson's conception of human behavior. The usage of terms like gene-culture, laws, governing, biologically grounded, and organic mechanisms speaks volumes. It clearly reveals that Wilson's sociobiology is actually little more than an attempt at importing biological concepts into the realm of sociality and culture. So although he offers a more sophisticated approach than that of Freud or Lorenz, he still ends up reverting to a reductionism that favors biological science. Wilson discusses culture, but not as

something that can actually visit formative psychological influence on human beings. Instead, he constrains the social activity of human beings by asserting that there are “laws governing culture.” Rather than defend this point on the grounds of any strong philosophical anthropology, he simply capitulates to the biological categories that he begins with. This results in a reductive exercise of biology that excludes any possibility that culture can actually play a significant role in forming people into who they are. For Wilson, therefore, the psychology of war, in its purest sense, essentially boils down to being “nothing but” the biology of war.

**Biological and cultural, but not dualistic.** Prior to entering into a brief survey and critique of some eminent socialization views, a point of clarification is in order. Through the above critiques, I have implicitly and explicitly hinted at the shortcomings of the innateness view insofar as it is overly reliant on that which is physical or biological. It would stand to reason, therefore, that if I were to propose an alternative philosophical approach to understanding human psychology it would be reactionary in that it would seek to diminish the role of biology. At the risk of sounding trite, this is both true and untrue at once.

While I do intend to propose a methodology that elevates the attention given to culture and reduces the emphasis placed on biological science, I will do so without adopting anything in the way of a sharp dualism. In this sense, my critique of innateness views as being overly biological and underly cultural is only a conceptual critique given the high degree of importance placed on physical science as the predominant pedagogy. I will not in fact go on to operate as though there is a clean distinction between self and culture, biology and psychology, body and mind. So I wish to be clear that my critiques

of the eminent innateness views are not put forth in anticipation of what is to be a dualistic alternative. Adding culture as an additional conceptual category beyond what exists in the biological reductionism of Freud, Lorenz, Wilson, and Smith does not imply that a dualism is imminent. Rather, a new category simply adds holistic richness to a way of talking about human behavior without necessarily adding an element that is ontologically distinct. Since these matters will be fleshed out in great detail in Chapter 2, I will simply leave it at that for now.

### **Eminent Socialization Views**

As stated earlier, the questions surrounding violence, war, and the human psyche have tended to be answered from along the spectrum of the innateness and socialization (or nature versus nurture) perspectives. The chief intent of this chapter has been to explore the contours and philosophical flaws of the most powerful innateness views. This is because, as mentioned in my introductory remarks, the innateness view has been most readily adhered to both in scholarly circles and among laypeople. “Violence is just an aspect of our human nature; warlikeness is engrained within us,” they say. And so the significant majority of my energy in this chapter has gone, and will have gone, to careful analysis and critique of this innateness position.

On the other hand, the socialization view has in fact enjoyed its fair share of allegiance as well. Those in the socialization camp argue that violence and war are behaviors made manifest by and through social conditions that evoke certain active and responses. Whereas the innateness end of the spectrum posits that warlikeness is part of the genetic and/or biological makeup of humans, the socialization view announces the other extreme in asserting that it results from what may be referred to as social stimulus.

To this end, my focus in this final section of the chapter will be to provide some descriptive snapshots of eminent socialization views while also presenting some succinct problems with such perspectives. I will try to show that socialization views, despite being perched on the other end of the nature-nurture spectrum, are equally flawed in light of somewhat similar philosophical reasons as contained in the innateness views. I hope that by the end of this brief exploration, it will have become increasingly clear that we are desperately in need of a new way of conceiving of the psychology of violence and war. This will set the stage for the following chapter, where my aim will be to propose this alternative way.

**Frustration and aggression.** To begin our overview of socialization views, it seems fitting to begin with the work of John Dollard. Together with Neal Miller, Leonard Doob, O. H. Mowrer, and Robert Sears, Dollard (1939) published a book titled *Frustration and Aggression* where it was suggested that aggression is caused by the blockage or frustration of the ability of a person to attain a goal. In essence, Dollard et al. submit that frustration actually causes aggression. Moreover, in the event that the original source of said frustration is unable to be challenged and/or resisted, the aggression ends up discharging itself onto an innocent, often uninvolved, target or scapegoat<sup>34</sup>. So, it can be seen that in Dollard et al.'s approach, aggression is a behavior that is socially evoked

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<sup>34</sup> Anthropologist and literary critic René Girard's theories on mimetic violence and scapegoating may be of interest to some readers. Good places to begin are his (1972) book *Violence and the Sacred* and also his (2008) *Evolution and Conversion*. Because Girard's thought has garnered so much interdisciplinary scholarship and secondary source attention, I will not be investigating his work in the present dissertation. It should suffice to say that if I had the space to devote to a thorough analysis of his thought, we would find that his theories still fail to answer one of the implicit questions that drives this dissertation: What is it that shapes human beings into agents *capable* of war both through action and attitude? Girard's theories, though brilliant, do not focus on the potentiation of violence so much as they do on the anthropological necessity of violence. Given then that his tack is rather unrelated to the questions standing behind this dissertation, I have chosen to leave his work unexamined so as to avoid convoluting the matter.



in that its root cause is interpersonal rather than biological or instinctual. This is where it clearly stands apart from the innateness view.

This view, coined as the *frustration-aggression hypothesis*, presents similar philosophical problems as its innateness counterparts. The most striking example of this lies in its reductionistic quality. The language of causality contained within the hypothesis conveys much in the way of its presuppositions about human behavior. Social scientists like Dollard, operating in the twentieth century, did much to catapult the psychological theory into the realm of that which could be considered science. This resulted in a positivist psychology whereby human behavior is understood in terms of causation. So, while aggression, according to Dollard, is not to be understood as an innate inevitability, it nevertheless reduces the behavior down to stemming from its antecedent causes. Deeply informed by the behaviorism that both preceded and ran alongside it in the history of western psychological thought, the *frustration-aggression hypothesis* fails to take into account anything like consciousness, mentalization, moral imagination, or character formation among other things. Its reductionistic bent presumes to explain aggression and/or violence in terms of social stimulus, or cause.

Another concern worth mentioning with Dollard et al.'s view is that, ironically, it too may be seen as a refashioned innateness view. Since the hypothesis asserts that aggression always results from unresolved frustration, it may be implied that a form of inherent determinism begins to enter the picture. Yes, Dollard et al. use social language to describe the behavior of aggression but in the end they, perhaps inadvertently, posit a new view of innate human nature. This innate nature is one whereby frustration is always

discharged as aggression and while it may not be theorized in biological terms, it still exhibits the same philosophical determinism as its innateness counterparts.

**Berkowitz on aggression.** Renowned social psychologist Lenard Berkowitz has picked up where Dollard et al. left off and thickened the understanding of the *frustration-aggression hypothesis*. Simultaneously an adherent to and critic of Dollard's paradigm, Berkowitz seeks to make visible some of the blind spots of this socialization view. In his book *Aggression: A Social Psychological Analysis*, he observes that frustration alone cannot be the only social factor that brings about aggression or violent behavior. In this vein, Berkowitz (1962) explains:

Threats are more likely to produce overt hostility than are deprivations...Dollard and his collaborators had not faced the important theoretical problem of fear.

Fear-producing situations are frustrations...but...in such circumstances the individual anticipates either physical or psychological damage to himself [sic]...Fear predominates over anger (p. 50).

It is clear that Berkowitz remains faithful to the general framework set forth by the *frustration-aggression hypothesis*. However, he wants to go beyond the arena of frustration and explore how different emotional inputs (such as fear) regulate aggressive outputs. Berkowitz's task, therefore, is to broaden the horizon of Dollard's work while remaining true to its theoretical methodology.

But this methodological faithfulness results in the same philosophical problems that we have observed above with Dollard's approach (i.e., reductionism, determinism, and positivism with respect to human behavior). The same problem persists in Berkowitz's work, except it happens to be dressed in different clothes. Though he

diversifies the breadth of the social stimulus model advanced by Dollard et al., he fails to provide anything new in the way of methodology. In the end, his approach assumes the same sort of causality behind human behavior. We are left, therefore, asking similar questions such as: what about agency and subjective decision making? Is aggression and/or violence an inevitable response given certain social stimuli? Is human behavior shaped through character formation or is it merely conceived of as an “output” connected to social input? These questions highlight the philosophical concerns that come with the territory of the socialization view of both Dollard and Berkowitz.

**Monkey see, monkey do.** Perhaps the most prolific social psychologist in American history, Albert Bandura provides something of a corrective to the overly behavioristic tack of the socialization views offered by Dollard and Berkowitz. While he most certainly explores the socialized nature of human behavior, Bandura’s unique contribution is that he does so with greater emphasis on observation of other humans. His (1973) book, *Aggression: A Social Learning Analysis* as well as his (1977) *Social Learning Theory*, highlighted the following consideration: willingness and the tendency on the part of people to mimic the behaviors observed in and modeled by others plays a major role in human behavior. His famous “Bobo Doll” experiments attracted praise and controversy alike as they, through largely empirical methods, demonstrated that behavior may be more of a cognitive process than merely a behavioristic one (Bandura, 1962). The experiments showed that children, by observing the behavior and corresponding consequences of adults, tended to cater their behavior according to that which could be ascertained through observation. Observing modeled aggressive behavior serves as a predictor for the simulation of said behavior. Bandura’s work, therefore, suggests that

behavior is not merely reducible to the causal apparatus of stimulus-response but involves to at least a degree something in the way of social cognition.

Just as E. O. Wilson does for the innateness view, Bandura, for the socialization view, at least brings to the forefront the role of something like culture into a landscape of otherwise reductionistic models. Social cognition may be thought of as a theory of human behavior that derives its contents from the shared, sociocultural sphere. So, in this sense, Bandura is not only ahead of his time but onto something groundbreaking. However, he makes a peculiar theoretical maneuver that ultimately goes on to somewhat undermine the unique trajectory that he had launched. In his book, *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory*, Bandura places the notion of the self as the primary regulatory aspect of psychosocial functioning (Bandura, 1986). So although his earlier work envisaged the social sphere as the carrier of psycho-cognitive meaning and behavioral possibility, he proceeds to collapse into an individualistic model that places the self as something distinct from the social. While it is true that Bandura takes seriously the role of sociality and environmental interaction, he eventually returns to a notion of a privatized, isolated self that stands apart from the very social system he once researched so meticulously.

To be fair, Bandura provides an elegant model that accounts for the dynamic interplay of self, culture, and cognition. However, his project returns to an arbitrary prioritization of an individualistic notion of self that sections itself off from the sociocultural sphere. Culture is, for Bandura, not something that is contained within the individual, but rather something that the individual encounters. This dualistic move that sharply distinguishes self from culture is something that I hope to show in Chapter 2 is

problematic, unnecessary, and unhelpful. For the time being, however, I believe it is important to reiterate that Bandura is for the socialization view what Wilson is for the innateness view. Both thinkers take culture seriously but only insofar as it is seen as an interactional entity that stands apart from the self; a self which in Wilson's case is wholly biological and in Bandura's case is wholly cognitive and individual.

Culture, however, is better conceived of as something that is ontically but not ontologically different from the self. In other words, while self and culture can be thought of as distinct concepts, they should in no profound sense be thought of as altogether distinct entities. It will be the task of Chapter 2 to argue in defense of this methodology. For now, it is important to note that the eminent socialization views are problematic for the same philosophical reasons as the innateness views, though because of different conceptual and methodological commitments. I have attempted to show, in this vein, that the socialization views too contain their share of reductionism, determinism, and unnecessary dualism.

### **Concluding Remarks**

In this chapter, I have taken aim at the commonly held innateness view of violence and war: the scholarly and laypersons' perspective that violence and war are inherent features of the human psyche. I explored in depth the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud, the ethology of Konrad Lorenz, the sociobiology of E. O. Wilson, and the evolutionary psychology of David Livingstone Smith. I argued that each of these thinkers commit grave philosophical errors in their methodological approaches towards understanding the psychology of violence and war. These proponents of the innateness view exhibit, among other missteps, the errors of biological reductionism and

determinism suggesting that their notion of human nature is not only unhelpful but problematic. Contrarily, I also provided brief expositions of the socialization view: the scholarly and laypersons' perspective that violence and war are behavioral results of social stimuli. Through analysis of the works of John Dollard et al., Leonard Berkowitz, and Albert Bandura, I argued that socialization views, with their methodological commitments to causality and positivist behavioral psychology, also fall victim to the philosophical errors of reductionism and determinism. I argued that Bandura's approach is the most sophisticated, though it ultimately falls short in its overemphasis on the individuality of self as distinctly split of from the very sociocultural sphere he so keenly highlights.

Why have these philosophically questionable theories on violence, war, and the human psyche loomed so largely both in the academy and in lay circles? The answer may have something to do with people's tendencies to prematurely accept scientific explanations that are in fact far more interpretive than what their progenitors would be comfortable admitting. In a devastating articulation of this point, Ashley Montagu (1968) writes that people will:

...embrace an explanation having the appearance of plausibility, especially when that explanation is offered pretentiously, with at least the appearance of support from the apparatus of scientific learning, observation, discoveries, experiments, facts, and authorities...What is almost certain to escape many readers, including some scientists, is that the apparatus of scientific learning, observations, experiments, and facts, however authoritative, do not speak for themselves but are always at the mercy of their interpreters (p. viii).

Montagu reminds us that science is not always as objective in its outplaying as some suggest. With respect to scientific theories on aggression, violence, war, and human psychology, therefore, we have good philosophical reasons to either reject, or at least remain skeptical of, the innateness and socializations views presented in this chapter.

Therefore, it is philosophically problematic to assume that an exclusive emphasis on either biology or social stimulus advances a deep understanding of human behavior. Though biology and socialization are indeed important, they are not enough. Human beings are indeed biological beings who encounter social stimulus. However, by splitting these aspects apart in order to put forth a scientific theory of behavior, a sense of holism is lost. Psychology should take seriously both the reality of biology and embodiment and also the reality of environmental impact. Nonetheless, by giving more credence to one over the other, psychology becomes simplistic, reductionistic, and philosophically bankrupt. In the following chapter, I will propose and exhaustively outline the methodology that I think averts these philosophical problems. I hope that this will signify a new and helpful approach to understanding the concepts of self and culture as they pertain to the human psyche, particularly with regards to violence and war. If I succeed in articulating and defending the merits of this methodology, we will then be equipped to move forward with an analysis of the psychology of war in America with a fresh perspective.

## Chapter 2

### **Becoming, not “Isness”: The Human Psyche and a Holistic Conception of the Embodied Culture-Self**

*Everything changes and nothing remains still...and...you cannot step twice into the same stream.*

-Heraclitus (2013, p. 96)

*The language of self-definition is defined in the spaces of mutual display.*

--Taylor (2007, p. 483)

In the previous chapter, I surveyed what I referred to as innateness views and socialization views pertaining to the psychology of violence and war. We saw that both the innateness views and the socialization views fall short because of very serious philosophical problems. The implication that I am pushing for in this is that neither approach provides a salient enough account for human subjectivity. Due to the deterministic and reductionistic tendencies contained within the methodologies of these approaches, we are in a good position to avoid placing too much confidence in the conclusions reached therein. This leaves us wondering whether a more viable view of human personhood is available. The purpose of this chapter, then, is to propose a more viable method in understanding human psychology. If I am successful in proposing this method well, we will find ourselves in a position whereby we can begin to ask different questions about violence, war, and the human psyche. Furthermore, the specific question of the American psyche of war will thus be able to be more adequately addressed than the innateness and socialization models allow for.



As such, this chapter will argue in support of the following thesis and methodology: given that it is inadequate to speak of psychology in terms of “human nature,” behavior (such as violence and war) must not be seen as inherent aspects of the psyche. Concepts of inherency or innateness assume a static, timeless human nature. Theories adopting a notion of human nature not only wrongly view the human person as a fixed, disembodied, and abstract entity but also as an entity whose core essence is split off from and impervious to context and culture. From this, we will begin to see that the sociocultural realm of existence needs not only to be elevated, but re-situated as something central and primary, not peripheral and secondary, to being human. An implication will be, therefore, that the human being is nonexistent without its embodiment of culture and vice versa. Human beings are not private, isolated selves who negotiate culture but cultural selves who negotiate existence. I will argue that employing a collapse of the commonly assumed dualism between self and culture opens us up to a richer, more robust, and more accurate conception of human behavior. This methodology avoids reductionism and determinism since it contains an implicit reliance on the notion that selves always make meaningful and ethical choices from out of their shaped psyches. In other words, a focus on culture does not necessarily adopt a new reductionism because human behavior is seen as potentiated through the psychology that enables choice rather than antecedent, inherent traits or social stimuli that enact behavior.

In adopting this view (what I will go on to refer to as the culture-self) of human personhood, our analysis of the psychology of war will be enhanced and made ready to explore the central and concluding implication that I will have built towards in this chapter: that, psychologically speaking, human beings are what they do. This will set the

stage for a nuanced exploration of the American psyche of war that will appear in Chapter 4.

Since the primary purpose of this chapter is to articulate and argue for my proposed methodology, it is important to point out at the outset that this (and the following) chapter will not specifically explore the concepts of violence and war. Rather, my intent here is only to propose what I consider to be a more tenable conception of human behavior and the human psyche. In other words, my concern in this chapter will solely be to advance and defend the notion of the culture-self as the most philosophically sound view of human psychology, thus insinuating that human beings are what they do. For this reason, there will be little to no direct reference to violence or war until Chapter 4, in which this chapter's methodology will then be applied.

### **Human Nature**

To begin with, we must focus our attention on whether or not the very language of “human nature” is useful as a mode of understanding human psychology. It is crucial that we devote significant attention to this consideration and take seriously the implications that it renders. In this section, I will offer a critique of the notion of human nature by exploring the work of thinkers whose writings call us to an understanding of the self (or the psyche) as something that is inextricably embedded in particular contexts and unable to be teased apart from its sociocultural and historical location. The bulk of this section will be devoted to this and other major considerations that strongly suggest that human beings cannot be understood or conceptualized independent of culture. Thus, we will hopefully see that to speak of human nature in an atemporal, abstract, and fixed fashion is to commit a grave mistake in the enterprise of psychology. Prior to delving deeply into

these matters, however, I wish to briefly parse out how this problematic conception of human nature exists and functions in the aforementioned and critiqued innateness and socialization views. From there, we will be well all the more justified in further exploring the “human nature problem” in a fuller sense.

**Human nature in the Innateness view.** There is, in fact, not much to convey here that is not already obvious from the survey contained in Chapter 1. As proponents of the innateness view, Freud, Lorenz, Wilson, and Smith, each in their own ways, adopt and implement the notion of human nature in their psychological theories on violence. This is done both implicitly (through invoking an overemphasis on genetic and biological predisposition) and explicitly (through use of the very words “human nature”). Each of these thinkers begins with the methodological assumption that the core essence of “the self” or “the psyche” is something that can be spoken of and theoretically conceptualized independent of the sociocultural particularity in which that “self” or “psyche” exists. Further, even if culture and/or environment is taken seriously, each thinker nevertheless views the role of culture as being something separate from the psyche as made manifest in human nature. To unpack this, an analogy may be helpful.

We might imagine that a stone is comprised of certain collections of clay, minerals, etc. Let us refer to this as the “essence” or “nature” of the stone. This stone, in its unchanging essence, can be tossed into a lake (whose water we may refer to as an environment or culture) and submerged into a new context. In this sense, the stone has a “nature” independent of the lake. Once it has been tossed in, the lake may be “containing” the stone but it does not really make the stone what it is. The culture of the lake is a holder, rather than a molder, of the stone and its inherent nature or essence. In

the same vein, arguers for the innateness view posit that “human nature” finds itself “tossed” into the lake that is society and culture. The self and the culture are seen as distinctly from one another as are the stone and the lake. They are ontologically separate and have no formative potential over one another; instead the two are seen to have interactional relationships at best. On the innateness view, the lake does not make the stone what it is (and vice versa) just as the culture does not make the self what it is (and vice versa). So, the concept of an independent, non-contextual human nature runs central to the theories found among those in the innateness camp and even when context is spoken of, it is only in the interactive rather than formative sense.

**Human nature in the socialization view.** Though certainly not as obviously as within the innateness views, the socialization views too employ a sort of “human nature” concept. This occurs in the reification of the human that is implicitly created by virtue of the behavioristic tendencies of those arguing for socialization views of violence and war. What this means is, because of the heavy emphasis on social stimulus as being the cause of behavior, the human being is reduced into nothing more than a shell that reacts to its external surroundings. On this view, the human activity is seen in terms of Newtonian physics: as a reaction due to some previous action. Though this is typically not considered to be a robust account of anything along the lines of “personhood” or “consciousness,”<sup>35</sup> there is nevertheless some sort of theory of what human beings essentially are that is being advanced here. In the socialization view, human nature may not so much be given positive descriptions as negative ones. Human nature is seen, in this

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<sup>35</sup> Early behaviorists like Watson, Pavlov, and Skinner would surely have abhorred these terms since they are value-laden terms that ascribe far too much subjectivity, meaning-making, and mentalization to the human organism. Instead, they saw the human being not as a “reflective” or “conscious” creature, but as an organism whose behaviors could be explained in terms of the stimuli antecedent to said behaviors.

sense, as sponge-like, merely sopping up the stimuli that are external to it and reacting both predictably and accordingly. Through this, very little remains by way of meaningful, ethical decision-making on the parts of human beings.

Dollard et al. (1939), Berkowitz (1962), and Bandura (1973) each to some degree, posit a concept of the human person as an isolated, distinct-from-culture entity that reacts to the social stimuli with which it interacts. Each theorist ultimately claims that violence and aggression result from events in the environment being received by and emanated from the vessel that is the human being. Though, as we saw in the last chapter, Bandura goes far enough to introduce the role of cognition, he still inducts a causal linkage between the environment and the self, thus leaving us with a somewhat mechanistic and dualistic view of human nature.

So while what we find in the innateness views is by no means a set of positive theories on human nature and what it inherently contains, they nonetheless submit that human beings are all “by nature” beings that react to social stimuli in a one-to-one causal fashion. Salvadorian psychologist Ignacio Martin-Baro, credited for having proffered a cultural, contextual approach to psychology known as liberation psychology, has aptly deciphered this meaning-making component to the human psyche while pointing out that social behaviorists neglect it. He writes:

We should note that the behavioral unit we are considering is not simply a “response” in the technical “stimulus-response” sense of the term...Rather, it is a complex body of behaviors, and activity or series of activities that have a unified personal and/or social meaning (Martin-Baro, 1994, pp. 53-54).

As Martin-Baro argues, social behaviorism fails in its inability to provide a robust view of socioculturally laden existential meaning on the part of the actor whose psyche is in question. To understand human behavior, therefore, we must move beyond the emphasis on mere social stimuli and the reaction thereto. Rather, it would seem that deeper, meaning-laden, ethical internalizations of the sociocultural realm are key in understanding psychology.

As we will soon see, philosophy and modern cognitive science show this view (the socialization view) of human behavior to be too robotic in its conception. Along these lines we might conclude that the socialization views implicitly contain a theory of human nature that sees human beings as robots incapable of much in the way of subjectivity. This conception of human nature runs steadily through the socialization views, eliminating the relevancy of culture as something that a human being internalizes and assigns meaning to. Rather, culture is seen as something distinct that visits causal power onto the human organism. In the socialization views, therefore, a concept of human nature is employed whereby the human inactively receives the input of culture and non-subjectively discharges the output of that culture. Culture, in this sense, is not only separate from the self, it also has complete causal determinacy over it. This paints a picture of human nature as a passive, robotic recipient of cultural stimuli.

**Human nature: A baseless abstraction.** In 1971, the esteemed linguist Noam Chomsky and the prolific historian-philosopher<sup>36</sup> Michel Foucault took part in a debate

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<sup>36</sup> I am unenthusiastically choosing this disciplinary tag to describe Foucault. This is because his critical method renders him very difficult to pin down in terms of the categories supplied in modern academia. It is difficult to tell if Foucault is an historian, a sociologist, a philosopher, a political critic, some combination of those, or none of those. Since much of his work centers on critiquing human discourse through the lenses of language and systems of thought, I have decided, without any strong sense of conviction, to describe him with the label "historian-philosopher."

on Dutch national television as part of a series of events organized by Fons Elders in which major social and political thinkers came together for dialogue on relevant issues. As often occurs between two thinkers whose methodological commitments differ so greatly from one another's, Chomsky and Foucault continuously reached impasses in the debate that rested on one key concept—human nature. Chomsky's commitment to the science of linguistics had brought him to readily accept and incorporate a concept of human nature whereas Foucault's adumbration on the history of power as the central mode of discourse prevented him from making such observations. Though philosophical, anthropological, and psychological discussions on human nature by no means originate with, or are unique to, the likes of Chomsky and Foucault, their interchange nevertheless captures the crux of what rests at the heart of such debates.

Early in the discussion, Chomsky submitted a point for consideration that essentially coupled the notion of human nature (what he linked to linguistic expressions of limitless creativity) with a vision for a future containing sociopolitical justice. Foucault, despite his shared conviction for the justice and liberation of human beings, was not quite ready to adopt Chomsky's methodological optimism. During perhaps the most important exchange of the discussion, Foucault responded to Chomsky by saying:

I would say...that I am much less advanced in my way, I go much less far than Mr. Chomsky [sic]. That is to say that I admit to not being able to define, nor for even stronger reasons to propose, an ideal social model for the functioning of our scientific or technological society...On the other hand...we should indicate...even where they are hidden, all the relationships of political power which actually

control the social body and oppress or repress it (Chomsky & Foucault, 1971, p. 40).

Foucault's approach can thus be described as archeological and historical whereas Chomsky's is scientific and far more forward-reaching. While Chomsky's scientific methodology propels him to consider what a new world can look like through the lens of the human nature he posits, Foucault's critical-historical approach cautions him to the fact that human beings are always psychologically formed based on sociocultural and political location. Foucault even goes so far as to describe this formation as a force of "control" on and over the "social body." In later sections of this chapter, we shall heed his methodological suggestions and explore the role of the body as well as the centrality of speech (Smart, 1985), which both occur within sociocultural space, in forming the psyches of humans. This ever-changing, contingent, and contextual, approach to human psychology will help us to understand that the notion of human nature is, in the end, a baseless, empty, and unhelpful one.

Foucault's call, therefore, is an important one. He urges us to take seriously that human beings—rather than having a fixed, constant, and detectable human nature—are social bodies located in and among discursive (i.e., linguistic) webs of power that produce and form them into who they are. Foucault's method borrows heavily from Nietzsche's in that it attempts to get rid of commonly perceived dualisms by honing in on the role of power relations and their unfolding potential. This method elevates the role of the concrete, rather than the abstract, in making sense of human behavior. Foucault's discursive method is always firmly rooted in the role that power and knowledge have as realities in human activity that are inextricable from one another.



For Foucault, what counts as “true” or “real” is always bound together with some system or systems of power. Whereas progenitor of the scientific method Francis Bacon views the relationship between knowledge and power in dualistic terms, Foucault sees the relationship more holistically. As an Enlightenment thinker, Bacon’s charge is correlational in that knowledge begets power, that increased wisdom leads to a stronger sense of existence. Foucault, however, sees knowledge and power as synonymous, rather than correlative, entities: what counts as knowledge is always bound up in some expression of power and vice versa. Power and knowledge, therefore, are not distinct but one in the same. So while Bacon’s assertion (“knowledge is power”) is that knowledge leads to, or enables, power, Foucault’s is that knowledge literally is power (and vice versa). This most certainly applies to ways of perceiving what it means to be human since truth about the self is always, according to Foucault, constructed by the inter-relationship of power and knowledge in historical and sociopolitical terms. In fact, contrary to often held scholarly assumptions, Foucault considered the central theme of his work not to be analyses on power and knowledge but analyses on the development of subjects throughout history (Foucault, 1982/1994). It is also important to note that the “truth” or “knowledge” of what it means to be human (what Foucault often refers to as subjection) is always enacted through the embodiment of powers systems; so, for Foucault, just as power and knowledge maintain no clean distinction from one another, power and selfhood also do not.

Subjection, or embodying sociocultural modes of power, does not necessarily need to be viewed as coercive, though of course it can be. For Foucault, the power-

knowledge enactment would actually cease being effective if it did not have some sort of pleasurable or satisfactory dimension for the subject involved. Foucault (1972) writes:

If power were never anything but repressive...do you really think one would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it does not only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body (p. 119).

The subjective embodiment of sociocultural power-knowledge is therefore not wholly repressive in its purest sense. Subjects choose the personhood that is available to them in particular historical contexts; they are not necessarily, in the traditional sense of the term, enslaved by them in any mandatorily oppressive ways. Instead, people often willfully become passive and complacent in their ongoing embodiment of particular, contextually-supplied ways of being.<sup>37</sup>

Foucault views these “body-techniques” as concrete ways of behaving under the power-knowledge paradigm. These subjects are quite content in the way that they are being controlled by the power systems in place, but only insofar as their automaticity is accompanied by a type of ignorance of anything that might exist beyond. This mindless embodiment of power-knowledge (or power-subject) modes of being is what Foucault refers to as “docility.” He describes this nicely when he writes: “Thus discipline produces subjected and practised [sic] bodies, ‘docile’ bodies. Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms

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<sup>37</sup> Foucault’s treatment of Bentham’s panopticon highlights this wonderfully.

of obedience)” (Foucault, 1975, p. 138). Foucault describes an intricacy of balance channeled onto the social body whereby the person is ironically at once empowered and debilitated. The parameters of subjectivity, or what it means to be human, appear to be both supplied by (empowered) and constrained by (debilitated or made docile) the sociocultural realities that exist by virtue of power systems. Through this docility, therefore, human beings commonly fall into habitual patterns of embodiment that define and give rise to their subjective senses of self. The sociocultural realm is a force that unconsciously shapes people and their understandings of personhood.

There is no need to assume, therefore, despite its sometimes esoteric use in both the physical and social sciences, that the sociocultural realm is something non-concrete. As Foucault informs us, culture is not an abstract entity but a tangible one that couches the very notions of human understanding that engender the very concepts that come about: such as that of human nature. The question is not so much then “what is human nature?” but “how does a particular conception of human nature seem to function in the cultural sphere?” So, although humans are certainly biological beings with universal traits, it must be understood that what is biological is in constant symbiotic relationship with what is concretely and contingently cultural. This avoidance of biological reductionism renders fixed notions of human nature altogether useless. Along these lines, Rose, Lewontin, and Kamin (2000) argue:

All humans are born, most procreate, all die; yet the social meanings invested in any of these acts vary profoundly from culture to culture...This is why about the only sensible thing to say about human nature is that it is “in” that nature to construct its own history. The consequence of the construction of that history is

that one generation's limits to the nature of human nature become irrelevant to the next (p. 315, my emphasis added in italics).

This illuminates the important consideration that biological universals are virtually in consensus but largely meaningless in terms of psychological theorization. Most humans have one head, two legs, a heart, a brain, etc. Very few people would deny those realities. Psychological questions, however, extend into what can be said beyond anatomy regarding what it means to be human. Notice that this does not mean that psychology operates apart from biology but rather beyond it in that the psychological aspects of human behavior are inaccessible through the accounting for of mere physical data. Rose et al. use the term human nature to speak to what lies beyond the limits of biology. As evidenced in the above quotation, they conclude that nothing non-contextual, objective, or universal may be said of human nature because they, like Foucault, take seriously the formative quality of sociocultural ways of being that are constructed and lived out differently in different locations throughout history. One of the most significant ways that this formation occurs is through the human propensity toward language-use. Language, in this vein, can be seen quite literally as a locus of meaning-making. Later in this chapter, I will explore the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein in order to tighten the qualitative linkage between language and context, and thus self and culture with respect to embodied and discursive habits.

**Human nature and social constructionism.** The rejection of this sort of notion of human nature has most recently been connected to an intellectual tradition known as social constructionism. Psychologist Philip Cushman (1995) writes that social constructionists argue that “humans do not have a basic, fundamental, pure human nature

that is transhistorical and transcultural” (p. 17). And we must continue to take into account that the biological self is limited in that it is incomplete without having expressed itself in and by the sociocultural activity that makes humans distinctly human. In other words, and to use an everyday example, having two legs is not distinctly human (although it is human in a merely biological sense); however, one’s planning a morning jog using the continuous movement of those legs is distinctly human in that the sociocultural activity of running for pleasure or exercise propels us beyond the realm of biological reductionism. Jogging, in this vein, is not part of any abstract human nature but a potentiality that arises only from within certain prioritized meanings of embodied, psychological human activity. There is no determinative linkage between biological “legness” and sociocultural “jogging.” Rather, jogging comes to be by and from within historical and cultural understandings and practical ways of being.

Cushman is keenly aware of this non-determinative quality of culture that is so closely intertwined with human behavior. He writes: “The physical body has thus been shaped by the language it performs: it has been constructed by social practices” (Cushman, 1995, p. 18). Cushman’s analysis harkens us back to Foucault’s attention on both body and language. He notes that the body is shaped not only by what it does in the social sphere but by the “language it performs.” This alerts us to a key consideration that we shall conclude with: what we do matters; and furthermore, we are what we do.

Berger and Luckmann, sociologists who are in many ways deemed as the progenitors of social constructionism<sup>38</sup>, have similarly described the importance of

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<sup>38</sup> I mean this in the formal, disciplinary sense. Social constructionism has its philosophical roots deeply planted in earlier systems of thought extending back to Kant’s epistemology, and even earlier. Berger and Luckmann are innovators in the sense that they launched a sociological discipline that pooled preexisting ideas but their methodology is by no means without intellectual precedence.

rejecting biologically reductive notions of human nature in adopting a more socioculturally sophisticated approach to examining human behavior. To this end, they (1966) write:

Humanness is socioculturally variable. In other words, there is no human nature in the sense of a biologically fixed substratum determining the variability of sociocultural formations. There is only human nature in the sense of anthropological constants (for example, world-openness and plasticity of instinctual structure) that delimit and permit man's sociocultural formations...While it is possible to say that man [sic] has a nature, it is more significant to say that man constructs his own nature, or more simply, that man produces himself (p. 49).

Berger and Luckmann, just as we saw with Cushman and Foucault, refuse to ground a conceptualization of anything like a human nature independently from sociocultural and historical considerations because it is precisely those variable considerations that form people into who they are. And so we come to see again that the role of sociocultural activity and formation is of utmost importance in understanding the human psyche. This sociocultural activity always takes the form of embodied practices, including those within language, and can "produce" any number of ways of being. Kathryn Tanner conveys this wonderfully when she writes: "If culture works on anything, it works on bare animal or bodily based capacities with an extensive and indefinite range of possible outcomes" (Tanner, 1997, p. 28). So biological considerations are important but they are incomplete in understanding human psychology. Psychological states are most certainly related to human beings' biologies but they are not reducible to them.

It is hopefully becoming clear that ultimately carrying a timeless, universal notion of human nature across contexts and eras proves to be problematic. Since the self is always physically embedded in some place, at some time, and with some discursive modes of understanding and making subjective meaning, the idea of human nature shows itself to be fruitless in providing a robust understanding of psychology. To be sure, the self is a biological and physical entity, yes, but that biological (i.e., embodied and linguistic) nature only contains potentiality in the form of hardware (as argued in the legs and jogging example above) rather than any determinative basis for fully understanding human psychology. And so, we cannot understand human psychologies independent of their particular, sociocultural contexts for it is those contexts that produce the very behavioral variabilities that we refer to as psychologies. It is a mistake, therefore, to assimilate these culturally contingent behavioral variabilities to universal, fixed pronouncements about human nature. After all, no such human nature exists since human beings are constantly being and becoming who they are through embodiment of concrete cultural values. The human psyche must only be spoken of and understood through its sociocultural location. The absence of human nature in this regard thus encourages a rejection of the disjunction (or dualism) between self and culture.

Before adopting and breaking down the implications of this paradigm, I wish to devote a bit more attention to two dualisms in need of refutation: that between culture and self; and that between mind and body. From there, the groundwork will be set for a return to the above implications, brought forth by Foucault and others, that the body and its discursive (linguistic) activity serve as crucial gateways into understanding human psychology in contextual and historical, rather than universal, ways.

### **The Case for the Culture-Self**

This section will argue for the necessity of collapsing certain dualisms that exist within social science and philosophy today. By driving these points home, we will arrive at a place where we may derive the following conclusion: there is no self without culture and there is no culture without the self. Thus, by better enacting this holism we can embrace what I refer to as the culture-self. This culture-self holism will be first in line for my analysis. I will then briefly make the case for a non-reductive form of physicalism, in rejection of mind-body dualism. From there, two separate sections will follow as I will reconnect us, in line with Foucault's emphases, to discussions on body and word. Finally, I will flesh out the implications that this all has on human psychologies. Furthermore, I will offer some points of clarification in anticipation of some detractions that may arise on the heels of having advanced my methodology.

### **Referential Distinction of Culture and Self**

Prior to continuing this discussion on the holism of culture and self, it is necessary to pause and clarify some vital issues. To begin with, it is important to maintain awareness that while I advocate for a collapsing of culture and self, I nevertheless do so (obviously) from a position that renders them categorically distinct. My very use of the terms "culture" and "self" highlights the need for using referentially distinct words to refer to things that occupy conceptually separate space. Employing referential distinctions, however, does not make necessary or generate a neat, ontological distinction. The use of different words in reference to varying felt or perceived experiences does not, de facto, generate distinguishable realities. And so, one may speak of culture and self as ontically distinct entities while avoiding the pitfall of holding them



as ontologically separate. In effect, culture and self, though referentially distinct, may still be thought of as co-constructing components of the same field of reality. Culture and self may thus be viewed as distinct only by name, or perhaps as conceptually distinguishable dimensions of a unitary phenomenon.

This, however, undoubtedly leads to certain confusions that necessitate further nuancing of what is meant by “self.” One might claim, for example, that it seems true, a priori, that a self is obviously distinct and that it enters into a culture from out of this distinctiveness. Notice that this is only true if the “self” is conceived of in a largely biological sense. It does seem that one’s physiological self is, at least to a large degree, “closed off” from the outside world. The biological “stuff” of human beings (organs, bones, etc.) is seemingly walled off via skin and thus seems distinct from culture. In fact, the encased body can actually enter into different cultures and thus concretely prove the above point. But again, this only goes so far and brings us again to the issue of reductionism. Is there more to being human than what can be accounted for through biological materialism? By posing this question, my intent is not to appeal to the existence of some disembodied self (or soul). Rather, the question is more phenomenological. Is there more to literally being human than can be accounted for through biology? Do human experiences amount to more (or at least something different) than what can be said by describing material parts? Does the ethical, narrative, meaning-making, phenomenological dimension of human experience call into question approaches that merely view the self as a collection of body parts? The answer to these questions seems, both intuitively and philosophically, to be yes.

It is this self, the one that goes unaccounted for through biological reductionism, the one that gleans meaning and constructs identity and personhood, the one that deliberately engages in sociopolitical, spiritual, and ethical activity, that is indistinct from culture. A self cannot follow the admonition of Socrates to “know thyself” apart from culture because the very attempt to do so immediately catapults the human person into a realm that transcends its materiality and embraces its subjectivity—a subjectivity whose texture is never formed in vacuous, acultural space. Notice that this analysis does not free us from the need and tendency to speak of selves and cultures in distinctive ways. We are still left using distinctive terms. Still, we must know what we are saying and what we are not. Self and culture are mutually co-constructive components to the holism of human life. Being human, in its fullest understanding, must account for this unity rather than create unnecessary and exclusive realities that posit the notion that a self is ontologically separate from its culture and vice versa.

**Are there exceptions?** An appropriate question that arises next is: are there exceptions? Is it possible for selves to navigate and negotiate particular cultures without their “selfness” becoming infiltrated by or, to use a lighter term, shaped by said culture? At first glance, the answer seems to be yes. But the “yes” requires some expounding. There are familiar stories of persons who come from a particular culture and yet seem to develop a concept or understanding of self that exhibits such a starkly contrasting quality. A White person, for example, may have grown up in the segregated South of the United States yet have developed inclusive sensibilities that render him or her welcoming and loving toward African-Americans. How might the co-construction of culture have not occurred when it comes to such a person? The answer lies in both a nuancing and

contextualization of the term “culture.” Culture may be thought of as an arena from which to draw one’s embodied rhythms, habits, meanings, etc. But obviously, one can reject the rhythms, habits, and meanings permeating the culture that immediately surrounds him or her and pick up (and embody) a different cultural way of being. Such a person would accurately appear to be an exception to their culture. But exceptions do not diffuse the co-constitution of culture and self, they rather highlight that the co-constitution is happening in a different way, one that is against the norm. The non-racist White person growing up in the segregated South is not an “acultural self” but a self that embodies an alternative culture. Their apparent exceptional status does not make them distinct from their culture, but rather a part of a different cultural way of being and becoming. Perhaps they embody consistent rhythms and habits that form a different meaning of what it means to encounter African-Americans. This culture-self would be different than a culture-self that emerged with racist sensibilities.

And so, we must not think of culture as a singularly unavoidable arena that unassuming selves merely encounter and are shaped by. Rather, selves both form and are formed by cultural ways of being that can either continue to co-facilitate one another or, when rejected in favor of another mode of being and becoming (i.e., another type of cultural embodiment), not. Exceptions to culturally normed and observed ways of being and becoming do not call into question the culture-self as phenomenologically tenable. Instead, it reiterates the ongoing need to examine selves through their embodied-cultural ways of being and becoming, even if they seem counter-cultural. Exceptions (or those who are counter-cultural) are still culture-selves. However, they are culture-selves whose holism occupies different realms of embodied meaning.

**Toward holism.** You will recall that in the introduction I referred to the work of the psychoanalyst Thomas Ogden and his suggestion that analysts and analysands co-construct a relationship (or analytic third) that is at once independent of and dependent on the two people involved. So while the “culture” of psychoanalysis is created by the interaction of two persons, the two persons are unable to be understood apart from that culture and apart from each other; thus the two persons can be thought to be nonexistent without said culture. Ogden has taken a psychoanalytic page right out of Winnicott’s book. In parental-infant terms, Winnicott (1960b) famously suggests that there is no baby without a mother and no mother without a baby. Again, the intersubjective field (what we may refer to as culture) is elevated to a level of importance whereby neither party knows or understands its identity apart from it.

This sort of thinking can sound contradictory and thus confusing. “How,” one might ask, “can there be no baby without a mother and vice versa? Are the two not distinct individuals? If so, how can they not exist without the other?” This line of questioning is valid only when the initial, dynamic nature of identity gets pushed aside in favor of something more static or fixed (or even ontological). For example, one only comes to be known or identified as a “mother” in the context of a relationship with an infant, making the identity dependent upon the relational field. Why then, assuming that this relational field carries on, should we begin to think of “mothers” as “mothers” independent of babies, or vice versa? Doing so would constitute a logical, and contextual, error of identity as mothers are not mothers in some isolated, trans-situational realm. As Ogden and Winnicott propose, therefore, identities and senses of self only emerge from out of intersubjective or relational fields. As suggested in the introduction, these fields

can easily be likened to culture while these senses of self are closely related to something like the psyche. Thus, the theoretician's task of avoiding the logical identity errors of establishing dualisms where they do not belong is essential in the quest for understanding human psychology. In what follows, I will attempt to provide elaboration on how this holism can give rise to a new way of understanding the human psyche: through what I continue to refer to as the culture-self.

In 1934, a book titled *Mind, Self, and Society* by George H. Mead, a philosopher and psychologist, was posthumously published. In that work, Mead's groundbreaking analyses offer glimpses into understanding the notion of the self without asserting unnecessary distinctions between other categories such as society or mental activity. Though his methodology is informed by his disciplinary commitments to what has been referred to as social behaviorism, he nevertheless conceives of the self as a fluid and non-causally constructed entity whose substance derives meaning from its being embedded in the social and linguistic spheres. Mead (1934) writes that the social act (or gesture) of the self:

...does not exist as a gesture merely in the experience of the single individual. The meaning of a gesture by one organism...is found in the response of another organism to what would be the completion of the act of the first organism which that gesture initiates and indicates. We sometimes speak as if a person could build up an entire argument in his [sic] mind, and then put it into words to convey it to someone else. Actually, our thinking always takes place by means of some sort of symbols. (p. 146)

It is apparent, then, that Mead rejects the notion of a self being isolated or self-contained. He suggests that “our thinking” cannot occur independent from the web of “symbols” that are furnished by and/or shared within the social realm. Individual meaning, therefore, is “found in the response of another” in Mead’s view. This mode of understanding human psychology lost traction in the middle part of the twentieth century as the quest for scientifically-achieved certainty in psychology gave rise to a new kind of behaviorism, which was far different from the holism that Mead argues for in the quotation above. However, some scholars (such as those already mentioned thus far in the chapter) have recaptured this sort of methodology that Mead was privy to by resisting the dualistic maneuver of splitting the self off from culture.

**Cultural psychology.** Mead’s work in some ways anticipates Foucault, social constructionists, and also the discipline known today as cultural psychology. Implicitly and explicitly informed by anthropology, postmodern philosophy, phenomenology, and existentialism, among other disciplines, cultural psychologists maintain a thread of what I have already referred to as holism in their methodological approach towards understanding the human psyche. As such, the holism that rests at the heart of the cultural psychology paradigm fuels a rejection of the ontological distinction between self and culture. Cultural psychologist Richard Shweder (1990) eloquently describes this as follows:

Cultural psychology is premised on human existential uncertainty (the search for meaning) and on a (so-called) intentional conception of “constituted” worlds. The principle of existential uncertainty asserts that human beings, starting at birth (and possibly earlier), are highly motivated to seize meanings and resources out of a

sociocultural environment that has been arranged to provide them with meanings and resources to seize and to use. The principle of intentional (or constituted) worlds asserts that subjects and objects, practitioners and practices, human beings and sociocultural environments interpenetrate each other's identity and cannot be analytically disjointed into independent and dependent variables. Their identities are interdependent; neither side of the supposed contrast can be defined without borrowing from the specifications of the other. (p. 1)

Through this exposition, we see articulated what the likes of Winnicott, Ogden, and Mead each claim in their own terms. "Human beings" existentially seek meanings by navigating their "sociocultural environments" and these (people and their cultures) cannot be "analytically disjointed" because they are "interdependent." The baby is only a baby (and a mother is only a mother) in the context of what we might call the mother-baby culture. In the absence of this culture, however, the space of self-definition is devoid of substance. So, selves and cultures are not only mutually informative towards one another, but they are also mutually interdependent on one another for their very existential identities. Just as there is no baby without a mother (and vice versa) there is no self without a culture (and vice versa).

To reiterate, we should notice that this approach in understanding the human psyche and its features never presumes the ability to cleanly distinguish between psychology and context. This indirectly raises the important anthropological issue of dualism (which will be explored in brief in the following subsection). If psychologists consider the "mind" to be an entity distinct from the "body," they may in turn presume to have the capacity to make theoretical claims and observations independent of human

physicality and the ways that people embody space, negotiate culture, and make meaning in and by doing so. We have seen already in Chapter 1 that both traditional perspectives (the innateness view and the socialization view) in understanding psychology and violence make this dualistic maneuver, in some form or another, by invoking conceptions of mind or mentality that exist or function independent of contextual particularity, embodiment, and sociocultural formation. Therefore, the cultural psychology paradigm is predicated on a non-dualistic, anti-Cartesian anthropology that does not presume, as psychologists and philosophers so often do, that the “the mind” is an entity open to decontextualized, disembodied investigation and inquiry.

One implication of such a methodology would, again, be the assertion that the self and culture are incapable of being understood or conceptualized independently from one another. These “interdependent” identities, as Shweder refers to them, are not to be examined in a linear fashion but in a simultaneous, symbiotic one. That is, the question of “which came first?” never applies to investigations of self and culture as it may in the “chicken and egg” riddle because each are mutually interpenetrative from their very inception. Cultural psychologists Markus and Kitayama (2003) have called this *mutual constitution* of culture and self. In this perspective, “...psychological tendencies require and are shaped by engagement with culture-specific meanings, practices, artifacts, and institutions of particular cultural contexts...” (Markus & Kitayama, 2003, p. 282). So, the self and culture are inextricably linked and this linkage manifests through history and in daily life. To split them apart and ask “Which came first?” is to misunderstand this very linkage at the outset.



This is why, in line with the paradigm of cultural psychology, I propose this way of referring to and understanding the human psyche: through the implementation of the notion of the culture-self<sup>39</sup>. Psychological phenomena must be understood as being shaped and governed by cultural factors; and cultural factors are to be seen as institutionalized segments of psychological life (Ratner, 2012). This mutually interdependent feedback loop offers a way of conceiving of the human psyche that echoes the implications of Berger and Luckmann, Foucault, Cushman, Mead, Ogden, Winnicott, Shweder, and Markus and Kitayama: that there exist no selves without cultures and no cultures without selves. Moreover, though ontically different from the standpoint of pedagogically designated nomenclature<sup>40</sup>, culture and self contain no hard and fast ontological designation from one another. We are, therefore, better off employing the notion of a culture-self.

Despite what has been argued thus far (that, in the absence of a notion of human nature, the culture-self conception of psychology is more philosophically aligned with the dynamic, subjective, and contextual state of human beings) the need exists for a crucial issue to be unpacked. Namely, we must devote attention to yet another dualism, one that occupies the arena of philosophical anthropology. This calls to question consideration of what human beings are, themselves, thought to be substantively comprised of. And so we

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<sup>39</sup> I am, to be clear, borrowing from Foucault, who has been mentioned already. Foucault's discursive method relied so heavily on the notion that knowledge and power are one in the same, rather than ontologically distinct, that he began to write the terms accordingly. So, knowledge and power were conjoined and eventually written as power-knowledge so that readers would be less prone to adopt the dualism he so wished to avoid. It is from this that I draw inspiration for the term *culture-self*.

<sup>40</sup> If I have not already done so, I should make it clear that this will persist throughout the remainder of this dissertation. I encourage the reader to consider that my use of the separate categories or terms of *self* and *culture* is only for pedagogical purposes. So, I use the terms in their nominally different ways only so that I can write about them without becoming nonsensical by assuming that the term *culture* and the term *self* (or *self* and *self*) can signify two different things on paper when, clearly, they cannot. Hence, the occasional use of the separate terms of *self* and *culture* is required.

do well at this stage to explore the issue of philosophical anthropology as it relates to notions of mind and body, or what we will go on to think of in terms of psychology and embodiment.

**What is a self: Mind, body, or both?**<sup>41</sup> The mind-body problem is one that has been prevalent throughout the histories of philosophy and psychology. The problem centers around understandings of what human beings are fundamentally and substantively comprised of. Monists, or physicalists, argue that the human being is made up of one physical substance (thus the mind is a physical property). Dualists on the other hand have held that the human being is substantively split: one part comprising its physicality (body) and the other part its mental essence (often referred to as “mind” or even “soul”). These two approaches do not represent the only alternatives to the mystery of philosophical anthropology; there are indeed multiple approaches to understanding the human in reference to mental and physical activity. Rather than provide an exhaustive explanation of these varying alternatives, I will focus my critique on the view often referred to as “substance dualism” for the purpose of our consideration for this chapter. I will begin by briefly delineating what this form of dualism has historically and traditionally consisted of.

Mind-body dualism has been the subject of debate since at latest the time of Plato and Aristotle. Since then, many philosophers have held some sort of dualistic assumptions about what the human being is comprised of. The most notable, and quite surely the most influential, of these philosophers was René Descartes. When Descartes famously wrote his famous dictum, “Cogito ergo sum (I think, therefore I am)” he

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<sup>41</sup> Portions of this discussion on mind-body dualism are imported from my work elsewhere, particularly my contributions to *Spirituality, Emergent Creativity, and Reconciliation*.

effectively proclaimed that thinking is an activity that occurs independently of or separately from the body (Damasio, 1994). Descartes believed that the mental (mind) was distinct from the physical such that it existed and functioned independent of the body. The physicalist's (non-dualist) challenge to such a postulation is to simply inquire: "How?" To unpack the question, the physicalist may inquire first as to the whereabouts of the mind and second as to how it interacts with the body. Descartes never formulated a thorough response to the latter question. As to the former, he suggested that the mind intervened to alter the action of the body through the pineal gland of the brain. This hypothesis has since come to be recognized as patently false.

As one might imagine, Cartesian dualism raises important concerns. First, it is at odds with what is understood in cognitive science and evolutionary biology. As Antonio Damasio (1994) puts it:

...long before the dawn of humanity, beings were beings. At some point in evolution, an elementary consciousness began. With that elementary consciousness came a simple mind; with greater complexity of mind came the possibility of thinking and, even later, of using language to communicate and organize thinking better. For us then, in the beginning it was being, and only later was it thinking. (p. 248)

Damasio shows that Descartes' misstep lies in his assumption that mind and body are mutually exclusive, that they exist and operate independently from one another. His critique states that organisms are organisms; the functional capabilities they possess arise from within their biological capacities<sup>42</sup> rather than from separate aspects of themselves.

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<sup>42</sup> To be clear, this is a claim that higher order capacities (such as thinking) are capacities that could not come to be without certain biological hardware (i.e., a brain). However, this is not to suggest that the

Thus, the physicalist position in reaction to Descartes would state the following: the thinking human being does not possess a physical body; instead, the human being is a physical body with the capacity to think, and even to self-contemplate.<sup>43</sup>

Cartesian dualists will conceive of mental activity and physical activity as distinct in light of their (assumed) differing sources (one emanates from the mind and the other from the body). So, what one thinks can be viewed as separate from what one does. However, and as Damasio points out in the above quotation, it is important to recognize that thought and language are offshoots of consciousness, which is an offshoot of the physicality of the human organism. In the physicalist (or monist) sense, therefore, language, and consciousness are derived from and in association with the physical capacity to think (i.e., the brain) and reflect rather than from a detached, disembodied mind as Descartes posited. In its purest form, mind (or psyche) is the byproduct of the physical, not a distinction from it. A failure to acknowledge this can seep into culture at unconscious levels. People often conceive of themselves as dualistic in nature without ever having heard Descartes' name or having studied philosophy. Adages like, "mind over matter" generate from a presumption that mind and body are distinct. Such ideologies permeate conceptions of personhood such that broader cultures begin to reflect, resemble, and perpetuate such splits.

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capacities are fixed. The ability to acquire new behavior may rely regressively on certain biological precursors, but new capacities arise as others take form. That is, an organism may acquire new capabilities that are built upon previously acquired capabilities. Rather than remaining entirely limited by virtue of original biological "machinery," beings can adopt new capacities as they become more complex. This may occur within one being or on an intergenerational level and there are certainly limits to how far capacity acquisition may go.

<sup>43</sup> Ironically, it is excessive self-contemplation that led Descartes to his conclusion that he must have existed in some substantive form independent of his body. See his *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641/2007).

Descartes' mistake was to assume and/or conclude that a nonphysical aspect of himself was engaging in self-reflection (hence: "Cogito ergo sum"). The alternative is to adopt a physicalist approach to understanding personhood whereby the human being is seen not as having a body, but as being a body. However, physicalism like this, if left alone, may essentially be conceived of as a reduction of the human person to a unitary collection of physical parts. This is often referred to in philosophical literature as reductive physicalism, which is more or less synonymous with biological determinism (which has already been explored). Biological determinists have long struggled to ground any sort of metaphysical ethics that would carry contrast with hedonism since the human organism would only be viewed as a bottom-up sum of its parts.

We have already seen, in Chapter 1, that this sort of reductionism and biological determinism is problematic in that it offers no subjective quality to the human psyche. Moreover, we also saw that biological determinism leaves no room for serious consideration of the sociocultural dimension of humanity as having real, formative influence on what may be referred to as behavior, psyche, or even a physicalist conception of mind.<sup>44</sup> Nancey Murphy articulates how non-reductive physicalists can ground "...higher human capacities...in part...as brain functions, but their full explanation requires attention to human social relations, to cultural factors and, most importantly, to God's action in our lives" (Murphy, 2005, p. 116). So, the psyche is not merely reducible to the instantiation of brain functions but requires that we pay close attention to the sociocultural, and even, spiritual-theological aspects of reality.

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<sup>44</sup> Physicalists need not relinquish their use of the word mind. It is a concept that may be helpful in describing certain types of human behavior as long as it is understood as only that—a concept. The mind is not a distinct entity but a way of describing something that human beings do. So, despite not possessing disembodied "minds" human beings, from out of their physicality, nevertheless engage in "mind-like" behavior. The use of the term *mind* therefore, does not necessarily need to be perceived as problematic.

Murphy helps us tie together the threads of cultural psychology and philosophical anthropology that have been thus far developed in this section. The culture-self is something that is both embodied and contextual and the human psyche, in this sense, may thus be viewed as something that is embodied and formed based on its cultural situation. Human beings are not merely sums of their biological parts; instead, they function as biological beings with emergent psychological capacities that are contingent on and shaped by forces that are external to, but not distinct from and their physicality. In other words, culture-self is a term used to describe human beings as organisms whose psychological characteristics are formed based on contingent (not determined), meaning-based, embodied navigations of concrete sociocultural contexts. I will now turn my attention to how the culture-self tends to operate amidst such navigations. This will necessitate two subsections: one devoted to further development of the notion of embodied psychology, and another devoted to the activity of language. As we will see, both of these constitute a type of ongoing, concrete, phenomenological way of being and becoming for the culture-self and continue to steer us away from a universal, timeless notion of human nature.

### **Embodied Psychology**

I have argued thus far that “human nature” is not a good or useful category to employ when attempting to make sense of psychological behavior. I then suggested that by collapsing two commonly held dualisms (that between self and culture and that between mind and body) we may be opened up to a new way of conceiving of human behavior whereby embodied ways of being play an instrumental role in the formation of a human psyche (and vice versa). As such, human behavior can neither be reduced to its

biological makeup nor to any supposed causal interaction with mere social stimuli.

Rather, the human psyche, as something that is embedded within a web of sociocultural dynamics, is shaped through ongoing, embodied, meaning-making modes of being and becoming. Here, I will explore in more depth the notion of embodiment and its relation to the culture-self by touching on the work of two French thinkers: Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Pierre Bourdieu.

**Merleau-Ponty and embodiment.** It would indeed be an understatement to say that Maurice Merleau-Ponty, a phenomenologist who was deeply intrigued by human perception and psychology, emphasized the role of the body. In fact, it is arguable that the whole of his philosophy is predicated upon the presupposition that human beings are not only physical but in constant, embodied negotiation of the world that they find themselves. At points throughout his corpus he uses physiological terms like “grip” or “grasping” as segues into his conclusions about perception and psychology. Both by his being influenced by Gestalt psychology and in his rejecting of every type of dualism, Merleau-Ponty was thoroughly convinced that behavior and perception were unable to be reduced to their parts (Orange, 2010). Perception, in this vein, is always something that can be understood only in conjunction with an embodied instantiation of being-in-the-world<sup>45</sup>, a holistic term used by Martin Heidegger to also react against the tendency to analyze phenomena based on parts that have been “broken up into contents which may be pieced together” (Heidegger, 1926/2008, p. 78). To reiterate what has been argued

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<sup>45</sup> This Heideggerian term shows up here without coincidence. Merleau-Ponty’s thought comes out of the tradition established by Husserl and Heidegger. Both of these philosophers in their own way attempted to, among other things, understand the human mind in terms of perception, location, and directedness. In this vein, Merleau-Ponty may be seen as culminating a tradition of phenomenology by emphasizing the physical location and embodied directedness of something like a mind.

already, therefore, neither transcultural conceptions of human psychology nor dualisms between mind and body are useful in any robust analysis of behavior.

Merleau-Ponty (1964/1968) illustrates his holistic perspective in a complex set of remarks that urge the reader to inquire as to the possible whereabouts of mental phenomena if they are not situated in the immediate perceptivity of one's embodiment when he writes:

For if it is true that, seen from the outside, the perception of each seems to be shut up in some retreat "behind" his [sic] body, reflection precisely relegates this exterior view to the number of phantasms without consistency and confused thoughts: one does not think a thought from the outside, by definition thought is thought only inwardly. If other...thoughts...are not behind their body which I see—they are, like myself, nowhere; they are, like myself, coextensive with being, and there is no problem of incarnation. (p. 31)

Merleau-Ponty's writing is quite technical (and given that the above quotation is translated from its original composition in French) so it easy to miss the thrust of what he is claiming here. He essentially makes the following point: the mind-body problem (what he refers to as the "problem of incarnation") is only a problem when one presumes that thoughts and perceptions exist apart from bodies. Moreover, if thoughts and perception exist in disembodied ways, then this would have to call into question our entire physicality; we too would be nowhere as we engage in such thinking. But the problem, for Merleau-Ponty, is that we do not appear to be "nowhere." It is part of our everyday experience of ourselves to feel our way around the world as bodily beings. Our physicality is as real as anything we can experience. So, Merleau-Ponty calls us to ask,



why undermine the centrality of our embodiment by detaching the activities of thought from their bodily basis?

We see, therefore, that Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of perception encourages us not to overcomplicate questions of psychology by stripping human experience apart too much, as is done through implementing a distinction between mind and body. There is most certainly a sense of unity and connectivity that he observes between the world, the body, and the psyche. His parsimonious approach to philosophy and psychology precludes the all too common splitting off of these categories from one another. Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) explains this as follows: "The thing, and the world, are given to me along with part of my body, not by any 'natural geometry', but in a living connection comparable, or rather identical, with that existing between parts of my body itself" (p. 205). Merleau-Ponty's claim here is that the conjunction between the body and that which is exterior is just as tight as the connection between, for example, a hand and a wrist. One simply is nonexistent without the other. Neither the mind, the body, nor the world that is encountered are seen as separate entities; they are unified in forming the psyche.

This leads to a theme that is important for Merleau-Ponty—habit. Since perception is always embodied, habits are to be understood only as results of behaviors and thoughts that have continuously been internalized. "Habit is," Merleau-Ponty (1942/1963) writes, "finally only the fossilized residue of mental activity" (p. 163). But again, this "mental activity" is embodied since thoughts are contingent upon a body and what we might call its absorption of a world. Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) again makes this quite clear when he describes the body as:

...our general medium for having a world...At all levels it performs the same function which is to endow the instantaneous expressions of spontaneity with ‘a little renewable action and independent existence’. Habit is merely a form of this fundamental power. We say that the body has understood, and habit has been cultivated when it has absorbed a new meaning, and assimilated a fresh core of significance. (p. 146)

Merleau-Ponty argues here that habits are always performative expressions of meaning that take place in the body. This seems obvious and one might respond by saying: “Of course habits are physical; excessive drinking, gambling, nail-biting, etc. are nothing more than performative expressions.” To this, Merleau-Ponty has no challenge. His goal, therefore, is to get us to realize this rather than relegate psychological behavior to the realm of disembodiment. Obsessive gambling, to use one of the above examples, should not then be seen as a product of an “addictive” mind in any disembodied sense; rather, it is a product of psychological habits that come about from ongoing, bodily ways of being that render some form (even if unhealthy) of what Merleau-Ponty refers to above as “meaning” and “significance.” Our thoughts, perceptions, habits, and therefore the whole of our psyches, are always unified with our embodied action in the world.

**Bourdieu and embodiment.** Pierre Bourdieu’s work also focuses on themes such as embodiment and habit. He proposes a new way of engaging in sociological thought that resists the tendencies of previous theories. These tendencies have been to either understand human behavior through the analysis of individuals, or independent agents (such as in the theoretical work of Freud) or through what might be referred to as social structures (such as in the work of Marx). Bourdieu’s method resists this dichotomized

approach and instead focuses on the dispositional nature of human behavior, what he calls habitus.<sup>46</sup> Habitus, for Bourdieu, may be thought of as a lasting system of thought and action that becomes so absorbed into one's being that it functions as a sort of unconscious belief. So, the human being can neither be understood as a totally independent entity (as in the innateness views) nor as something determined by social force (as in the socialization views). Rather, the embodiment of culturally-laden ways of being come into play. Just as for Merleau-Ponty, for Bourdieu the body is key in this understanding of human behavior. He writes: "The relation to the body is a fundamental dimension of the habitus that is inseparable from a relation to language and to time" (Bourdieu, 1980/1990, p. 72). So the modes of being, as captured in the term habitus, are inextricably connected to embodiment, language, and time.

Not missing what might be anticipated from this, Bourdieu goes on to speak of the notion of space as well: "All the symbolic manipulations of body experience, starting with displacements within a symbolically structured space, tend to impose the integration of body space with cosmic space and social space" (Bourdieu, 1980/1990, p. 77). For Bourdieu, the "symbolic manipulations of body" actually result in a collapsed world whereby personal space, social space, and cosmic space begin to blur. He refers to this web of relations as field and elsewhere states that being part of a field engenders belief in a way that is naive and therefore neither Kantian nor Cartesian (Bourdieu, 1980/1990). By virtue of his emphasizing the habitus enacted by bodies in a field, Bourdieu sees the human psyche as not only embodied but always located in a sociocultural web of interrelationships that give rise to an unconscious sense of being that is not merely

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<sup>46</sup> A term he picks up from Aristotle and, to a greater degree, Marcel Mauss.

rational (as in Kant's formulation) and not merely mental (as in Descartes' formulation). Like Merleau-Ponty, Bourdieu adopts a holism that views psychology as a perceptual unity emerging from social and cultural embodiment.

**More on embodiment.** Through the work of Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu, we see that humans are physical beings whose embodied ways of being form and shape them into that which they manifest as. The mind is neither private nor disembodied but rather an ongoing psychological expression of one's physical encounters with sociocultural spaces. Many contemporary thinkers have followed the terrain cleared by the likes of Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu. Rather than provide an exhaustive review of them, I will focus this brief subsection on three people in particular whose work is helpful for our discussion of embodied psychology: Mark Johnson, George Lakoff, and Alva Noe.

In their book *Philosophy in the Flesh*, Lakoff and Johnson (1999) contend that the findings of modern cognitive science necessitate a reorientation in the discipline of philosophy whereby the role of embodiment is elevated and seen as central. They begin by arguing that reason itself is not disembodied, as philosophy has traditionally maintained, but that it: (a) emerges from neural and embodied experience; (b) is evolutionary; (c) is non-universal; (d) is mostly unconscious; (e) is metaphorical and imaginative; and (f) is linked with passion and emotion (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). These points set the stage for a detailed exploration of the crucial role that embodiment plays in the very notion of being human. Our physical modes of activity, they argue, shape and produce our ways of reasoning, perceiving, thinking, and feeling. In short, our embodied lives are what give rise to our psychological lives; the two go hand in hand. They go

beyond the basic claim that the body is necessary for thought by arguing that thought is actually shaped by embodiment. Lakoff and Johnson (1999) write:

The claim that the mind is embodied is, therefore, far more than the simple-minded claim that the body is needed if we are to think. Advocates of the disembodied-mind position agree with that. Our claim is, rather, that the very properties of concepts are created as a result of the way the brain and body are structured and the way they function in interpersonal relations and in the physical world (p. 37).

So, it is not merely that the mind needs a body in order to operate; the thrust of their claims would be missed by stopping there. Lakoff and Johnson go further than that in claiming that the properties of the mind are themselves “created as a result” of bodily interactions in the “interpersonal” and “physical world.” Psychologies and their particularities, therefore, can be seen as created and shaped by the physical embodiment of human beings within their unique contexts. Minds and psyches actually come to be based on physical existence in particularized cultural domains.

This approach in understanding human psychology follows in the tradition of Heidegger—a tradition in which I have already mentioned Merleau-Ponty having a place—that emphasizes the role of being-in-the-world as a concrete activity. This connects seamlessly to the notion of culture-self that I have proposed whereby no clean distinctions (or dualisms) are made between one’s psyche and one’s cultural location. Consistent with this methodology, Johnson (2007) himself has elsewhere, in a rather Heideggerian tone, written:

From the very beginning of our life, and evermore until we die, movement keeps us in touch with our world in the most intimate and profound way. In our experience of movement, there is no radical separation of self from world...What philosophers call “subjects” and “objects” (persons and things) are abstractions from the interactive process of our experience of a meaningful self-in-a-world (p. 20).

Here, Johnson argues for a holistic understanding of human psychology that, rather than abstracting selfhood from the world, situates the self in the contexts that it embodies. The self, again, comes to be what it is in and through the embodiment of culture and there exists no privatized or atemporal psyche.

Philosopher Alva Noë (2009) has argued similarly for a holistic understanding of human beings by focusing broadly on the notion of consciousness. Noë reasons that the scientific obsession with biology has mistakenly led to the assumption that psychological consciousness can be reduced to what lies internal to the brain. He maintains that human beings and their psychological states are not reducible to their brains. He writes: “Consciousness requires the joint operation of brain, body, and world. Indeed, consciousness is an achievement of the whole animal in its environmental context. I deny, in short, that you are your brain” (Noë, 2009, p. 10). Noë suggests that consciousness is an embodied process that, while involving the brain, does not boil down to mere anatomy. Rather, one’s psychological states come to be as a result of a holistic process of occupying the world and acquiring conscious understandings of the self in that world in the process. Noë’s analysis, like that of Johnson and Lakoff, refrains from separating the self and its mental life from the context that it bodily navigates. A person’s

psychology is always embedded in and shaped by the practical embodiment of that person's cultural or environmental context. Psychological reality, it seems, cannot be spoken of in the absence of concrete practice; that is, what it is that human beings in fact do.

### **Language and the Myth of the Private Self<sup>47</sup>**

As has already been mentioned intermittently, the concrete activity of human psychology can be thought as embodied in another distinct way—through language. A careful analysis of language does even more to support one main theme that has been carried throughout this chapter: that human beings are not split off from culture and that they are not private, disembodied selves. In order to argue this point even further, I will draw on the linguistic philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein.

Wittgenstein made important contributions to the philosophy of mathematics and the philosophy of mind. He is perhaps best known, however, for his work in linguistic philosophy. Wittgenstein changed the enterprise of philosophy simply by dissecting the ways that language functions within it. This has elevated Wittgenstein to a level of importance not only in the field of philosophy, but more broadly in the purview of what comprises social science on the whole.

Wittgenstein's scholarly work on language is commonly interpreted through two somewhat distinct phases.<sup>48</sup> The first phase (often referred to as "early Wittgenstein") is

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<sup>47</sup> Portions of this discussion on Wittgenstein are imported from my work elsewhere, particularly my contributions to *Spirituality, Emergent Creativity, and Reconciliation*.

<sup>48</sup> Though there is debate among philosophers regarding the sharpness of this distinction, it is not a stretch to suggest that Wittgenstein's method changed drastically between his earlier and later works. In fact, he himself claims as much in the preface of his most acclaimed book *Philosophical Investigations* when he writes, "...I have been forced to recognize grave mistakes in what I wrote in that first book" (Wittgenstein, 1953, p. x<sup>e</sup>). It may be argued that his later work does not negate the conclusions drawn in his earlier work, namely in his book *Tractatus-Logico Philosophicus* (year). Nevertheless, the methodology used by Wittgenstein is clearly different in the *Investigations*, and will serve as the basis of what I present here.

fraught with fleeting instances of Platonic idealism along with more pronounced efforts to ground language in logic. In this phase, Wittgenstein's view of language<sup>49</sup> is that words must correspond with what is logically and empirically verifiable (Russell in Wittgenstein, 1922). That is, words are meaningful when they represent logically and universally grounded pictures of what makes up reality. Likely influenced by the British school of logical positivism surrounding him (namely, in such philosophers as Bertrand Russell and G. E. Moore) during his early work, Wittgenstein endeavored to uncover the way that language is bound and governed by a foundational structure.

In the second phase (often referred to as "later Wittgenstein"), Wittgenstein does not diverge entirely from the implications of the first phase; however, his methodology in the understanding of language is clearly different in that it is less grounded in logical metaphysics. Instead, he contends that language is shaped by action and various modes of life. Unlike the first phase where Wittgenstein's goal was to ground language in logical structures, his later aim was to consider the ways that words actually function in their ordinary, everyday, sociological sense. We might say then that the later Wittgenstein's objective is less representational and more pragmatic.<sup>50</sup> It is in his book *Philosophical*

<sup>49</sup> This early position argued by Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* is often referred to as his "picture theory" of language. Though this theory is not wholly Platonic in that no effort is made by Wittgenstein to deny the reality of the physical world, it is nevertheless in line with Plato's conception that Forms contain the solution to the philosophical problem of universals. Wittgenstein's enterprise, however, is far less dismissive of the physical world than Plato's. It may be said that the picture theory seeks an ideal meaning (or Form) of various uses of language without abandoning logic and entering into the full abstraction of Plato's non-physical realm.

<sup>50</sup> It should be noted that my use of the word "pragmatic" here is only in reference to Wittgenstein's methodology in explaining language and its function. The word is not a reference to his worldview. Wittgenstein himself anticipated the misunderstandings that would arise out of readers' tendencies to equate his linguistic philosophy with a comprehensive metaphysics. His work provides a linguistic corrective to the enterprise of philosophy; it does not presume to advance an exhaustive theory of ontological or transcendental reality. Wittgenstein clearly denies any such associations with a pragmatic worldview in his posthumously published *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology* when he poses the question to himself, "But aren't you a pragmatist?" then answers "No. For I am not saying that a proposition is true if it is useful. The usefulness...gives the proposition its special sense..." (p. 54<sup>e</sup>).



*Investigations* that this practical exploration of language-use is offered. Early in this work, Wittgenstein introduces perhaps his most acclaimed philosophic concept: the language-game. Language-games, according to Wittgenstein, are the ways that expressions of language and actions are interwoven; the processes through which words are learned in native contexts (Wittgenstein, 1953). For Wittgenstein, different language-games illustrate that certain words can mean different things depending on the contexts that they are uttered and the actions taking place therein.

To elucidate this point, Wittgenstein provides everyday examples that are rather straightforward. Say, for example, a builder and his or her assistant are constructing a building using raw materials, including slabs of concrete. If the builder turns to the assistant and says, “slab,” we might ask: what is the meaning of that word? Wittgenstein points out that “slab” could mean any number of things. It could mean: “that is a slab.” It could mean: “bring me a slab.” It could mean: “I need a slab.” It could even mean: “bring me two slabs” (Wittgenstein, 1953). Wittgenstein’s intention here is to draw attention to the multifaceted nature of language-games. When one learns a language well enough (we might say when one has learned the rules to the language-game) the myriad of meanings is actually a non-issue, presenting no obstacles in comprehension. In other words, and to stretch his own example further, once the builder and assistant have developed rapport in their activity (i.e., building together) the word “slab” may be used in any of the aforementioned ways (and beyond) without necessarily leading to ambiguity or

miscommunication. The reason for this is they would be engaged in a mutually understood activity within the language-game.<sup>51</sup>

Wittgenstein, however, recognizes the trouble that this may create for those who are not privy to the particulars of a given language-game. He notes that someone, say a foreigner, who might be unfamiliar with a certain language would misunderstand utterances based not on the unfamiliarity with the utterance alone<sup>52</sup> but rather because of his or her absence and inexperience within the established language-game (Wittgenstein, 1953). In order to fully understand and distinguish the vocabulary of a language as well as the wide variety of semantic expressions generated within it, one must first become privy to the (possibly varying) ways that the words are used.

Given that Wittgenstein's linguistic philosophy is quite elaborate, many books and treatises have been written on it alone. Rather than continue on with any further analysis of his thought, then, I will pause here in order to explore the ways in which the enterprises of sociology, anthropology, and psychology may be impacted by his contributions. Wittgenstein's thought contains a number of major implications. One implication is that, in his own estimation, his analysis closes the book on philosophy after

<sup>51</sup> Elsewhere in the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein refers to such shared activities as "forms of life." Though (perhaps ironically) he uses the term in different ways, it is mainly meant to convey the social, cultural, and behavioral bases through which meaning is recognized among persons speaking a common language.

<sup>52</sup> Wittgenstein means this quite directly. He suggests that the foreigner would hear sounds just as the native would. Either instance of perceiving such sounds can be linked to the activity transpiring in a given moment. So, the foreigner might hear the utterance "bring me a slab!" and, based on observing the accompanied activity, interpret it to mean "building-stone" (i.e., slab). The foreigner hears those four words as a referential utterance corresponding to the noun "building-stone" or "slab" whereas the native means something entirely different (namely: "pick one of those building-stones up and bring it to where I am"). Wittgenstein argues that there is nothing in the actual utterance (meaning, the phonemic sounds of the words themselves) that contains meaning beyond what is occurring, or perceived to be occurring (Wittgenstein, 1953, p. 9<sup>e</sup>). That is, the activity attached to the sounds is what provides meaning; not the utterance itself. The foreigner's interpretation that "bring me a slab!" means "slab" is not deemed *wrong* in any logical or abstract sense but only insofar as he or she misunderstands the localized language-game. This distancing from logically positivist views of language is perhaps the clearest indication of how Wittgenstein's methodology here differs from his earlier work.

having declared it unnecessary. His treatment of language brings him to suggest that there are in fact no philosophical problems that stem from anything other than misuses of language. So, for example, the philosopher who sits ruminating over the question, “What is reality?” is caught in the absurdity of philosophy. Wittgenstein’s charge is to urge us to consider the ways that the word “reality” is used and to just leave it at that. He thus concludes that what he has come up with is a type of therapy for philosophers whereby philosophical problems are not solved but dissolved; they become non-problems in the face of proper language use.

But there is a second implication that has a more direct impact on the central thesis of this chapter. Namely, Wittgenstein’s philosophy alerts us to the consideration that there exists no such thing as a private language. Language (and therefore meaningful expressions of mind and psyche) is always constructed in public, sociocultural spaces. And so the implication stemming from this absence of private language is that there is therefore an absence of private thought. This is perhaps one of the most controversial aspects of Wittgenstein’s work and I shall briefly explain it here.

Written in a very unorthodox style, Wittgenstein’s philosophical writings at times pull for the reader to do the work. His arguments are not always developed in the way that one might expect from a philosopher. At the same time, it is precisely this simple, straightforward style that makes his arguments so forceful and quite often sobering. As such, he offers several thought experiments that nudge the reader towards the realization that the self and its psyche may not be as privatized as is often assumed. Wittgenstein (1953) writes:

Point to a piece of paper. And now point to its shape; now to its color; now to its number (that sounds queer). - How did you do it? - You will say that you ‘meant’ a different thing each time you pointed. And if I ask how that is done, you will say you concentrated your attention on the color, the shape, etc. But I ask again: how is that done? (#33)

Wittgenstein’s agenda is to demonstrate that the act of pointing cannot in itself be sufficient for these various instances of meaning or intentionality. The only way I can “mean” anything comprehensibly different when pointing to the shape versus the color is if I attach language to my actions. If, for example, I tell a friend that I am thinking about a sandwich and they ask me what I mean, I would likely respond by elaborating about what a sandwich is. I might use words to indicate that two pieces of bread hold other ingredients intact. This, however, is done through the use of language not by reiterating some inner thought of sandwichness. In fact, the terminology of this last sentence plays into Wittgenstein’s hands because iterations and thoughts are always objects of verbal content.

To further make this point, Wittgenstein offers another thought experiment when he writes: “Say and mean a sentence...Now think the same thought again, mean what you just meant, but without saying anything (either aloud or to yourself)” (1969, p. 42). This thought experiment is even more compelling than the example above. Here, Wittgenstein puts the reader in a position where he or she is forced to realize that “thoughts” do not exist in the absence of language. If meaning can be something that operates independently of our language, then engaging in this experiment should render two separate reactions. That is, the reader ought to be able to mean one thing when speaking

and mean another thing when not speaking. The problem is that the latter does not exist. We find that we cannot mean anything without speaking, whether aloud or silently to ourselves.

Wittgenstein's philosophical account of language can inform the way we think of the human psyche and how it comes to be. He shows that language itself is always contextually embedded; it does not function in an abstract realm and its use is always grounded in concrete forms of life (or habits). Thus language is inherently a sociocultural phenomenon that is shared. Furthermore, the meaning and intentionality of the psychological lives of human beings are never private. Just as there is no private language, there is no private thought. Moreover, the words that are furnished for us in the sociocultural sphere are the words that shape our thoughts and therefore our psychological states. Wittgenstein shows us that the private self is a myth and that our notions of selfhood only come to be in the context of a shared, embodied, practiced culture. Human nature in the fixed, universal, transcultural sense simply does not exist. Anything useful that can be said of the psyche is said in words, words that are culture-specific and descriptive not merely of a self but of a culture-self that embodies concrete practices.

**Clarifying remarks on the culture-self methodology.** I have argued, with the help of Foucault, social constructionism, cultural psychology, embodied psychology, and linguistic philosophy, that there is no clear distinction between self and culture. However, I have also argued that culture is a force with its own subjective potential. At first glance, it may seem that adopting a holism (no distinction between self and culture) rather than a dualism precludes me from being able to make observations about the subjectivity of

culture on its own. After all, the detractor could argue that if self and culture are so linked, then any subjective statement made about culture would also be, by default, made about the self. There are two ways to respond to such a concern. First, as we have already seen in Ogden's (1994) thinking, mutual constitution (Markus & Kitayama, 2003) does not necessarily imply ontological distinction. In other words, just because two conceptual entities are thought to be part of a holistic system does not mean that the concepts cannot operate from out of their own subjectivity.

Winnicott's (1960b) mother-infant example may clarify this point. A baby and a mother are only identifiable as such in the context of their shared, intersubjective field. So, a baby is not a baby without a mother and vice versa. This, however, in no way diminishes the subjectivity of the mother. The mother can, for example, be either loving or neglectful towards the baby. The mother's subjective behavior does not automatically then presume or grant isolated or private status to her identity as a mother. Rather, it changes the shared, intersubjective space whereby the baby must now navigate being a baby in its own subjective ways with regards to the mother's subjectivity (whether it be loving or neglectful). To connect this back to the culture-self, the claim is not that there is no subjective difference between self and culture but that there is no objective difference between self and culture. Berger and Luckmann (1966) elucidate this point when they write:

By "successful socialization" we mean the establishment of a high degree of symmetry between objective and subjective reality (as well as identity, of course)...Such analysis is useful because it permits some general statements about the conditions and consequences of successful socialization (p. 163).

This sort of account provides, as Berger and Luckmann indicate, the ability to speak of something like a culture-self as being shaped by its socioculturally furnished practical embodiments. Understanding one's psychology necessarily derives from understanding what he or she partakes in. The culture-self is therefore, a psyche that exists not in a private, asocial dimension but rather in a public, sociocultural, and practically-embodied one.

The second, and related, way to respond to this concern is to contemplate the subjectivity that is apparently at hand when selves are seen as countercultural. Some way of being—say, for example, patriotism—may well be grounded in the practical embodiment of values within the cultural majority. If a “self” were to then be found that was unpatriotic, one would have to conclude that this “self” was embodying a different culture. The unpatriotic person would not be an isolated self who independently decided to be countercultural but rather a different kind of culture-self shaped by embodied ways of being that render him or her counter to the status quo. So, one way of making sense of subjectively different selves and cultures is to view them as part of different culture-self holisms rather than as random anomalies.

### **Implications and Concluding Remarks**

In this chapter I have attempted to flesh out the following points for consideration: (a) Notions of human nature implicitly and explicitly pervade psychological theories, including the innateness views and socialization views surveyed in Chapter 1; (b) Given that human behavior is always socioculturally contingent, it is problematic to invoke universal notions of human nature or selfhood; (c) There is no sharp ontological distinction between self and culture, hence the term culture-self; (d)

Collapsing unnecessary dualisms (between culture and self as well as between mind and body) and embracing holism allows for a better understanding of human psychology; (e) Embodied psychology suggests that, since our minds do not operate independently of our bodies, that our bodily navigation of our contexts gives rise to our perceptual-psychological states; (f) The way that language functions further suggests that our psyches are not only embodied but also publicly and socioculturally shaped (through cultural habits). Thus the notion of a private mind is a myth.

In taking the above points collectively, I would now like to put forth the overarching implication of this chapter. Since our psyches are formed and shaped by our ongoing, embodied, culturally-situated modes of being and becoming and we have no reason to adopt unfounded claims about a universal human nature, the sound alternative is to recognize that, psychologically speaking: we are what we do. In other words, our psychologies are formed by the practices and habits we partake in. Psychology, in this sense, is a broad term. It involves, and has involved throughout the history of the discipline, aspects of personhood pertaining to cognition, affect, emotion, interpersonal relationality, etc. For purposes of this dissertation, I am neither discounting nor relying on either of these subcategories of psychology. Warlike sensibilities certainly take their cues from most, if not all, dimensions of a person's psychological functioning. To either pinpoint one or subsume each of them as the source/s of warlikeness would be mistaken and reductionistic. For this reason, my use of the term "psychology" in the above claim is intentionally meant as a broad description about that which is mentally attributable to potentiating one's decisions to make or participate in war. Again, such a decision is not absent of the subcategories of psychology but rather contained within a broader psychic



ability that needs not be reduced to one or the other of them. So, to make the claim that, psychologically speaking, we are what we do is a claim meant to be taken as a broad generalization with respect to a person's psycho-ethical capabilities. It is not a nuanced proclamation regarding any one aspect of psychology in its rigid, disciplinary sense.

The obvious questions that follow are: what is it that we do? What practices and habits do we partake in? These questions will serve as the focus of the following two chapters. First, in Chapter 3, my aim will be to bring to the surface some of the key features and habits of American capitalism since I see it as the most pervasive aspect of cultural reality in the U.S. After distilling these features of American capitalism, we will then enter the following chapter (Chapter 4) ready to analyze a set of cultural practices and habits (or habitus) that, when embodied, appear to form, shape, and potentiate the American psyche of war.

### Chapter 3

#### Capitalism: Values and Habits of the American Culture-Self

*I have no faith in human perfectibility. I think that human exertion will have no appreciable effect upon humanity. Man [sic] is now only more active - not more happy - nor more wise, than he was 6000 years ago.*

--Edgar Allan Poe (1980, p. 4)

*Consciousness can never be anything but the conscious being, and the being of men [sic] is their actual life-process.*

--Karl Marx (1845/1998, p. 9)

In Chapter 2, I attempted to establish a view of human behavior that differs greatly from the approaches of many thinkers, particularly those whose theories on violence were surveyed in Chapter 1. I argued for this method by first rejecting the notion of human nature as being useless in that it fails to adequately take into account contextual variability and the paramount role it plays in the shaping of human psychologies. I also rejected the sharp distinction between both self and culture as well as between mind and body. Then, by focusing my discussion on the importance of the role of the body, I suggested that the physical embodiment of cultural ways of being is what gives rise to what we may refer to as the psyche. I proposed that this all points toward the major implication regarding the culture-self that, psychologically speaking, human beings are what they do.

Given that the purpose of this project is to examine the American psyche of war, it stands to reason that an investigation of American culture is now in order. If human

beings are what they do, then we might ask what it is that Americans do. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter will be to provide explorations of several core features of what I will refer to as *American capitalism*. I will argue that this capitalism contains some of the most pronounced aspects of American culture; thus to “do” American culture is to embody certain capitalistic values, habits, and practices<sup>53</sup>. My goal here will be to name and describe these habits. As such, the flavor of this chapter will be elaborative in that I will be outlining the core features of American capitalism rather than yet making any psychological arguments about them or in light of them. This chapter will thus contain brief summaries of core threads of American capitalist culture in order to build the case for a psychological interpretation (in regards to the psyche of war) of them in the following chapter. By delving into this discussion, I will implicitly be describing habits that are associated with American life. This, again, will pave the way for the following chapter (Chapter 4) in which I will connect these embodied habits with the American psyche of war. So, in essence, the purpose of this chapter is to articulate that American capitalism is what the American culture-self does as evident in certain habits that I will derive from the expositions below.

Prior to proceeding forth with this, I would like to make two clarifications. The first (and to repeat a point I have already made in the introduction) is in regards to my use of the word capitalism. I use this term less as an indication of economic analysis and more as a sort of sociocultural portrait. In other words, my intention will not be to merely dissect the goings on of economic and corporate structures and their related labor

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<sup>53</sup> I see these values, habits, and practices as being bound up as one collective posture or mode of being. For the sake of succinctness, therefore, from here forward I will refer to this conglomeration of terms simply as “habits.” In the next chapter, I will even introduce a notion of unconscious existential meaning (which I will refer to as thematic meaning) that can be included under this broad term of *practice*.

relations in their narrow sense; rather, I aim to speak more broadly of American culture in that it is one that is driven and held together primarily by social relations, to use Marx's term, of particular sorts. These social relations, while clearly containing economic and class related underpinnings, need not be restricted to the realm of market analysis and labor distribution.

Marx himself viewed economy as the most obvious material form of social relatedness; however, his enterprise can and should be thought of as a type of sociological analysis in a broad sense rather than merely as an effort to understand the nature of economic capital. His corpus sheds light on human psychology and organizational behavior through analyses of sociocultural materiality. In this sense, I am following a Marxian paradigm by analyzing capitalism for its cultural imprint on the psyches of Americans. I am not, however, considering capitalism to be a narrow term referring only to its classical economic parameters. As will soon be evident in my discussion, capitalism includes, but is most certainly not restricted to, economic relations. So, capitalism is a term I use to describe the whole of American culture and its habits.

This leads to the second clarification that perhaps best comes in the form of a response to what I anticipate may be a point of confusion. One might already begin to suspect that I am committing a sort of "essentialism" towards American culture. The concern would be that I am, either by perceiving things through my above delineated term capitalism or by claiming that these features of capitalism are ubiquitous to "being American", reducing American culture into one thing. This is a valid concern that deserves immediate attention.

My argument will not be that there is nothing more to being American than what I go on to present in this chapter. Rather, I will argue that in partaking, to any substantial degree, in American culture, one inevitably confronts certain modes of being and becoming. In other words, I am not saying that American culture is essentially all that I describe in this chapter. Instead, I submit that the features contained in this chapter are part of the inescapable web of social relations that one must encounter and negotiate. It is certainly not the case that being a part of American culture boils down to nothing more than the features of capitalism that I will go on to point out. It is the case, however, that being a part of American culture commonly includes the embodiment of certain features and habits that are unavoidable given the particular social-contextual field of the United States. And so, while what appears below is not all there is to being American, it is the case that it is at least a significant part of being American that most, if not all, Americans encounter.

In order to flesh out this clarification a bit further, we may benefit from returning to our methodology of becoming that states that, from a psychological standpoint, you are what you do. Abstract, theoretical knowledge about capitalist culture is not the focus of this chapter, or my study on the whole for that matter. Instead, I am interested in drawing out observations about the embodiment of American capitalism in its concrete sense. The question therefore becomes what do Americans typically do in embodied ways? rather than what is an all-encompassing theory on what it is to be American? The latter question is essentializing while the former is clearly not. Berger and Luckmann (1966) articulate this distinction between theoretical knowledge and embodied ways of being when they write:

...theoretical knowledge is only a small and by no means the most important part of what passes for knowledge in a society...The primary knowledge about the institutional order is knowledge on the pretheoretical level. It is the sum total of “what everybody knows” about a social world, an assemblage of maxims, morals, proverbial nuggets of wisdom, values and beliefs, myths, and so forth...every institution has a body of transmitted recipe knowledge, that is, knowledge that supplies the institutionally appropriate rules of conduct (p. 65).

Notice that Berger and Luckmann do not claim that this “recipe knowledge” is all that there is to a particular social configuration; instead, they merely observe that it is part of what “everybody knows” on a “pretheoretical level.” We might add here that this sort of knowledge revolves around a sort of embodied navigation of the sociocultural field. We are further reinforced in thinking, therefore, that embodiments of certain features of a culture may have formative psychological potential on most everybody within the culture even if said culture is not reducible to being comprised of nothing more than these features. And so, in what follows, I will explore certain features of American capitalist culture from which I will derive some key concomitant habits that will later serve as the basis for analysis on the shaping of the American culture-self as warlike.

### **Features of American Capitalist Culture**

With this said, the purpose of this chapter will be to examine the aspects of American capitalist culture that, to use Berger and Luckmann’s term, “everybody knows.” Groundwork will be laid by conducting this descriptive survey and gathering a collection of features of American capitalism, in order to glean certain habits associated with them. These habits will, in Chapter 4, be discussed in terms of their relation to the

psychology of war. For now, it will be the focus of this chapter to simply point out, delineate, and describe some key features of American capitalist culture. Though there will be some incidental, cursory remarks on the psychological impact of these features, it will be my task in the next chapter to discuss this impact more fully. What appears below is instead a series of sketches that reveal elements of American capitalist culture. I will conclude each section with a mention of the habits that are produced in accordance with the features. The following features and elements will be explored: individualism; fear; commodification; emptiness and/or alienation; progress; exploitation and greed; domination and control; and finally certainty, instrumental reason, and disenchantment. Though these features are undoubtedly interrelated to a great degree, I will discuss them each independently for the sake of clarity while acknowledging up front that some thematic overlap is bound to occur.

**Individualism.** Individualism lies central to American culture (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985). In contrast with communalism, individualism values personal rights, self-expression, and self-discovery. In fact, Americans are often offended by the implication that they are influenced by broader cultural systems or groups that they affiliate (Naylor, 1998). To be a complete individual is seen, in academic and lay circles alike, as one of the most esteemed forms of achievable health. The American psychologist Abraham Maslow, for example, studied people like Thomas Jefferson, Albert Einstein, and Eleanor Roosevelt and emphasized self-actualization as the full implementation of talents and capacities such that one becomes exceptional as a singular person (Goble, 2004). It seems then that personal development is potentiated through the

values of individualism may be viewed as one of the most prized aspects of being American.

It may be said that individualism has both positive and negative sociological and psychological effects. This is evident within the largely western political philosophy of libertarianism spearheaded by thinkers like Locke and Rousseau. This philosophy places individual liberty as the highest or most sought after political ideal. For example, an amplified valuing of individual expression can create a non-hostile environment whereby a diversity exists and individual differences are “tolerated.” In this sense, people are “at liberty” to do whatever they like as long as it does not impinge on the liberties of others. At the same time, however, an increased emphasis on the self can create a lack of care or interpersonal responsibility towards others. If the main sociopolitical ideal is to respect individual rights, it may be that a lack of communal concern then ensues. So, pending further contextual considerations, individualism is strictly neither a positive nor negative notion and it must be seen for both its gains and losses.

At the same time, we are justified in inquiring as to the habits that are likely to accompany the American tendency towards individualism. In this vein, economic considerations indeed come into play. Adam Smith’s political and economic philosophy began with the assumption that people behave according to their self-interests (Smith, 1776). Thus, one’s aggressive pursuit of personal needs and desires invariably produces market models wherein the common good is neglected (May, 1988) and personal needs rise to the forefront. This sentiment shows up in the work of one of economic capitalism’s most prominent American defenders, Milton Friedman, who argues that human beings act exclusively out of their tendencies as self-interest maximizers (Bellah,



Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1991). We see here that a sort of human nature is posited in these views since human beings are perceived as driven by selfish interests. In Smith's view, any common good that derives from this individualism is accidental. There are, however, cultures where individualism does not reign supreme and notions of communalism take precedence to the importance of personal satisfaction. Acting out of self-interest is not a trait grounded in a universal human nature but rather a sociocultural phenomenon. Communal cultures may be said to have very different socioculturally furnished embodied habits than individualistic cultures. These culturally embodied differences shape and produce moral psychologies that are also different.

Some thinkers have tried to deny any inherent connection between capitalism and individualism or self-interest. Writing about a particularly American form of capitalist society, Michael Novak (1982) has argued:

The real interests of individuals...are seldom merely self-regarding. To most persons, their families mean more than their own interests...Their communities are also important to them. In the human breast, commitments to benevolence, fellow-feeling, and sympathy are strong...Thus the "self" in self-interest is complex, at once familial and communitarian as well as individual, other-regarding as well as self-regarding, cooperative as well as independent, and self-judging as well as self-loving (p. 93).

Novak's points are good ones. Individualized selves, as he points out, are complex and often demonstrate interpersonal care for their families and communities. And so, members of individualistic cultures are not to be seen as depraved and entirely self-centered but more balanced as being both self and other oriented. However, Novak's

analysis is problematic in that it reifies and universalizes a concept of “self” as something that is transhistorical and transcultural. Notice how he uses abstract and non-contextual language like “to most persons” or “human” without grounding it in a sociocultural framework. He speaks of democratic capitalism and its players as though they function in a vacuum rather than connecting the notion of a self to its particular sociocultural and historical situation. Are most American selves today as other-oriented as Novak proclaims? This is up for debate, and merely asserting that most people care for their families and communities does not put to rest the issue of rugged individualism that pervades the American capitalist psyche. This is because the very mechanism of American capitalist culture, both through its economic and social outplaying, is one that rests on the Enlightenment values (put forth by Locke, Rousseau, Smith, and others) of private property, individual accrual of wages, personal freedom, and market competition against others.

The mistake that Novak makes is in speaking about the self as abstract and without its cultural mutual constitutor (i.e., the culture-self). Daniel Bell (1976) has famously emphasized the role of capitalist culture in noting that it gives rise to norms that are, in many ways, contradictory to the very ideals out of which they were put in place. Though Bell’s work has been rightly criticized in certain regards, his emphasis on culture should be applauded. Novak neglects the reality that individuals operating in capitalist culture are dynamic and subject to the influence that their activities have on them. Thus for him to speak vacuously about human beings and their communal and other-oriented tendencies is socio-psychologically problematic.

We may say for now that individualism, as implicit in the term itself, values the individual more highly than all else. Within American individualism, the protection, sustainment, and flourishing of that which is personal is elevated to a higher level of prioritization than many other cultural virtues. If Novak's vision were correct, most individualized American people would follow the admonitions of Jesus and sell their possessions in order to give to those members of their community who are in need (Luke 12:33, CEB) rather than purchase largely unnecessary goods for themselves.

To conclude this section, I wish to point out that individualism, as a feature of American capitalism, carries the following habits: self-prioritization; and indifference towards others. In the following chapter, I will argue that these habits, when performed or embodied, emerge in the form of a culture-self whose psyche is warlike.

**Fear.** Another feature of American capitalism is the pervasiveness of fear. Fear is by no means one-dimensional; it expresses itself differently depending on context. For example, the fear encountered by a wealthy CEO is far different from the fear felt by people living below the poverty line. Despite these sorts of surface level differences, however, fear contains core characteristics that can shape psychologies and behavioral dispositions in similar ways despite the variability of demographic contexts. To return to the above example, a CEO's fear and a poverty-stricken parent's fear may be about different things, but both cases may shape and bring about mentalities of necessity and insatiability. Both the wealthy CEO and the impoverished parent may live with a sense of scarcity and this may shape their psychologies in such ways that they live in fear of what the next moment may bring (or not bring). So while their fears are about different things, the fears themselves function rather identically on an intrapsychic level. And so it seems

to be the case that even members of different classes within one economic system can experience similar psychological ways of being. Modes of fear impact those in “higher classes” and “lower classes” alike and in a generally similar manner. In this sense, fear contains a core that, when embodied, may shape psychological states similarly no matter how that fear plays out situationally or circumstantially.

Barry Glassner (2009), a sociologist, has argued that America is a culture of fear that has become vulnerable to unfounded claims about external threats ranging from disease to crime. Though his work surveys a wide range of social and cultural phenomena, his overall thesis is situated in something of an economic analysis. He theorizes that Americans are so full of fear because “immense power and money await those who tap into our moral insecurities and supply us with symbolic substitutes” (Glassner, 2009, p. xxxvi). Fear mongering, it would then seem, is a lucrative business and America, according to Glassner, runs this business quite well. So it seems that fear is a possible consequence of a culture that values profit and money over the general psychological well-being of its own people. Fear can thus be seen as something that is manufactured based out of socioeconomic circumstances. Though some level of fear is perfectly normal, natural, and useful, Americans indeed appear to be living with a surplus of it.

The fear that exists within American capitalist culture is not only connected to mere economic conditions; it may also be connected to a broader sense of powerlessness. Citizens who feel disempowered are likely to exhibit the reaction formation of fear. Economist Bob Goudzwaard (1979), whose definition of capitalism was invoked in the introduction, has written of this reaction formation:

Powerlessness easily leads to fear. This happens especially with those people who, in the face of the great impersonal powers of our time—technology, economics, and science—experience their own helplessness so profoundly that they are firmly convinced that these powers lead an independent existence outside of us from which they can consciously control us...Fear is a reaction which we must take seriously. One ought not to play games with it. It is a reaction in people who sense that they are caught in a labyrinth from which there is no escape (p. 154).

For Goudzwaard, fear arises when people subjectively experience that they are being controlled by impersonal forces that reduce them into little more than objects. This is closely associated with certain concepts from the previous chapter such as Foucault's notion of docile bodies whereby people's embodied and discursive modes of being are unconsciously conformed to instantiations of power-knowledge systems<sup>54</sup>. Fear comes to be when people sense that they can no longer make genuine decisions under the manipulation of powers that be. Powerlessness begets fear.

Thus we can notice that fear is a pervasive characteristic of American culture. Though it impacts people of different demographics in varying capacities, its core is nevertheless similar in that it can spark psychological states of scarcity, need, insatiability, and even preemptive powerlessness and defensiveness. It is generated by economic interests as well as through particular manifestations of power over people. To conclude this section, I wish to point out that fear, as a feature of American capitalism,

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<sup>54</sup> See Foucault's (1975) analysis of Jeremy Bentham's panopticon in the book *Discipline and Punish*. There, Foucault draws out sociological implications of prison architecture in comparison to his theory that docile bodies operate as though they are being surveilled. Goudzwaard's notion of powerlessness in capitalist cultures driven by technology, economics, and science seems to be in line with Foucault's thesis.

carries the following habits: hyper-vigilance; docility and powerlessness; and hyperactivity<sup>55</sup>. In the following chapter, I will argue that these habits, when performed or embodied, emerge in the form of a culture-self whose psyche is warlike.

**Commodification.** The powerlessness that Goudzwaard alerts us to is closely related with the nature of capitalist culture in general. The existential states of human beings can, from within this sense of powerlessness, become reduced to the states of mere cogs in the machine. Marx and Engels refer to this as the “commodification” of human beings whereby their senses of meaning are entirely bound up in their productive activities. Human beings who have been commodified have been made “into machines” (Marx & Engels, 1848). In other words, entities that are normally not associated with the notion of being “a product” or “a good” can and do begin to take on that identity role through the practical activity in which they engage. In the case of capitalist culture, the commodification of humans engenders a sort of perception that human beings are machine-like in their incessant, docile, production-oriented activities. The psychological effect of a culture that commodifies most everything (including its people) is that human beings may begin to be viewed as dispensable.

This dispensability, or devaluation of human beings, in the form of commodification is, in Marx’s view, a culturally-laden value that emerges out of the material exchange of labor for money. Since labor does not merely create goods but also turns the worker himself or herself into a good, the human world undergoes devaluation as the “world of things” becomes increasingly valued (Marx, 1844/1967). Cultures produce people whose psychological states are shaped by the material activities that they

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<sup>55</sup> Ohman (2008) has argued that there are clear, cyclical connection between fear, anxiety, and hyper-vigilance. Studies have demonstrated that persons with high levels of fear and anxiety will tend to rest their attention on threatening stimuli and be slower to shift attention elsewhere.

carry out. For Marx, the material activity of commodification within capitalist culture produces psychological states whereby nature and humanity begin to be perceived as commodities or things<sup>56</sup>. Through the process of commodification, people not only personally embody this docile, machine-like, existential state but they are likely to view others accordingly. People in such cultures can both feel commodified and do commodification by perceiving others as similarly docile and machine-like.

To conclude this section, I wish to point out that commodification, as a feature of American capitalism, carries the following habits: world-objectification; and other-objectification. In the following chapter, I will argue that these habits, when performed or embodied, emerge in the form of a culture-self whose psyche is warlike.

**Emptiness and alienation.** Streaming out of the brief discussions on individualism, fear, and commodification comes a dyad of mutually-related existential features of American capitalism: emptiness and alienation. This existential issue is vital and sheds light on unquestioned slogans and adages that pervade American culture encouraging people to “find themselves” or “discover who they are”<sup>57</sup>. Maslow, whose work was mentioned above, actually employs the language of “actualization” to refer to individuals who have lived into or up to their potential. These considerations suggest that the American self (or culture-self) is one that is perpetually empty and in need of being filled in.

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<sup>56</sup> I am reminded here of the words of people like Martin Luther King, Jr. and Thomas Berry who spoke often of the injustices that result from “thingifying” the world and perceiving aspects of humanity and ecology as “things.”

<sup>57</sup> It is interesting to note that one of the U.S. Army’s advertising slogans over recent decades has called for new recruits and to-be soldiers to “be all they can be.” This implies a sort of empty potential of the Americans targeted in these ads; an empty potential that needs to be realized or filled in, presumably by the joining the army.

Philip Cushman (1995) has connected threads of capitalism and consumerism in order to describe this cultural-existential situation as follows:

The empty self is a way of being human; it is characterized by a pervasive sense of personal emptiness and is committed to the values of self-liberation through consumption. The empty self is the perfect complement to an economy that must stave off economic stagnation by arranging for the continual purchase and consumption of surplus goods (p. 6).

Notice that Cushman describes the empty self as “a way” of being human rather than “the way.” The notion of pervasive existential emptiness (what he calls the “empty self”) is not a universal human attribute but rather a way of being that serves as a “complement” to a type of culture—one that thrives on constant economic reconfiguration and production<sup>58</sup>. This socioeconomic and cultural process creates circumstances in which human beings constantly attempt (and re-attempt<sup>59</sup>) to make sense of their meanings and purposes. This proves difficult, however, as continual capitalist modes of production commodify people and cultivate a sense of what we saw Goudzwaard earlier refer to as “powerlessness.” The result is a shaped psychological state of perpetual emptiness whereby insatiable consumption monopolizes human activity. If the self is empty, it constantly seeks filling from and through the resources available in its culture. So, Cushman’s empty self provides us with one elegant illustration of how culture-selves come to be formed through mutual constitution of culture and selfhood.

<sup>58</sup> In fact, Cushman’s analysis *does* center on the American self. It is also quite telling to note Cushman’s connection of self-liberation and consumption. The aforementioned American values of individuality and libertarianism enter the mix here.

<sup>59</sup> This perpetual re-creation is evident in American pop culture where the music artists with the most career longevity are often celebrated for their ability to “re-invent” themselves.



Emptiness, as a mode of being and becoming, is profoundly present among Marx's social insights as well. His concept of alienation conveys this similar quality of existential personhood. Alienation is a term that contains so much breadth in the enormous body of literature by Marx and about Marxian thought that it would be an impossible task to summarize that breadth here. Rather, for our use, we will need only a basic understanding of the way in which Marx conceived of alienation. Essentially, he viewed capitalism as disconnecting human beings from their own needs by directing their productive labor activities to ends that are entirely alien to those very needs (Dupré, 1983). Human beings whose labor activities have no purpose or meaning other than making money to meet physical needs (such as eating to satisfy hunger) are not engaging in what Marx would view as the creative act for its own sake. Labor, in this vein, becomes a means to an end rather than an end in itself for the sake of one's own holistic flourishing. If people work only for a wage, they become disconnected from their work. Disconnection is alienation. The laborer's existential status is compromised because his or her purpose or meaning boils down to the mere goal of earning a wage. It is easy to see, then, how emptiness and alienation are related concepts because both result from an embodied sociocultural activity that produces human beings who continually and perpetually live as means to ends rather than as ends in themselves.

Alienation can take on a different form as well. In addition to one's being alienated from one's own activity, people who embody certain modes of being can also feel alienated from others. Just as suggested earlier in the case of commodification, sociocultural expressions of alienation can shape not only one's view of self but also one's view of others. Other members of a community or cultural sphere are easily viewed

as empty and alienated in their own right and this “perception of the other” can quickly take on a dehumanizing quality since others too represent means rather than ends in themselves.

To conclude this section, I wish to point out that emptiness and alienation, as features of American capitalism, carry the following habits: meaninglessness; insatiable dissatisfaction; and indignity of others. In the following chapter, I will argue that these habits, when performed or embodied, emerge in the form of a culture-self whose psyche is warlike.

**Progress.** Perhaps one of the most salient features of American capitalism is the notion of progress. Goudzwaard (1979) links the notion of progress directly with capitalism when he writes:

And is not capitalism itself by nature progress-oriented? Capitalism is a form of societal organization that is specifically directed toward growth and change. In this specific orientation toward progress, capitalism appears to this day to be a recognizable and essential element of our societal structuration [sic] (p. xxiv).

And how does this progress occur? The answer, in a contemporary sense, is closely related to the increase of information through the advancement of reason and technology. So, believers in human progress are usually those who believe that we are better off today than we were yesterday. Our intellectual and technological pursuits are seen as modes of achieving a greater grasp of the world and therefore a greater quality of existence.

Though there are certain arenas in which this strong emphasis on progress is correct and warranted (e.g., advances in medicine) there are glaring reasons to doubt its goodness in the broad sense. Technology brings about certain luxuries and capabilities,

yes, but it also brings along with it the potential for devastation. So, for example, we enjoy the “benefits” of advanced farming techniques but suffer the ecological and social consequences of overproduction and labor exploitation; we enjoy the advances of physical and chemical science but live with the gruesome realities of nuclear weaponry and chemical warfare. These considerations should tell us that progress is neither inherently a good thing, nor inherently a bad thing. Its goodness is always contingent on ethics, which couch the use of the particular mode of progress.

But it is more important for the sake of this project to consider how the notion of progress manifests itself in the psyche and among human activity. In other words, how do humans who venerate progress tend to behave psychologically? In the context of American capitalism, it is arguable that the notion of progress is alive and well, but only in secular and material senses. Clarke Chambers theorized that progress remained a strong conviction throughout America in the twentieth century but only insofar as it had been divorced from religion and grounded in the systems of democracy and abundance (Lasch, 1991). Americans today, thus, are likely to base their views of the world on the fundamental assumption that progress is a virtue. And given these emphases on democracy and abundance, individual liberties and consumption again come to the fore.

In a culture that values progress, people are likely to link their psychological and existential senses of personhood to that which can be gathered and used. Even a person’s success is predicated upon their ability to progress forward. For example, learning for the sake of learning loses value<sup>60</sup> as compared to learning so that one can obtain a degree, get

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<sup>60</sup> One way of testing this theory is as follows: Pay attention to conversations that people who are enrolled in school have with others. Upon answering when asked what they are studying or majoring in, students often receive the following words in response: “And what do you want to do with that degree?” The implication here is that one’s education *must* serve some purpose other than the existential enhancement

a job, and begin earning a wage that—if successfully carried out—increases in amount as the employee moves forward. When we presumptively refer to this process as “getting an education and establishing a career” we overlook the implicit cultural obsession with progress that underlies it.

To conclude this section, I wish to point out that progress, as a feature of American capitalism, carries the following habits: incessant exertion; and ingratitude. In the following chapter, I will argue that these habits, when performed or embodied, emerge in the form of a culture-self whose psyche is warlike.

**Exploitation and greed.** Capitalism, in its strictly economic sense, is capable of generating wealth. Keen readers of Marx acknowledge that he in fact ironically admired capitalism as the greatest achievement in human history because of its massive organizational and wealth-generating potential. And so capitalism is indeed a process capable of creating more capital. This is because its primary focus lies in its aggressive modes of production and the economic growth generated from it. The generation of capital is not necessarily a problem (again, ethics can determine how the neutrality of capital is allocated or used); however, the abuse or misuse of wealth is. Economic capitalism, in its purest sense, rests on the goal of wealth-generation rather than the goal of exploitation (Appleby, 2010). However, the line between wealth accrual and exploitation is thin and a careless navigation of that line can, and often does, result in greed. Generating maximal income can be a slippery slope into doing anything to generate more income. The adamance on increased income quickly becomes a form of

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that may be gained from learning in itself. Rather, education is expected to serve merely as a means to acquiring employment.

exploitation and greed. Psychologically speaking, the means begin to trump the ends<sup>61</sup> and people become obsessed with exponential growth and wealth-generation. For example, the outsourcing of labor is often implemented by companies as a business-savvy, short-term model of maximizing profit (Qualls, 2014, p. 154). The outsourced employees are often paid unfair wages while the company's domestic citizens go jobless. This is where exploitation and greed enter the discussion since the communal needs of human beings become secondary to the primary goal of earning capital.

Exploitation and greed are closely associated with several of the features of American capitalism that have been discussed thus far in this section such as: individualism, commodification, and progress. The emphasis on the freedom and financial advancement of the individual, at the expense of others, manifests as this exploitative and greedy way of being. In this regard, Qualls (2014) has written:

Laissez-faire capitalism emphasizes the absolute and unlimited rights of the individual over all other concerns. Because of that emphasis, personal self-esteem-ism trumps both ethics and community concern, spirit and pride, and becomes manifest in greed...Self-esteem can blind one to the qualities of others, even unto the extreme of negating enlightened self-interest. It is thus dangerous

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<sup>61</sup> This overemphasis on generating income is evident in the American work force. People often become specialized by the end of late adolescence by earning a college degree and entering into a career soon thereafter. Along the way, they are fed the sociocultural message of the importance of making money: In order to buy a home, a vehicle, another vehicle, etc. Simultaneously, they are encouraged to begin thinking about retirement. This often compels people to "maximize their earning potential" and work harder to put money away for retirement. Once that retirement finally approaches, many people encounter an existential crisis whereby everything they "saved money" for is no longer desirable. They are "unable to retire," as it were. Many are so addicted to the incessant work that they engaged in for years that they are unable to retire with any peace of mind. They find, despite financial security, that their lives are without meaning. This demonstrates how an obsession with earning money *psychologically shapes* people in such a way that when they arrive at the finish line of the proverbial race, they are rarely in the emotional state to celebrate. Instead, they turn around and think "maybe I can run for a few more hours." This workaholism staves off existential emptiness and lack of meaning by instead re-inserting the person into what they know and do best: More work.

for self-esteem-ism to form the basis of one's dealings with the world, for the self never exists alone. It takes a community for anything to develop and prosper, and it takes a world, whole and hale, to guarantee the life of all communities (pp. 42-43).

And so it is not capitalism in its simplest sense that is problematic for communal living. Rather, what is problematic is the type of capitalism that centers on individual liberty, personal gain, and self-interest in the quest for wealth-production. With an over-emphasis on individualism and liberty, American capitalism would appear to possess this blend of values (or lack thereof). The United States has, after all, historically been occupied with "exploring, exploiting, and *civilizing* [emphasis added] its own continent" (Nordholt, 1995, p. 160).<sup>62</sup> And so exploitation and greed are potential offshoots of capitalism, which seem to materialize when wealth-generation takes priority over the needs of others.

To conclude this section, I wish to point out that exploitation and greed, as features of American capitalism, carry the following habits: destructiveness and self-centeredness. In the following chapter, I will argue that these habits, when performed or embodied, emerge in the form of a culture-self whose psyche is warlike.

**Domination and control.** Given the nature of American capitalist culture, competition, as a pervasive concept in the marketplace, makes its way into the daily activity of Americans and their psyches. An example of how this mentality of competition can seep into the collective psyche of a culture may be found in sports.

Goudzwaard (1979) and others have attempted to draw sociological connections between

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<sup>62</sup> I add these italics as a disclaimer since this word is loaded with political and ethical baggage. I do not presume that the activities of the United States have contained moral superiority or have been as harmless as the word "civilizing" might inadvertently connote here. Nordholt's use of the term avoids this elitist presumption as well but, since I am not quoting him at length, I elect here to italicize the word in order to represent his and my perspective unambiguously.

economy and competitive sports. These thinkers often note that societies tend to give rise to sports that resemble the material-economic infrastructures of the society that they exist. So, for example, socialist cultures tend to gravitate towards sports with more communal dimensions such as soccer whereas capitalist cultures tend to popularize sports with a higher degree of variance and specialization among its players.

In soccer, the main “difference” between players is that they tend to either be more defensively or offensively oriented and this orientation determines their positional location and mode of gameplay on the field. However, soccer players, regardless of their position, generally end up doing the same thing on the field for the most part. The game is centered around their feet in relation to the ball. In baseball, on the other hand, each of the players can be described as having their own set of distinct skills designed for particular as opposed to general uses in the game. There are those whose job it is to pitch once every five days, those who pitch one inning at a time, those who come up to bat only in certain situations, those who hit for power, those who hit for average, those who do not hit at all, and so on; moreover, each position on defense has its own complexities and attributes that are far more varied and specialized as compared to the game of soccer. And so, baseball reflects the specialization that is brought to pass in the factory setting where individual workers are specialized to “do certain things” as part of a larger moneymaking system. Capitalist culture, in this paralleled mode of sociological analysis, gives rise to activities like baseball because its activities have similar thematic components, such as specialization and uniqueness of skill-set. The psychology of being a sportsperson often corresponds to the cultural psychology of the given person.

If sports are able to mimic the marketplace activity, then it stands to reason that something psychological takes place in capitalist cultures that creates certain forms of competition. This competition often materializes in the forms of domination and control whereby people are culturally shaped to understand their life activities as ways to manipulate<sup>63</sup> that which is around them. Jacques Gouverneur (1983) has described the domination and control that arises from capitalism as follows:

With the development of mechanization, capitalism domination becomes real. By this we mean the domination exercised by the capitalists controlling not only the ownership but also the functioning of the means of production. Now the workers are doubly subordinated to the capitalists: obliged to work for the benefit of the owners of the means of production, they also become instruments of the machine controlled by the capitalists (p. 164).

Gouverneur's remarks focus on the domination and control delivered at the hands of the capitalist; that is, the owner of the means of production. However, it is important to note that the workers, in being dominated and controlled, are also engaging in a shared activity with the capitalist. Those who fall victim to domination and control also embody ways of being that show them that the world operates in this way. So the controlled learns that the world is controllable and their psyche may then be shaped accordingly.

To conclude this section, I wish to point out that domination and control, as features of American capitalism, carry the following habits: conquest and manipulation. In the following chapter, I will argue that these habits, when performed or embodied, emerge in the form of a culture-self whose psyche is warlike.

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<sup>63</sup> Specialization in the capitalist sense can be linked to my use of the word manipulation here.



**Certainty, instrumental reason, and disenchantment.** Another important feature of American capitalism is the psychological posture of certainty and instrumental reason that is taken by its adherents. Below, I will discuss these two elements and bring this section to a close with a discussion on the related element of disenchantment.

Within technological societies, it becomes necessary for people to operate with an implicit orientation of sureness that is predicated upon particular forms of knowing. Stemming from and developing alongside the cultural value of progress, people in societies like America find themselves in need of adaptive rational abilities that allow them to keep afloat in the face of technological change. Certainty, in this sense, is a term meant to encompass technological know-how. This relates closely to the ways that Enlightenment thinkers have conceived of human uniqueness. For example, Benjamin Franklin observed that the human being is *homo faber*, or toolmaker (Applebaum, 1992). Marx too is often thought to have employed the notion of *homo faber*, observing that human beings were differentiated from other animals by virtue of their productive tendencies (Torrance, 1995). Though Marx never used the term *homo faber* he is nevertheless thought to have employed its essence in his analysis of human activity in relation to the socialized reality of production. Thus, post-Enlightenment political philosophies have been built upon the notion of humankind as an active, productive, and innovative species whose technological advancement necessitates an intellectual counterpart; hence, certainty and instrumental reason.

Certainty and instrumental reason, therefore, may be thought of as modes of thinking that sustain people as they navigate the terrain of ever-advancing technocapitalist culture. Instrumental reason may be thought of as information—a sort of

acquisition of a skill set—as opposed to sheer wisdom or knowledge. It exists not for any existential or spiritual sake of knowing or learning but as a means towards mastering the technological changes in culture. It is also impatient in the sense that the technologically driven thirst for certainty thrives on the rapidly evolving timetable of industrial necessity. People, therefore, become gatherers of information rather than lovers of a more aesthetic or spiritual sort of truth<sup>64</sup> because it is certainty about information that reaps socioeconomic benefits. Heidegger, in the middle part of the twentieth century, observed the sociological and existential dangers of this way of being. Heidegger (1950/1977) assimilates what he calls “Enframing” to what I have described thus far as instrumental reason when he writes:

Yet when destining reigns in the mode of Enframing, it is the supreme danger...Meanwhile man [sic], precisely as the one so threatened, exalts himself to the posture of lord of the earth. In this way the impression comes to prevail that everything man encounters exists only insofar as it is his construct. This illusion gives rise in turn to one final delusion: It seems as though man everywhere and always encounters only himself (p. 27).

Several paragraphs later, Heidegger (1950/1977) makes this existential point a bit more forcefully:

The destining that sends into ordering is consequently the extreme danger. What is dangerous is not technology...The essence of technology, as a destining of

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<sup>64</sup> This sociological issue is evident within American public school systems. When budgeting issues arise, the first aspects of the curriculum to be eliminated are almost always art, music, and physical education while math and science remain firmly in place. Why? Because those are the disciplines of instrumental reason. In other words, it is those modes of information that equip students to become “productive,” both as members of society and in terms of their own future earning potential. This is why parents so often try to talk their children out of becoming artists, saying things like: “There is no future in that.”

revealing, is the danger...The rule of Enframing threatens man [sic] with the possibility that it could be denied to him to enter into a more original revealing and hence to experience the call of a more primal truth (p. 28).

Heidegger's words are profound. First, it is important to notice that he sees instrumental reason (or Enframing) as a sort of narcissism in the sense that it only renders an encounter with oneself. By setting up certain rationalistic conditions up front, human beings end up coming face to face with only that which they themselves put into motion at the outset. Second, this orientation of certainty and instrumental reason (which Heidegger, in the second quotation, refers to as "ordering") blocks human beings off from a different form of truth (which he refers to as "primal truth"). What we can pull away from Heidegger's critique is that an overemphasis on instrumental reason orients human beings in ways that close them off from possibilities other than those that they themselves have preordained or set out for. Moreover, this emphasis on certainty and instrumental reason can engender a sort of spiritless and stale mode of being and becoming.

Heidegger's impugment of instrumental reason was adopted by the Frankfurt school and re-articulated with Marxist overtones. For example, critical theorists Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno viewed instrumental reason as the driving force behind humankind's descent into a contemporary form of barbarism (Alway, 1995). The nature of capitalist industrialization is one that places human beings in the situation of having to function according to certainty and instrumental reason. This produces a

psychological state in which people consider the only worthwhile modes of knowing as being those that can lead to productivity and personal gain.<sup>65</sup>

The result of certainty and instrumental reason as a primary mode of being is what Max Weber (1917/2004), borrowing a term from Friedrich Schiller, referred to as the “disenchantment of the world.” Heidegger saw it as constituting a turn away from “primal truth.” Weber, on the other hand, took this to mean that humankind, through its overemphasis and increased reliance on technological and calculative functioning, had become less embracing of anything in the way of mystery. Our previous discussion regarding progress reemerges here since disenchantment has a direct relationship with it. Weber (1917/2004) conveys this through a fascinating analysis of disenchanted human beings when he writes:

Let us consider this process of disenchantment...and, in general, let us consider “progress,” to which science belongs both as an integral part and a driving force. Can we say that it has any meaning over and above its practical and technical implications? This questions has been raised on the level of principle in the works of Leo Tolstoy...What he brooded about...was whether or not *death* has a meaning. His reasoning for this was that because the individual civilized life was situated within “progress” and infinity, it could not have an intrinsically meaningful end...Abraham of any other peasant in olden time died “old and fulfilled by life” because he was part of an organic life cycle...and because there were no riddles that he still wanted to solve. Hence he could have “enough” of

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<sup>65</sup> Some social psychological research has observed the positive correlations between extreme self-focus, narcissism, and violent acts (Foster, Campbell, & Twenge, 2003).

life. A civilized man, however...may become "tired of life" but not fulfilled by it (p. 13).

For Weber, disenchantment, which obviously comes hand in hand with an overemphasis on progress, represents a sort of spiritual-existential posture in life that catalyzes from an adamance on what we have thus far referred to as certainty and instrumental reason. A person's very sense of humanity and meaning can be compromised as a result of navigating technologically-driven, capitalist culture.

Weber's notion of disenchantment is a nice summation of the whole of this chapter. Each of the features of capitalism I have discussed up until now (individualism, fear, commodification, emptiness and alienation, progress, exploitation and greed, domination and control, and certainty and instrumental reason) can be seen as culminating in the existential state of disenchantment. Disenchantment produces a turn away from mystical ways of being and becoming in the world. This is an eminently crucial point to which we will return in chapter 5.

To conclude this section, I wish to point out that certainty, instrumental reason, and disenchantment, as features of American capitalism, carry the following habits: aspirituality and sanctimonious rigidity. In the following chapter, I will argue that these habits, when performed or embodied, emerge in the form of a culture-self whose psyche is warlike.

### **Clarifications and Closing Remarks**

I have ended each of the above sections by pointing out certain habits that are carried within the features of American capitalism that I have proposed. Moreover, I indicated that I will go on to argue in the next chapter that these habits, when performed

or embodied, emerge in the form of a culture-self whose psyche is warlike. Before closing out this chapter, some clarifications and considerations related to my discussion thus far are in order. First, I would like to reiterate that the above-mentioned features of American capitalism are features that are deeply embedded in the goings on of American culture. Certain remarks in the above sections may have appeared to be more economically grounded while others may have seemed more strictly cultural on a non-economic scale. This may have resulted in the tendency, on the part of the reader, to view these features as having the potential to impact only certain groups of people. And so I wish to be clear that I believe that these features bring with them habits that are ubiquitous within American culture. They impact everyone. In other words, they can be considered to be “in the air” as it were. They represent, to revisit Berger and Luckmann’s (1966) term, “what everybody knows,” in the sense that they are part of what it means to live as a physical being in American culture.

Language as a system of discourse, embodied habits, social practices, and institutionally governed modes of behavior are all suffused by these features of American capitalist culture. So while Americans undoubtedly operate out of their own subjectivity from the standpoints of socioeconomic status, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, geographic location, and so forth, they are nevertheless exposed to the same backdrop of capitalism as they navigate life. Their subjectivity must be enacted as a negotiation of the same American capitalistic “field” to use Bourdieu’s term. And so, these features have been intended to describe this field.

Second, I would like to shed light on something that has, up until this point, remained unarticulated, though perhaps implicitly detectable. This is the fact that I

believe American capitalism has the capacity to take on a sort of religious function if lived out to a loyal degree. Just as I have argued in the previous chapter for holism rather than dualisms, I continue to see no clean distinction between thought and behavior, faith and action. This means that religious beliefs need not be relegated to the intellectual realm of “the mind.” Rather, people’s religious “beliefs” may be detected through that to which they constantly devote themselves in active ways. If, for example, one verbally professes to be a world-class chef but never cooks and instead prepares microwaveable dinners every night, then their verbal profession is meaningless and their activity in turn speaks volumes. Similarly, the embodiment of capitalism can take on a religious significance for persons, even if they identify as ascribing to some alternative faith system. In this sense, the embodiment of capitalism may function as a form of religiosity in that it can steer those who “worship” its features away from the thorough worship of anything else. Therefore, the features of capitalism contained in this chapter may be construed as rituals of a religious variety. Due to their nature, however, they are rituals not commonly associated with religion in its classical, Western sense. These issues, as well as related ones, will be further touched upon in chapter 5.

And finally, it is important to reiterate the point I made at the beginning of the chapter: that my discussion of these features of American capitalism, for the most part, has intentionally not been applied to in-depth psychological analysis. With the exception of a small amount of interpretive discussion that has been provided, my aim in this chapter has been to spell out these features and derive from them habits that the American culture-self “does.” Rather than to draw out with any depth the implications of these habits, the goal of this chapter has been to set the stage for a discussion of how

these features and their related habits correspond to the American psyche of war. In the following chapter, therefore, I will draw connections between the methodology advanced in chapter 2 and the features described here in chapter 3 in order to show that American capitalism, when embodied, shapes and gives rise to the psychology of war. To reiterate then, the primary purpose of this chapter has been to indicate the features of American capitalism along with their concomitant habits.



## Chapter 4

### The Shaping of Warlikeness: American Capitalism and the Psychology of Violence

*To be prepared for war is one of the most effective means of preserving peace.*

--George Washington (1790)

*When we talk about war, we are really talking about peace.*

--George W. Bush (2002)

*How rarely do we face a person as a person! We are all dominated by the desire to appropriate and to own.*

--Heschel (1965, p. 61)

The purpose of this chapter is to coalesce the major threads of my discussion thus far in order to put forth the central argument of this project: that the American psyche of war emerges out of the culture-self's embodiment of capitalism. I have built towards this argument in the following way: first, in chapter 1, I outlined and described some of the major theories on human violence and war. These theories were placed under the categories of the innateness view and the socialization view. I showed that both categories are problematic in that they presume a dualistic self (as being both split between mind and body as well as between culture and self) and are largely reductive and deterministic in suggesting that human violence occurs somewhat causally based either on biological drives or social stimuli. Next, in chapter 2, I presented what I consider to be a better methodological way of conceiving of human psychology; one that is holistic and presumes no clear distinction between notions of culture and notions of selfhood. I

referred to this as the culture-self and argued that, since the psyche is a non-reductive and emergent property of bodily practice, it matters to a great degree what one actively does in their embodied behavior. This led to the implication that, psychologically speaking, human beings are what they do. From there, in chapter 3, I refocused my discussion onto the scope of this project by asking the question: what is it that the American culture-self does? To that end, I outlined some core features, along with their associated habits, of what I referred to as American capitalism and suggested that they lie central to what it means to embody, or “do,” American culture.

### **Aim of the Chapter**

I will now need to show that the embodiment of the aforementioned habits associated with American capitalism is commensurate with, and emerges in, a psychology of violence and war. In other words, this chapter’s aim will be to demonstrate how a culture-self that performs the features of American capitalist culture is concurrent with a culture-self that has the potential for war, both through action and attitude. However, it is important to first take note of two considerations.

The first consideration is that I continue to view warlikeness, in this sense, as an action or attitude whose manifestation is potentiated through a psychology that is shaped by certain culture-selves. These warlike culture-selves may be shaped in any number of ways depending, of course, on context. As such, it is my task to show how the psyche of an American culture-self, through the embodiment of capitalism, can emerge containing the potential for making decisions to enter, partake in, or tacitly support war. This leads to the second consideration: this very quickly becomes a matter of ethics, imagination, and choice. A culture-self in fact makes the ethical choice to be warlike by either

enlisting in the military or by morally supporting the military. The notion of the culture-self does not imply that human beings are automatons who passively become what their culture shapes them to be. Rather, the culture-self is a being that, through the process of being and becoming, comes to possess psychological infrastructure that potentiates modes of ethical decision-making.

This potential is predicated upon a sense of psychological imagination that opens the person up to what is possible, what is necessary, what is morally right, etc. What one is able to choose is far different from what one ultimately decides to choose. So, the American culture-self may have, through shaping, become an agent capable of war but this has no causal bearing on whether or not this culture-self actually becomes a warrior or war-supporter. Those potential results would be matters of ethics, imagination, and choice for each respective culture-self. Thus, the culture-self methodology is not reductive or deterministic because it assumes neither that a disembodied mind nor a mere biological predisposition contain causal power over the behavior of human beings. Instead, culture-selves may be thought of as beings whose embodied life potentiates the capacities of psychological imagination and subsequent moral decision-making. This is a matter of free choice rather than causal determinism.

Conflict resolution expert John Paul Lederach has touched on the importance of this ethically-charged imaginative capacity. Referring to it as “moral imagination,” Lederach notes that for peace to occur, we must be able to envision ourselves in new webs of life, even those that include enemies (Lederach, 2005). Lederach’s vision is indeed admirable. However, we might ask what it is that shapes or potentiates our very imaginations. What are people capable of imagining, or not imagining? This connects us

back to the philosophical issues addressed in chapter 2. If our psychological states are shaped by our contextual embeddedness in conjunction with the linguistic and performative aspects of cultural modes of being and becoming, then it stands to reason that so too are our imaginations. If our psyches are embodied, then our moral imaginations are framed within that which we repeatedly do and thus that which we continually shape ourselves into being and becoming. And so, a warlike psyche is shaped by our embodied, cultural modes of being and becoming and this in turn gives rise to a culture-self that can potentially become an agent of war through action or attitude. But this warlike potentiality actuates itself only in the event of a decision to do so on the part of the culture-self. What human beings do shapes their psyches and, in turn, their imaginative capacities.

### **Culture-Self as Non-Reductive**

Thus, and to reiterate some points I have already begun to make, if we are going to employ the notion of the culture-self as a new way of conceiving of the problem of violence and war, we must note that our discussion should be careful to avoid the pitfalls of the theories described in chapter 1. Namely, and to repeat, it is vital to mention that the culture-self is an ethical self with freedom to imagine and subsequently choose. The self is not, as the innateness views suggested, a private, closed, disembodied entity with inherent violence as an attribute. Nor is the self, as the socialization views would suggest, a disembodied mind whose violent behavior is contingent upon environmental stimuli and its interaction with them. The self is, instead, a culture-self that is not reducible merely to the goings on of culture. The culture-self becomes what it becomes through the embodiment of culture; it then possesses a psyche that, while still dynamic and subject to

change and alternative ways of being and becoming, has the potential for free ethical choice. The culture-self, as something that is shaped by that which it continually does, may or may not embody cultural ways of being that can give rise to a violent or warlike psyche. Whether or not it does, however, is a question of potentiality rather than determinative causality. No culture-self, no matter how it has been shaped, is ever causally or behaviorally doomed to that which it has been shaped into since it is in a constant state of being, becoming, and, perhaps most importantly, choosing. The culture-self is not a closed, deterministic system but an open and dynamic one. And so a culture-self that ends up manifesting as violent or warlike does so out of a two-leveled process consisting first of that which it has done, or has been shaped into, and second of that which it continues to do, or chooses to do based on that shaping. Violence and warlikeness is, therefore, a non-reductive potential of the culture-self rather than a behavioral inevitability predicated on antecedent psychological shaping.

Some personal anecdotal remarks and subsequent questions will help to illuminate and further clarify this non-reductive, irreducible, quality of the culture-self. During my undergraduate studies, I frequently encountered military recruiters on campus. They usually sat in areas of heavy student foot traffic (such as near the library) greeting students and inviting them to obtain more information on a U.S. military career. Watching the interactions that students had with the recruiters was fascinating to say the least. I would often sit and “people watch” these interactions from afar. Though I could usually not hear the words being spoken, I could tell that the military recruiters were usually the ones doing most of the talking and the prospective recruits were usually doing quite a bit of head-nodding. The interactions that I would observe would sometimes result

in the students' signing a form, presumably with at least the desire of obtaining more information on the U.S. military.

Now, for the purpose of straightforward clarity, let us imagine these interactions in the following terms: (a) A college student is walking about the campus where he or she studies, presumably without the intent in that particular moment of considering joining the military; (b) The student is then approached by a military recruiter who speaks to him or her for several minutes; (c) By the end of this conversation, the student is so ready and willing to further consider enlisting in the U.S. military that he or she signs up for a future interaction.

There are many questions that can arise from this. One might, for example, be curious as to what the respective student's political perspectives are. One might also be curious as to the content of the conversation: what exactly did that recruiter say to pique the student's curiosity so? Did they offer a much-needed financial scholarship? Indeed, these are legitimate questions. However, I submit that, in light of the culture-self methodology I am arguing for, these are sociologically circumstantial questions that are secondary to the more primary questions of psychological formation. Namely, I believe that the more crucial and compelling question to ask is this: what is it about the psyche of the student that gives him or her the potential to listen to the words of a military recruiter for several minutes and respond with head-nods and the almost instant decision to consider enlistment? In a more pointed fashion we may ask: what sort of culture-self can so quickly shift from walking to or from a college classroom to considering joining an organization that may command them to murder others? In other words, the issue is not so much political affiliation or conversational tactics (though these are important

considerations) as it is psychological potentiality. What type of culture-self is needed to make the choice to be warlike?

As mentioned in the introduction and already thus far in this chapter, these questions apply not only to those who enlist but also to those who so ardently support military action through attitude, be it through loyal patriotism or whatever else. Just as we can ask about the psyche of the culture-self who becomes a soldier, we can similarly ask about the psyche of the culture-self who supports the military and bolsters it as “a global force for good<sup>66</sup>.” This leads to sociological considerations on a more pervasive cultural level. For example, why is it that one can rarely watch an American football game these days without being asked, either by in-game commentators or through commercial advertisements, to thank and support military service people? Why is it that children are asked (and often required) to “pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America?” What does it mean to pledge allegiance? Might the daily, ritualistic embodiment of such a linguistic and performative aspect of American educational culture lead to a psyche that considers it unpatriotic to not support overseas murder? And so, the American psyche of war needs not be considered only an emergent psychological state of those who are enlisted. Rather, it exists among everyone who performs the cultural ways of being that give rise to this sort of psyche. The American psyche of war, therefore, is a potential that manifests itself within anyone who embodies violent modes of being and becoming, such as those of American capitalism. This psyche is what potentiates the ability to choose warlikeness, whether through action or attitude.

### **Clarifying Remarks**

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<sup>66</sup> This is the current slogan of the U.S. Navy.

Prior to moving forward with drawing connections between what was mentioned in the previous chapter as features and habits of American capitalist culture and the emergence of a warlike culture-self, I would like to offer some clarifying remarks. First, I would like to reiterate what was mentioned in the introduction—that though the methodology I propose is one that I believe to be universal, the application of it is indeed not. In other words, I believe (as I argued in chapter 1) that the theories suggesting that violence and war are either inherent to human nature or results of the private self's interaction with social stimuli are insufficient. If, therefore, the methodology of the culture-self that I proposed in chapter 2 is viable, then we are justified in claiming that, psychologically speaking, violence or warlikeness always emerges based on holistic embodiments of culture.

This is a universal claim. All human beings become warlike by embodying cultural ways of being that shape them as such. That much was argued for in chapter 2. The question of how this happens, however, cannot be argued universally and must instead employ particularized cultural analysis. We must not make universal claims about warlike culture-selves. Instead, warlike culture-selves must be understood through the lens of their particular cultures. And so, the aim of this chapter is to apply the universality of the culture-self methodology to the particularity that is American warlikeness. Warlikeness among non-American culture-selves would therefore need to be the focus of other, independent projects whereby sociocultural analyses could be offered based upon the particularities found in alternative contexts.

This relates somewhat to another necessary set of clarifying remarks. First and foremost, I would like to convey a rather substantial degree of cautiousness regarding



what I am putting forth in this chapter. Namely, I wish to be clear that I do not presume to have, in what appears below, exhaustively “figured out” the American psyche of war. What I submit in this chapter will be a set of observations that, in my view, fuse together the notions of being and becoming, embodied psychology, and American capitalism to suggest that warlikeness is something embedded in the American culture-self. I do not put these observations forth with heavy-handed certitude that assumes there is nothing more to be said about the American psyche of war (or American culture for that matter). My discussion consists of what I consider to be exploratory theoretical reflections. Though I possess a significant degree of conviction and confidence in these theoretical formulations, I do not to any significant degree believe that they encompass all that there is to the discussion.

And so, it may be that there is more to the shaping of the American psyche of war than American capitalism as I present it in this chapter. In fact, there probably is more to the discussion. My main intent in this dissertation has been to reorient the way that the psychology of war is understood and talked about by psychologists in particular and social scientists, philosophers, and lay people in general. If I have convinced the reader up to this point that war is not inherent to the human condition or a mere interactive response to social stimuli but rather a matter of psychological formation through an embodied culture-self, then I consider myself to have already succeeded. What has been, and remains to be, discussed from that point on is an attempt at offering some cultural illustrations of what the American version of the culture-self “does” that possibly sheds light on its warlikeness. If another theory were to offer a more plausible and complete account of how the American psyche of war emerges from out of the performative

culture-self, I will be pleased to revise my position and see the conversation improve in that direction.

Therefore, my key clarifications prior to continuing on are that: I am very confident, based on my argument stemming from chapter 2, that the culture-self methodology is a universally applicable one that can help to improve social science that pertains to psychology and violence; this universal culture-self methodology needs to, as suggested in its own terminology, be applied culturally so that contextual psychologies of violence can be born; and finally, I do not, in my ensuing analysis of the American culture-self, presume that I have necessarily tapped into the most complete or accurate way of understanding the American psyche of war. Rather, what appears below comprises a working philosophical-cultural-psychological theory of what shapes the American psyche of war—a working theory that, despite my emphatic confidence in it, is most certainly open to adjustment and improvement.

### **Violence and the Culture-Self**

I have attempted to make clear up to this point that I perceive the problem with theories on psychology and violence, among scholars and laypeople alike, to be as follows: culture has been viewed as secondary, peripheral, and incidental to discussions on human psychology rather than as primary, central, and formative. I have tried to show that it is a mistake to conceive of the self or the psyche as a private, self-contained, disembodied entity that merely encounters culture. Instead, the self and culture are mutually constituting, indistinguishable forces that locate onto the human being as a culture-self. The dualistic conceptions of personhood that give rise to the innateness and

socialization views neglect cultural questions altogether or, at best, place them up for secondary considerations.

In the United States, this becomes evident when discussions about violence take place on a social level. The failure to rightly see human beings as culture-selves becomes apparent when examining public discourse on issues such as gun violence, a lively and controversial topic in America today. The absence of culture-self thinking is evident in the very way that people engage in this discourse. For example, when tragic school shootings happen, the first questions that people tend to ask are those pertaining to the shooters. News reports usually center on the shooter's psychological condition. Investigations begin on the shooter's mental health, his relationship with his parents, his possible motives in killing other students, etc. This mode of discourse is often the first course of action. "Who is this person?" people want to ask about the shooter. The self (in this case, the shooter) is spoken of as an atomized, private, self-contained individual rather than as someone embedded and formed within a cultural web.

This excessive focus on a "privatized self" usually persists for several days until the discussion becomes quite dissatisfying and eventually run out of steam. At that point, people tend to begin asking broader sociological questions such as "do guns kill people or do people kill people?" Notice that even this sort of question, although having the illusion of taking culture into consideration, fails to adequately acknowledge the culture-self paradigm. The question itself contains dualistic language: either selves (i.e., individuals) kill people or it is the guns that are the problem. The question also—in its abstract, universal use of the term people—fails to account for people as always being concretely embedded in particular cultures. So, the main reason that this sort of question is so

difficult to answer is that it is the wrong question based on a non-holistic, trans-contextual conception of human behavior in relation to culture. So to the question “do guns kill people or do people kill people” the culture-self methodology would enable the following answer: “People who embody a gun culture (like America) have the potential, both psychologically and physically, to kill people. It is those people that kill people.”

By investigating this socially relevant example, I hope to have reiterated for the reader that the problems associated with abstracting the self as something split from that which it culturally does are in fact real problems and they persist not only in contemporary social science but also in today’s public discourse. The persistence of these wrongheaded discussions prevents us from asking the right questions that may actually lead to and/or engender conversations pertaining to peaceable psychological formation.

### **Culture-Self as Doer**

Finally, prior to moving forward with the main intent of this chapter (a discussion connecting the threads of American capitalism with the psyche of war), I wish to reiterate some key methodological considerations that I attempted to establish in chapter 2 that serve as the basis for what I go on to argue below. This mainly concerns the charge that, psychologically speaking, human beings are what they do. That is, human psychologies can only be understood through the corresponding interpretations of how practical, embodied modes of being and becoming function. The psyche, in its qualitative subjectivity, emerges out of that which the culture-self partakes in, that which it does. For example, a “psychology of dishonesty” would hardly be understandable by making assertions about how something like an abstract, disembodied, transcultural mind could possess attributes of dishonesty. Rather, a psychology of dishonesty would need to be

seen as a concrete, culturally embedded, non-reductive, emergent quality of a mind whose characteristics have been shaped and formed by embodied habits of dishonesty. To make sense of a dishonest psyche, one would need to investigate the culture-self's specific practical embodiments (such as habitual lying, deceptive behavior, trickery, internalized dishonesty as an existential source of meaning, etc.) rather than merely formulating universal theories on how "human nature" possesses the trait of dishonesty. Psychology, therefore, should not be spoken of apart from considerations of what the possessor of that psychology does.

Because I intend to employ this mode of understanding psychology in the sections below—particularly with regards to the American psyche of war—it will be helpful to provide a brief recap of how this methodology was arrived at in chapter 2. Furthermore, some corresponding points of clarification will be offered. I began that chapter's discussion by invoking the work of Foucault. There, I touched on the importance of rejecting notions of human nature in that they are far too abstract and transhistorical. Furthermore, Foucault's thought elevates the role of *power-knowledge* as a foundational mode of understanding the human being as a social body embedded in particular webs of discourse. Foucault views discourse (i.e., language) as the primary way that bodies become "practised" [sic] (Foucault, 1975, p. 138). Embodied habits and language, in the Foucauldian view, are necessarily linked. So, language is a key ingredient in how human beings come to understand themselves in the context of particular sociocultural realms. Social bodies come to psychologically be and become that which they are through that which they say and do.

From there, I entered into an exploration of social constructionism and cultural psychology. By engaging the work of thinkers like Cushman, Berger and Luckmann, Mead, Shweder, and others, I argued for a holistic conception of the human being as culture-self. This approach to human psychology assumes no dualistic distinctions between mind and body or between self and culture. An implication of this is that human psychology should not be explored in ways that neglect social context, contextual history, cultural particularity, and so forth. Conceiving of human beings as culture-selves provides further basis for a rejection of abstract, universal notions of human nature and thus steers conversations about the human psyche into the direction of particular sociocultural realities.

This led to a discussion on embodied psychology. In following the paradigm already discussed through Foucault's emphasis on the social body, I explored the work of thinkers who have written extensively on the role of embodiment in relation to psychic life. Merleau-Ponty's message is that psychological perception is always unified with one's bodily activity in the world. The very qualitative nature of the psyche is therefore inextricably connected to and shaped by one's particular bodily behaviors and habits. I also presented Bourdieu's notion of habitus and described its similar emphasis on the role of the body. His thought, like Foucault's, views language as a key element to the embodied life. Furthermore, Bourdieu's *habitus* is something that becomes, like language when it is mastered, largely unconscious. This (unconsciousness) is a vital point to which I will return shortly. I also discussed the work of Lakoff and Johnson, as well as Noë, in an effort to further elucidate the interconnectedness of psychological life with external, embodied, environmentally-based realities. These theories illustrate for us, among other

things, that the culture-self is not abstract but concretely situated and psychologically shaped by its embodied and linguistic modes of being and becoming in the world.

And finally, I explored the work of Wittgenstein on language. Wittgenstein's thought carries two major implications. First, it further reiterates what Foucault, social constructionists, and cultural psychologists teach us: that the dualistic split between self and culture is unviable; that the self is not a privatized, self-contained entity but rather a publicly-shaped, dynamic, and contingent being. Second, Wittgenstein's work shows us that language and action are necessarily linked. Language takes on its form through its correspondence with action. Thus, for many,<sup>67</sup> the culture-self, as always embedded in particular contexts, acquires psychological formation through the concurrent outplaying of language and embodiment. Given that the private self, as Wittgenstein shows, is a myth, the public self, as culture-self, comes to psychologically be and become what it is through that which it does.

These discussions and their logical conclusions, which were unpacked in chapter 2, provide foundation for the claim that, psychologically speaking, human beings are what they do. Because culture-selves are not able to be described through abstract notions of human nature and are always historically and contextually embedded, the embodied dimensions of being and becoming take on a significant role. Thus, the subjective human psyche emerges from out of embodied and linguistic modes of being and becoming. These occur both through spoken and unspoken action. In other words, practical and embodied ways of being and becoming manifest linguistically and non-

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<sup>67</sup> Some human beings are born without the capacity for language, whether through cognitive encoding or expression. I am careful, therefore, not to assume that language is a ubiquitous human ability. Even if one out of seven billion human being lacks linguistic capability, it becomes oppressive to essentialize and claim that language is humanly "universal."

linguistically. And it is vital to remember, as Bourdieu's analysis makes clear, that this embodied psychological functioning quite often becomes unconscious in the "field" of cultural experience. And so, what one does, through word and deed, shapes the qualitative nature of their psyche in ways that become second nature. Just as athletes, after much training and practice, perform their sports without conscious energy devoted to the rules of the competition, culture-selves, after embodied, linguistic, and habitual "mastery" of the culture, perform their psychological lives in largely unconscious ways.

Along these lines, I wish to return to Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* as something that becomes internalized as an unconscious knowledge of the cultural "field." The features of American capitalism (and their related habits) that I will go on to discuss in conjunction with the psychology of war should be viewed as modes of being that are not necessarily strictly active, strictly verbal, or strictly performative. Rather, culture-selves should be thought of as being containers of cultural modes of being and becoming that sometimes contain thematic meaning. These thematic meanings can be unconsciously internalized while still being "lived out." While thematic meanings of this sort can certainly be manifested in specific habits, specific words, or particular physical embodiments, they do not necessarily need to be. So, for example, a culture might contain the value or practice of "bravery." In such a case, to embody (or to "do") bravery may not necessarily display itself as a specific act or practice of courage (such as, say, standing up to a bully); nor must it necessarily emerge in particular words (such as, say, courageous speech). The cultural value of bravery can instead manifest through unconscious internalization or embodiment of a different sort: that which is on the level of thematic meaning. One might, to use Bourdieu's term, "unconsciously" live out the



cultural meaning of bravery without doing so through a specific act or mode of language. In this case, the person would still be “doing” bravery without enacting tangible verbs associated with bravery. He or she would still be psychologically shaped by the ethical values embedded in the cultural notion of bravery through the unconscious living out of its thematic meanings.

To be sure, “doing” culture in this sense does often take form in particular habits and words; my intent in conveying all of this is only to point out that it does not have to. A culture-self’s “doing” culture does not always manifest in directly observable ways since the embodiment of thematic meanings can function as an implicit existential state akin to what Bourdieu described as unconscious habitus.

With this being said, I will now proceed forth with my discussion of American capitalism and the American psyche of war. I will do this by revisiting the features of American capitalism from the previous chapter. Along the way, I hope to argue convincingly that the psychological ethics (whether through specific habits, particular modes of discourse, thematic meanings, or, in most cases, all of the above) that emerge from the embodiment of American capitalism are the same psychological ethics, or lack thereof, that inform and shape American warlikeness, both through action and attitude. In other words, the psyche that emerges out of the practical embodiment of American capitalism is the same psyche that endows culture-selves with warlike potentiality.

To reiterate, then, the psychological argument that human beings are what they do can be demonstrated either through the use of particular habits, particular modes of language or discourse, or through existential embodiments of thematic meaning. The latter (thematic meaning) is often less tangible despite its still being grounded in what the

culture-self does. In what follows, I will spell out the connections between American capitalism and the psychology of war as explicitly as possible. In light of all that I have just put forth regarding the “culture-self as doer,” the reader should keep in mind that not all of what appears below constitutes “habits” in the literal sense of the term. At times, the “doing” of American capitalism is described in terms of what I have referred to above as thematic meaning, which is often unconscious and incapable of being reduced to the outplaying of this or that action or linguistic expression. Nevertheless, I will conclude each section by providing a concrete example that attempts to steer the reader toward considering how such cultural habits connect directly to warlikeness. That is, I will attempt to briefly illustrate in each section how these lived habits within American culture are linked directly to the American psyche of war.

### **American Capitalism and the Psyche of War**

**Individualism.** A great deal of work in the fields of psychology, anthropology, sociology, and philosophy has been devoted to the notion of individualism. Given that my aim is a cultural analysis of the American psychology of war, it is perhaps best to begin with an example highlighting how individualism pervades the public arena. Examples are aplenty, but I will use one: the socio-technological evolution of audio music and its consumption. Music consumption has evolved concurrently with the leaps and bounds made by technology. We have seen, over the span of just over a century, music go from being enjoyed predominantly in live settings, to being frequently played on vinyl records, then to audio tape devices like 8-tracks and cassettes, then to compact discs, and now (most recently) to digital MP3 files. One way to conceptualize these shifts is simply to chalk them up as progressions in technology that make these varying

mediums of music consumption possible. But to leave it there would be to miss the nuanced importance of sociocultural force. Technology, after all, does not operate within a vacuum. It evolves not only based on advances in capability but also, in large part, according to the needs and demands of the consumers. Thus, making sense of something as seemingly innocuous as music consumption might tell us important things about the types of people being produced by the sociocultural sphere. In turn, it is those very people who go on to produce technology capable of certain applications. Mutual constitution of self and culture, in this sense, is seen as manifest through a technological outlet.

Along these lines, we do well to ponder the sociocultural values that are implicit within something as seemingly unrelated to human psychological life as these aforementioned music mediums. For example, one can observe that the above described evolution of audio technology demonstrates that music becomes more and more individualized. Listening to live concerts, for instance, is usually done communally with very little personal freedom or choice being exercised on the part of the listeners/consumers. Personal listening devices like vinyl records, cassette tapes, and compact discs begin to veer away from this communalistic music medium. And most recently today, we see that people are able to not only be completely detached from communal, live music experiences but they can also now purchase one song at a time (only their favorite tracks rather than, say, the whole album) given MP3 capability. Moreover, sound itself has become more privatized. Live amphitheaters and concert halls have slowly seen decline. People used to play music on boom-boxes whereby others might intentionally or unintentionally hear the sound. Nowadays, people are increasingly prone to affix their

personal listening devices into their ears. And so we see that music itself has become more privatized as a result of the Western culture-self's technological need for individuality and personal satisfaction.

This cultural example sheds light on how deeply pervasive cultural values can be. Individualism is not just something that intellectuals discuss in political philosophy seminars; it is an everyday reality of Western life in general and American life in particular. This reality locates itself on the psyche of individuals (culture-selves) and shapes their expectations, their ethics, their preferences, their values, etc. Cultural artifacts, such as music technology, are mutually constructed by the culture-self paradigm and often become automatic, second nature, and unquestioned. And so a generation of music consumers begins to value their own individuality and personal taste in song choice more than they value going to a live concert and being surprised by something the musician decides to play. Individualism pervades most everything.

So, how might individualism psychologically shape a person into a culture-self that is capable of warlikeness? In the previous chapter, I pinpointed self-prioritization and indifference towards others as habits that derive from individualism. In other words, the American culture-self that “does<sup>68</sup>” (or performs, or internalizes) self-prioritization and indifference towards others produces the warlike psyche. One possible practical embodiment may have to do with a particular conception of self-prioritization that concerns possessiveness and the pursuit of personal property. Stemming from the

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<sup>68</sup> It should be noted that from here on, I will intentionally use the words *do* or *does* in a manner that may at times be grammatically incorrect (e.g., a *culture-self* that does indifference towards others). Though these sorts of sentences read as grammatically peculiar or unsound, I elect to employ them nevertheless because they capture the crux of what I intend to convey in clear, explicit terms: That the American *culture-self* “does” certain practical embodiments. This flows directly out of the message that was reached in Chapter 2: That, psychologically speaking, we are what we do. Hence, the language of “doing” is made explicit from here on in this chapter.

individualism described by John Locke, C. B. MacPherson has referred to this as “possessive individualism” (Leiss, 2009, p. 62). It is the type of individualism that places a high degree of emphasis on the control of one’s personal goods and assets. This can result in an understanding of society being little more than a series of market relations (Patell, 2001) whereby one’s own needs take priority over those of others.

There are two main offshoots of this mode of individualism, the first of which directly relates to the doing of self-prioritization. Self-prioritization falls directly in line with the core spirit of individualism in which personal rights are valued over the flourishing of the common good.<sup>69</sup> This pervades the psychology of people both in terms of domestic and international ideology. People under this mentality come to grow accustomed to particular freedoms of the personal sort. Once this way of living in the world takes hold of oneself, it becomes more difficult to encounter others with empathy or compassion. Others begin to be viewed not only as atomized individuals in their own right, but their lives begin to be of little or no concern for the next person. In America, for example, it is not uncommon for people to walk right by persons in need in public places without even making eye contact with them. A self-prioritized mentality enables this. “That person must have done something to be in that position,” people tend to think. This thought stems from an individualistic outlook whereby a responsibility towards others lacks prioritization. Individuals are perceived as being free to pursue their own pursuits; as a result, the lives of others easily become perceived as insignificant to most people. If pervasively embodied, I submit that this is an inherently violent practice and emerges in a violent psychological disposition. A self-prioritized psyche that enables someone to walk

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<sup>69</sup> Batson, et al. (1999) demonstrated that excessive emphasis on oneself (egoism) was correlated with lower levels of concern for the common good.

by a person in need without so much as looking at him or her is a psyche that shapes and enables dehumanization of other sorts. The culture-self that does self-prioritization and indifference towards others is one whose psyche emerges as capable of the disregard for others necessary for warlikeness.

To that end, we might ask: what does it take to kill another human being? I would argue, in the company of others such as Montagu (1984), Dower (2009), and Short and Wolfgang (2009), that some level of dehumanization is necessary in most cases. In its milder forms, this manifests as indifference towards others. Certainly in the case of war, the enemy is often illustrated as being something quite “other” or foreign. Military language has a way of distancing soldiers from the reality of what they engage in. For example, referring to fighting in war-zones as being “in theatre” unburdens the soldier from having to call their activity what it really is: “killing other humans.” Instead, the “in theatre” language enables soldiers to conceive of their behaviors in ways that are detached from reality. War, in this conception, is not thought of as war but rather as akin to being an actor in a play. Indifference towards others and dehumanization of this sort must usually be part of the soldier’s psychological capacity prior to entering into warfare<sup>70</sup>. It is a capacity fueled by a defense mechanism that runs in accordance with a mode of protecting oneself from the truth of that which they do<sup>71</sup>. The embodiment or doing of both self-prioritization and indifference towards others helps shape this psychological capacity by delivering the constant, incessant, sociocultural lesson that no

<sup>70</sup> Otherwise, they are susceptible to developing trauma through the internalization of their own dehumanizing activity. The horrors of war are devastating and *should* cause human beings to become deeply disturbed. Reacting with psychological trauma is healthy, not disordered. Why should a human being not develop PTSD after witnessing and/or committing horrific acts?

<sup>71</sup> Sigmund Freud’s daughter, Anna, developed this conception of defense mechanisms. The type alluded to in this sentence is known in analytic terms as *denial*. See *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense* (1937).

other person matters as much as I do. Thus, the extreme self-emphasis of individualism is a cultural artifact that, when embodied, spoken of, and lived out on a daily basis, shapes the American psyche of war by producing self-prioritized people who are capable of indifference at best and dehumanization at worst.

The second offshoot of this (possessive) mode of individualism results in the sociocultural emphasis on the seeking and gathering of resources. This offshoot is a bit more tangible than the dehumanization of the psyche described above in that it more directly impacts one's personal activity as well as one's political ideology. Nevertheless, it is tightly related to self-prioritization and indifference towards others. Americans tend to live in a milieu in which material wealth and possessions play a major role in one's being considered successful. Consider the following ideas commonly taken for granted in American culture: the "American Dream" is typically thought of, in its imagery, as manifesting in a house, a white picket fence, a car, etc.; the saying "time is money" equates one's momentary sense of existence to that of currency; the most cherished holidays, Christmas and Thanksgiving, revolve around the exchange of goods and the overconsumption of food, respectively. These examples highlight the way that materialism permeates the American psyche.

To return to the point of possessive individualism, this sort of materialism relates directly to the pursuit of personal property and goods. Again, the prioritization of self becomes elevated and done. This takes place literally in ways that are more ecological and political in nature. A collection of individuals who are driven by personal needs for property are likely to behave in ways that reflect this insatiable appetite for resources. It is estimated that the United States, despite comprising only five percent of the global

population, consumes up to twenty-five percent of the world's energy. In order to maintain this lifestyle (as well as the rise in American population expected in the decades ahead) resources must be continually sought after. This is where the literal political impacts enter into the picture. The United States acquires much of its fossil fuel energy through its presence and dealings in the Middle East. And so, the American value of individualism made manifest through the habits of self-prioritization and indifference towards others generates possessive needs that must be accommodated. On a very tangible political scale, this often translates into wars being fought for sake of resources rather than on any ideological or moral grounds. If the United States was merely in the business of protecting human rights around the globe, then we would expect to see an equal amount of military intervention in countries that do not have oil as a natural resource. If delivering "freedom and democracy" to countries that need it is the prevalent force of U.S. foreign policy, then why not declare a war on Sudan rather than Iraq? Political contradictions like this suggest that the war psyche does appear to be shaped based on the increased individual "need for more" in the way of property and personal resources rather than out of some moral sense of justice.

A daily embodiment of a culture that elevates the individual over the communal produces a psychology that possesses the potential for war. Americans who live and maneuver within value systems that place their own needs above those of others constantly perform the indifferent modes of being towards others that make possible the psychological decision to dehumanize in the context of war. This psychological capacity for dehumanization is very likely prerequisite for the deliberate decision of killing others. Moreover, individualists' incessant needs for the acquisition of personal goods shapes the



psyche that drives foreign policy, which in turn leads to wars fought over resources. We begin to see, therefore, that individualism, through the doing of self-prioritization and indifference toward others, is a feature of American capitalist culture that shapes the American psyche of war.

**A concrete example.** Individualism, and its core features of self-prioritization and indifference toward others, plays out in American culture quite consistently. One example can be seen in the ways in which people react to homelessness quite commonly. I often notice that homeless persons in public places are literally neglected and ignored. Homeless persons sitting on sidewalks begging for money tend often not to even be looked at, let alone given money or assistance. Even when confronted with verbal pleas and requests, many are quite happy to walk by a homeless person without even glancing in their direction. The justifications for such behavior reveal the deeply engrained individualism pervading American culture. Comments such as: “They probably did something to deserve it;” or “They should just get a job” illuminate the extent that people feel no sense of responsibility toward others. Instead of being personally implicated in the socio-systemic sources of homelessness and/or joblessness, people tend not only to avoid self-blame but also to place blame onto the other. This is a doubling of individualism in which the self and the other are viewed as isolated from one another, even to the point of interpersonal ethics.

What does it take to walk by another human being who is in need without even looking at them? It takes a certain mode of self-prioritization and indifference toward others. These features of individualism shape a psyche that enables a view of others as expendable, disposable, and deserving of any poor circumstances in which they find

themselves. The expendability of other human beings, once internalized as a mode of being and becoming, can easily transfer into the psychology necessary for war. A literal ignoring and neglecting of the life within another is a cornerstone of killing in the context of war.

**Fear.** As stated in the previous chapter, a certain level of fear is necessary and healthy. If, for example, I were to be lost in the jungle, my fear of being attacked by predators would probably not be unfounded. On the other hand, fears can be irrational and baseless. The distinction between rational and irrational fears is indeed helpful but, for the sake of our discussion, is unnecessary to adopt. This is because what I am more interested in exploring are the culture-self's psychological ramifications of living with fear, no matter how rational or irrational it may be. What sort of psyche does the constant embodiment of fear shape or give rise to? In American capitalist culture fear tends to center, again, on notions of resources and the scarcity thereof. Fear of this sort can be debilitating in that people feel powerless in the face of ever-changing social and technological life. This cultivates an ongoing sense of economic worry. In turn the culture-self's embodiment continually rests on practical manifestations of hyper-vigilance, docility and powerlessness, and hyperactivity. This is because a capitalist culture that engenders fear produces people who live with senses of alertness and vulnerability, which in turn can result in overactivity in efforts to calm these senses.

But again, what do these practical embodiments, or psychophysiological states, tend to result in with regards to a person's psyche? In other words, how is it that the American culture-self that "does" hyper-vigilance, docility and powerlessness, and hyperactivity produce the warlike psyche? It is important to note that one effect may be

related to a person's inability to function well interpersonally. French political scientist Dominique Moïsi has written: "Excessive fear is dangerous. An obsession with fear, either real or calculated, is a serious handicap to one's ability to interact with the world of others, either internally or externally" (Moïsi, 2009, p. 93). Fear, according to Moïsi, can negatively impact one's interpersonal potential regardless of whether the fear is of the rational or irrational sort. We can speculate that this occurs based on an inability to deal with others in ways that extinguish levels of fear. In other words, being fearful of someone may take over the ability to relate to that person in a way that is actually devoid of fear. This sort of fear may be thought of as a doing hyper-vigilance. Hyper-vigilance closes us off in this sense. For example, the child who "is afraid" to eat the food he is so convinced of not liking is, through his hyper-vigilance, closed off to the parent's pleas about the food's potential goodness and benefits. In a similar way, a person who culturally embodies the American capitalist feature of fear in the form of hyper-vigilance may come to be closed off to others in a way that enables him or her to behave destructively towards them. Fear potentiates a hyper-vigilant unwelcoming of others and in turn functions at the heart of a psychology necessary for war.

There are obvious ways in which fear and war go hand in hand. For example, being in battle surely elevates one's levels of anxiety and leads to a fear of personal safety. However, here we must be careful to maintain scope of the question under consideration. Rather than exploring the psychology of wartime, we are interested in exploring how the embodiment of certain practical modes of being shapes the psychology necessary to become warlike. The result of this investigation would have to illuminate pre-war psychological modes of being and becoming. In this regard, the American culture

of capitalism, locates itself on the psyche of individuals who in turn are seen to possess the potential to be warlike.

In this vein, another practical offshoot of fear can be seen through docility and powerlessness and the resultant hyperactivity that follows. Capitalist culture, by virtue of its ever-changing technological and informational nature, can instill a constant sense within people that the world is going to pass them by. If human beings feel as though the structure of the world around them is in drastic, continual flux they will in turn feel compelled to activate and mobilize themselves in some way. This lack of stillness comes to be as an amalgamation of hyper-vigilance and powerlessness. People in ongoing states of alertness of and vulnerability to the events of their environment are likely to become overactive (perhaps even paranoid) as a compensatory strategy. Fear can serve as a motivator to action (Henry, 2010). Practically embodying the world in this way engenders a sense that people must always be “ready for action” lest they be destroyed by the unexpected nature of their surroundings.

The embodied doing of these rhythms of life makes for warlikeness. A world in which one must actively react to vulnerability with alertness is a world that gives rise to a warlike mentality that potentiates ethical adages like: “Kill or be killed.” This sort of paranoid philosophy makes sense only to a mind that has already been shaped to see the world in these fearful terms. A person who has practically embodied fear is a person capable of seamlessly internalizing the psychological dimensions of war. Thus the doing of fear—through the embodiment of hyper-vigilance, docility and powerlessness, and hyperactivity—is a feature of American capitalist culture that shapes the American psyche of war.

**A concrete example.** As noted above, fear begets hyperactivity. The emotional dysregulation of embodying a constant state of fear provokes people to seek resolution through action. The deep sense in which competition pervades American culture illustrates the connections between fear and domination of the other. Americans are taught constantly to improve their own marketability in the job force through education, networking, specialization, etc. Seeking this improvement ensures that people can outperform others in the marketplace. In this sense, a fear of not being able to secure and/or maintain employment evokes a sense of overactivity. This overactivity is designed, at its core, to advance oneself over and above others. Advancing oneself over and above others is a psychology that pervades warlikeness as well. American wars are commonly fought not merely out of a sense of self-protection (or even self-preservation) but more out of a sense of self-flourishing. Through their speeches, U.S. presidents often remind the world that their country is the greatest and most innovative in the world and that this vision will not be compromised. We thus have a similar mode of being and becoming at play as with the everyday marketplace of America. Americans, through both their educational and economic shaping as well as in their geo-politics, see themselves as agents of advancement in competition with others. Fear, in this sense, lies at the core of the competition-laden psyche that fuels Americans daily and shapes them toward warlikeness.

**Commodification.** What does it mean to do commodification? To commodify is to adopt and live in accordance with a particular view of reality and others as means to ends rather than ends in themselves. This view of the world is integral to American capitalist culture. Commodification can be associated with the notion of objectification

which may be thought of as violating the dignity of a human being by treating it as though it were a mere thing (Chia, 2009). And so navigating a capitalist culture of commodification gives rise to embodied habits of objectification that can be directed towards people (others) and the world.

What sort of psychology emerges from the doing of this world-objectification and other-objectification? In order to propose an answer to this question, it may be helpful to use economic terms. When people physically experience themselves as being commodified or objectified in the context of capitalist culture, they operate in a world that perceives people and nature as entities that are bestowed with nothing more than utilitarian and labor value (Lucas, 2011). In turn everything becomes objectified. Doing life in an objectified manner engenders a psyche that perceives the world and others as, to use yet another economic term, expendable. A practical, embodied lens of expendability produces a psychology that makes possible the destruction of other human beings. When human beings are viewed as means to ends rather than as ends in themselves, it becomes fairly easy to in turn justify killing them. In fact, it is arguable that only from within a psyche that commodifies and objectifies others is killing even a viable ethical possibility.

It is interesting to note how this shows up in ethical discourse. Students in introductory level philosophy courses are often presented with utilitarian thought experiments asking them to critically think through the question of whether or not they would allow one person to die in order to save five persons. These critical thinking exercises are problematic on the whole because they are far from normative. They force students to imagine far-fetched, hypothetical scenarios that they will likely never

encounter. Nevertheless, it is useful to consider how the exercise taps into the notion of objectification.

The dilemma of making the decision as to whether or not to let one die for the sake of saving five is typically made more difficult when students are asked not, as in the first place, if they would intentionally pull a lever that led to the death of the one person in order to save the five but if they would intentionally push the one person to his or her death. This compounds the difficulty because it presents a deeper level of humanity and agency into the scenario. In the first case, commodified language enables students to think only in terms of numbers. In the second case, they are confronted with the interpersonal task of contemplating the person's life/death in a way that feels more human than what a mere number-crunching consideration could account for. One takeaway here is that the doing of other-objectification shapes a psyche that is capable of treating human beings as things, numbers, or objects to be thought about critically rather than beings to be honored ethically. Embodying capitalist modes of being and becoming that commodify, through the doing of world-objectification and other-objectification, shapes the American psyche of war by teaching culture-selves that people are expendable. Perceiving nature and human beings as disposable entities is part and parcel of the American psyche of war because the killing of others rests firmly on the psychological capacity for such an outlook to begin with. Therefore, to do commodification is to psychologically shape oneself into an agent capable of warlikeness.

**A concrete example.** In the case of commodification (and objectification), I would like to provide an example through a personal experience. Several years ago, I

attended a talk given by a well-known American political commentator who explicitly supports much in the way of U.S. foreign policy. The political science department sponsored a talk at a Los Angeles area university and much of the audience was comprised of young undergraduates. Over the course of an hour, this gentlemen argued that what the United States needed was, in fact, more weapons for the sake of military defense. He argued (through instilling much in the way of fear no less) that many nation-states wanted to attack the U.S. and that devoting more money and resources to the development of a defense weapon budget was the answer to such a threat. Along the way, he made sweeping, disparaging remarks toward Islam and renounced it as a “sick ideology” and noted that there was a reason “we are out there in the Middle East cleaning things up.” He also noted that over 3,000 Americans died on September 11th and used this as a justification for the last decade of U.S. sanctioned war. He appeared to neither express any concern nor regret about the recent invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan.

By the end of the talk, I was quite upset. I decided to stand up and question/challenge the speaker. One of my remarks referred to his appeal to the “number” of American casualties on September 11th. “Sir, I join you in lamenting the loss of innocent life on that fateful day,” I said, “but at the same time I am wondering if you could reflect on how innocent Iraqis might feel about the countless lives that have been lost in their country since 2003.” Before I could even take a breath after uttering this sentence, I noticed that the speaker shrugged his shoulders and shook his head. His nonverbal behavior was akin to someone shrugging after accidentally spilling some water; the physical embodiment of the words “no big deal.” I reacted, “Did you just shrug that off, sir?” He responded, “Yes, look you have to crack some eggs to make a cake.”



Eggs and cake? I thought we were talking about people. What enabled this man to speak of and think of human beings as means to an end? How could he objectify and commodify them so? How could he shrug at the thought of innocent people being slaughtered in war? I could not help but wonder if this was part of his psychological profile as an American. The same mentality that enjoys a two-dollar tee-shirt without taking into account the objectifying, abusive conditions under which such a tee-shirt was made seemed to be at play here. A two-dollar tee-shirt is “no big deal.” As such, the lives damaged by sweat laborers who built that tee-shirt are too “no big deal.” One who embodies such commodifying habits can easily shrug off the death of people amidst war as similarly being “no big deal.”

**Emptiness and alienation.** Closely connected to the notions of commodification and objectification are embodiments of emptiness and alienation. Alienation stems from existential realities of capitalism that have already been touched on, such as docility and powerlessness. A person who becomes alienated from their own activity begins to live out a sense of meaninglessness and insatiable dissatisfaction because their sense of being takes on a monotonous trend. The sense of absence in one’s purpose and/or meaning can very easily lead to utter relativism and even nihilism. Nietzsche’s solution to the problem of meaninglessness and dissatisfaction was to overemphasize the notion of power becoming increased to its maximal capacity through aesthetics (Casey, 2002). This sheds light on how the doing or living out of meaninglessness can quickly begin to give rise to the need for an expression of power. And so capitalism, in its overemphasis on consumption and constant resourcefulness, creates emptiness and alienation as modes of being. These modes of being cultivate an embodiment of meaninglessness, which in turn

begs for the expression of power in order to nullify the existential void brought on by that very emptiness.

The meaninglessness and insatiable dissatisfaction of the empty, alienated self can thus manifest in terms of dominative living. The will to power, to use Nietzsche's term, arises in order to extinguish the flames of utter nihilism<sup>72</sup>. Empty selves must exert power in order to create meaning in a world that is perceived as meaningless. This often takes form in ways that function with the indignity of others. For example, it is arguable that war is in fact an expression of aesthetic life that fills the void of an empty, alienated self. Another way to put this is that a psyche that comes to perceive itself as without meaning seeks meaning in the form of ultimate self-assertion and, in its most extreme sense, even in the form of violent warfare. Chris Hedges has described war as something that can "...give us what we long for in life...it can give us purpose, meaning, a reason for living" (Hedges, 2002, p. 3). Thus war may in fact be a source of existential meaning that is adopted as a response to the meaninglessness and dissatisfaction encountered in capitalist culture that engenders senses of emptiness and alienation. This in turn manifests as willingness, perhaps even a need, to assert power over others in the form of indignity and destruction.

The American culture-self—as a doer of meaninglessness, insatiable dissatisfaction, and indignity of others—is therefore a being that seeks existential fulfillment that is often delivered through the need to exercise power over the world and over others. This can, and often does, take the form of warlikeness because the psyche that seeks fulfillment through power closely resembles the psyche with potential of

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<sup>72</sup> It is this consideration that often leads to Nietzsche's being credited as the progenitor of at least one version of existentialism. This is because he emphasized the notion that people tend to *make* meaning in response to their own perceived meaninglessness. This is also what fuels his critique of religion.

achieving that fulfillment through the destruction of others. And so, embodying emptiness and alienation through the doing of meaninglessness, insatiable dissatisfaction, and indignity of others, shapes the psychology of war within the American culture-self. A person whose psychology seeks nourishment through his or her own will to power is a person who possesses the potential and willingness to acquire that nourishment through acts or attitudes of war.

**A concrete example.** I once asked a person who enlisted in the military at the age of 20 to explain their decision. The person replied “to be a part of something bigger than myself.” This person was both in touch with and out of touch with his own existential state as being one devoid of meaning. He went on “my life has felt so plain for so long. I want to do something that people will remember and respect.” I was struck by the non-political nature of these remarks (at least on their face). Something about this person’s experience as a 20-year-old American was meaningless. He now felt that in order for his life to “mean something,” he had to join the military. A psychology of emptiness and alienation from oneself necessitates a satiation of a void. The military recognizes this with slogans such as “Be all you can be in the Army.”

**Progress.** As a nation whose declared beginnings occurred late in the eighteenth century, the United States’ political-philosophical roots are firmly planted in Enlightenment principles. Among these principles lies the broad idea of progress. In its Enlightenment sense, notions of progress find company with notions of economic growth (Nisbet, 2009). In this sense, the connections between capitalism, both in its economic and philosophical modes, and progress become obvious in a rather foundational way. The “land of opportunity” is thus typically viewed as such insofar as it supposedly provides

people with paths to economic progress. Indeed this sounds innocuous enough in theory. Furthermore, it should be noted that not all expressions of progress are negative; many, in fact, are not. However, the unconscious internalization of the thematic meaning of progress can incite senses of incessant exertion and ingratitude within and among those who live under its influence; these habits can shape a psyche of warlikeness.

This post-Enlightenment mode of progress is largely scientific in its form and brings with it a pervasive insistence on progress in all regards. What this results in is productive constancy and a lack of stillness. There are obvious arenas of life in which this is a productive and life-affirming force (e.g., most forms of medicine). However, as a generalized mindset, the practical embodiment of progress can bring about incessant exertion. In other words, culture-selves who internalize progress as an existential value can and often do exhibit an inability to remain inert: their faith in progress compels them to press forward in life, always seeking bigger and better forms of control over nature and over others. Perseverating in this way shapes culture-selves and renders them almost incapable of gratitude of what lies before them since what lies before them is always subject to, and in need of, alteration. Culture-selves whose daily modes of being and becoming are predicated upon the perceived need for ongoing improvement are shaped in ways that close them off to appreciation. The enjoyment of that which one has becomes lost amidst the distraction of acquiring something beyond, something superior. The American capitalist attitude, in this vein, is not “be appreciative for everything you have and treat it with care” but rather “things can always improve if you push forward and never settle.” This notion of upward mobility has been, in the history of the United States, conceived of as an alternative to immobility (Cullen, 2003). That is, America seems to

possess a historically enacted aversion to existential stillness. This aversion can engender an insistence on advancement while catalyzing a subsequent ungratefulness for that which already exists. And so, the thematic meaning of progress, when lived out, can give rise to a psychology of incessant exertion and ingratitude.

Incessant exertion and ingratitude are key characteristics of the American psyche of war. Whether fought for the sake of resources or the spreading of nationalized ideologies, wars tend to rest on the inability to remain still. The psychological ethics of pressing forward, advancing, and not appreciating that which is already there, are, to a large extent, the same psychological ethics that fuel the engine of war. An internalization of progress, as a core feature of American capitalism, shapes the psychology of culture-selves who are capable of warlikeness. Acts and attitudes of American warlikeness are therefore potentiated from out of a psyche that has already been shaped, through embodied modes of “doing” American culture, to view the world and its inhabitants as objects to be subjugated to the idea of progress.

**A concrete example.** Progress may be viewed as the inability to remain still. Hyperactivity may be seen in concrete, financial forms. For example, Americans are commonly told to begin working for money at an early age and to maintain this inflow of capital in order to set up a sense of financial security for retirement. Thus, many spend their lives hyperactively pursuing money, storing that money away, seeking more money, and so on. Financially speaking, people seek progress. Their psychological state is one constantly fueled by the fear of shortage. “What if I do not have enough?” they ask implicitly and explicitly. This enacts an active, constant state of seeking more and discourages satisfaction with what one already has. From many standpoints, this can be

likened to war. To name just one, the economic foundations of certain wars contain parallels. Just as American people will proactively perform certain less than desirable actions in order to make money (i.e., work a job that brings little to no passion or satisfaction just for the paycheck and retirement security) they may also engage in less than desirable acts in order to secure certain resources (fighting a war for oil, or for a sense of continued prosperity). This perhaps brings to light new considerations of the commonly-employed term of “fighting for one’s country.” Holding on firmly to the continued opportunity for progress is, however subtle, a warlike psychological state.

**Exploitation and greed.** In the context of American capitalism, exploitation and greed can easily give way to enactments whose essences are akin to those of destructiveness and self-centeredness. The result is a psyche that is capable of warlikeness. Ruth Sample has described exploitation as an interaction “with another being for the sake of advantage in a way that degrades or fails to respect the inherent value in that being” (Sample, 2003, p. 57). From this we see that exploitation relies on an over-emphasis on oneself over the needs or dignity of others. A posture like this can be described as inherently destructive. In the Marxian sense, exploitation comes hand in hand with the commodification of the proletariat at the hands of the capitalist. The capitalist seeks the accumulation of more wealth and this self-centered greed translates into a cycle of increased exploitation of the laborer. Destructiveness and self-centeredness, therefore, come with the territory of capitalist landscapes.

To do exploitation and greed is to be destructive and self-centered. How might these thematic embodiments shape one’s psychology? In order to answer this question, it is helpful to strip the concepts down to their most basic form. To begin with, let us focus

on exploitation. When culture-selves embody exploitation, they literally assert their needs over those of others. In other words, their daily practical and thematic-existential ways of living rest upon an elevation of personal wellbeing over that of others. This is the same practical, existential, and ethical stance necessary for warlikeness. Earlier, I drew a connection between dehumanization and warlikeness. Here, a similar connection can be drawn in the context of destructiveness towards others. In order to kill, or support the killing of, another human being one needs not only the ability to dehumanize others but also to perceive them as lesser. This hierarchical interrelation is shaped by the embodied habits of exploitation whereby people are seen as means to achieve the personal ends of other people. This emerges as a psychology of destructiveness.

Greed also comes with this territory and thrives on a deep sense of self-centeredness. American capitalism cultivates a culture of accrual, accumulation, and profit. One of the most central consequences of such a culture is the symptom of human greed. Greed steers priorities such that the proliferation of one's own needs becomes paramount. The value of self-sacrifice is virtually nonexistent in such a culture since the prioritization of self-improvement precludes such a value from ever being a possibility. Doing greed is therefore an embodied mode of being and becoming that shapes a psychology of selfishness and self-centeredness. In the context of warlikeness, this sort of prioritization of self seems to be a vital consideration. Killing, or the attitudinal support of killing, in the form of warlikeness necessitates a prioritization of self over others. This psychological potentiality can be shaped by practical modes of life that center on exploitation and greed, which engender destructiveness and self-centeredness.

**A concrete example.** Using others (exploitation) for personal gain and the exponential increasing thereof (greed) is a pervasive in various threads of American capitalist culture. This may be seen through the lens of business ownership and private capital. Business owners and high-ranking executives often profit greatly while those who make their institutions function do not. An example may be seen in fast food franchising where owners and executive profit financially while paying the vast majority of their workers minimum wages (which are state mandated at that). Corporations like McDonald's see billions of dollars in revenue while paying not only their own employees but also the very farmers from whom their food comes with unfair wages. This is a direct outplaying of exploitation and greed, which has its war parallels. On average, soldiers are paid modest wages and are hardly properly treated and/or taken care of upon returning from war (financially, medically, and psychologically). In this vein, war may literally be seen as a business with employees who are exploited by doing the dirty work. The soldiers in this case may, just like the fast food employee, be partaking in war based out of financial necessity more so than personal desire. This is not to say that there is not a large amount of employees who enlist for other reasons (indeed there is) but rather to demonstrate that a concrete parallel may be seen in terms of American capitalism and exploitation and greed.

**Domination and control.** Capitalist culture, in many ways, can be characterized by the mechanistic ways in which it organizes nature and people as parts of nature. In order to accumulate wealth, maintain the modes and the means of production, and progress forward, American capitalism must, to at least some degree, rest on its ability to change the world. This gives way to the associated, value-laden enactments of conquest



and manipulation, which can apply both to nature and to human subjects. Critical theorist Herbert Marcuse (1964) integrates concepts of scientific and technological reason with the adurance on domination and control when he writes:

The social position of the individual and his [sic] relation to others appear not only to be determined by objective qualities and laws, but...seem to lose their mysterious and uncontrollable character; they appear as calculable manifestations of (scientific) rationality. The world tends to become the stuff of total administration, which absorbs even the administrators. The web of domination has become the web of Reason itself, and this society is fatally entangled in it.

And the transcending modes of thought seem to transcend Reason itself. (p. 169)

Here, Marcuse's indictment of technological capitalist society signals several things for us. In the first place, it highlights the type of "reason" that begins to count as truth. In capitalist culture, what counts as true knowledge tends only to be that which operates in accordance with pre-determined, objective laws. Moreover, he connects the embodiment of these value-laden modes of being with notions of controllability and domination. For Marcuse, individuals who operate in technological-capitalist social webs come to see the world and others as things that can be subordinated. The over-insistence on constant domination and control of the technological and economic sort cultivates a psychological sense of conquest over and manipulation of the natural world and its inhabitants, including human subjects.

This psychological potentiality (conquest and manipulation towards the natural world and human subjects) brings with it warlikeness. War, through action and attitude, carries with it the prerequisite psychological potentiality of conquest and manipulation.

Warriors and war supporters must possess the capacity to view nature and other human beings as “things” to literally be conquered and manipulated at best and obliterated and destroyed at worst. As such, the doing of American capitalism—which brings with it embodied habits and the internalization of thematic meanings of domination and control—shapes and gives rise to, through its ethical underpinnings of conquest and manipulation, a psyche of war.

**A concrete example.** Dominating, manipulating, and presuming to control nature shapes people with warlike mentalities. An example may be seen in the ways that ecosystems are destroyed strictly for anthropocentric needs. Trees, animals, the ozone layer, are often destroyed indiscriminately strictly in order to advance “human flourishing.” A frivolous attitude toward nature and the world manifests as destruction so that one may control his or her ends. The crisis of global warming is evidence of this. American consumerism and capitalism often rests on the need for conquering and manipulating others, from oceans to rain forests to animals and humans. The mentality that places personal needs above those of others (or even above the whole system) is the same mentality that potentiates the decision to make or support war. According to the psyche of war, the destruction carried out through war is worth the ends achieved by it because of the propensity toward domination and control.

**Certainty, instrumental reason, and disenchantment.** Certainty and instrumental reason, as I argued in the previous chapter, create a sense of anthropocentrism. By invoking premeditated criteria for what passes as knowledge and establishing boundaries therein (what Heidegger refers to as Enframing) human beings set themselves down paths which, through an overemphasis on sureness, overtake their

existential states of being and becoming. For Heidegger, this constitutes a sort of escapism whereby a primal level of truth and existence become masked by the intellectual quest for certainty. The lack of mysteriousness to and through this mode of life can give way to disenchantment.

The practical embodiment of these existential phenomena can engender states of aspirituality and sanctimonious rigidity. What does this mean? It means that human beings who live by these notions of reality begin to internalize a thematic existence that fosters a lack of spiritual grounding in the world. Moreover, these human beings become constrained by their own self-righteousness by virtue of the aforementioned reliance on their own modes of understanding the world. Certainty begets more certainty or, at least, the need for more certainty. Such culture-selves can tend to have less tolerance for transcendence, mystery, and expressions of knowledge that differ from their own. In this sense, they become aspiritual and rigidly sanctimonious.

Along the lines of this aspiritual sensibility, Goudzwaard (1979) has posed the central questions a follows:

We might ask ourselves...*what breakdown of the spiritual background of medieval society was minimally required so as to prepare the soil in which the seed of capitalist society as we know it could take root?* Or, to put it differently, which spiritual barriers related to the main characteristics of medieval society had to be removed successively before modern capitalism, via the industrial revolution of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, could become the vanguard of western culture? (p. 9).

For Goudzwaard, then, it appears that activation of key tenets of capitalism necessitate the deactivation of certain spiritual or religious tenets. This analysis primes us for further consideration of the disenchanting effects of embodying certainty and instrumental reason as the primary (and most treasured) modes of human activity.

As a product of this doing of aspirituality and sanctimonious rigidity, human beings lose deeper, transcendentally-grounded senses of existential thematic meaning. Instead, focusing on certainty and instrumental reason shapes psychological ethics that value mastery of the external world over the spiritual experience of being mastered by the external world. Doing certainty and instrumental reason shapes people towards psychologies that value power imposition. This posture, I submit, lies central to the American psyche of war in that it is a posture of assertion as opposed one of peaceable reception. Violence is often justified through a sense of certainty about others. A stance of “knowing” rather than “seeking” is often what enflames violent rhetoric and conduct in the context of geo-political warfare. In short, certainty can be thought of not necessarily as a predictor for killing but, at the very least, as a major enabler and prerequisite of it. American culture-selves who embody and internalize existential meanings of certainty and instrumental reason—through the enactment of aspirituality and sanctimonious rigidity—are culture-selves whose disenchanting psyches emerge as capable of warlikeness.

**A concrete example.** It may be argued that certainty, and the sense of mastery it brings with it, is a powerful driving force behind warlikeness. In order to thoughtfully and intentionally harm and/or destroy something, a level of certainty and disenchantment with it is necessary. The United States has the highest incarceration rate of any developed

nation in the world. This not only tells us something about crime rates, but also the degree with which we are sure of the status of people behind bars. We are sure that they belong there; we assume that we have adequate rationale in order to explain locking certain people away from the rest of society. Losing a sense of enchantment, mystery, and ultimately hope, with and toward others is what enables this sort of certainty. It we can label someone a criminal then we know precisely what to do with them.

American society, as evident in the incarceration issue above, is used to defining people rather than being open to them. It lies at the cornerstone of the capitalist agenda as well. Often times, the first words uttered upon meeting someone at a party are “What do you do for a living?” rather than “What are you passionate about?” This comes from a need to define people rather than be impacted by them. It comes from a place of instrumental reason rather than open reception or receptivity. If we know what people are, we know what to do with them. This is the same mentality that drives warlikeness. Once we define the other (i.e., the enemy) declaring war is an easy next step. Thus, a psyche that is accustomed to defining others through the mechanisms of certainty, instrumental reason, and disenchantment, is the same psyche that has the potential to be warlike.

**Summarizing remarks.** In this section, I have attempted to show how the features of American capitalism that I first introduced in chapter 3 carry with them embodied habits and internalized, existential, thematic meanings that give rise to a psychology of warlikeness. Warlikeness, both through action and attitude, has herein been thought of as a psychological potentiality of culture-selves rather than as an innate aspect of something like an abstract human nature via a disembodied mind or as a

response resulting from socialization and/or societally-based stimuli. These observations have invoked the methodology proposed in chapter 2, which argues for a holistic conception of personhood whereby the commonly held dualisms between mind and body as well as between self and culture are rejected. Moreover, the emphasis on embodiment as the mode of psychological formation employs the notion that, psychologically speaking, human beings as culture-selves are what they do. In putting forth the preceding reflections I have attempted to argue, therefore, that as doers of capitalist culture, Americans embody and internalize habits and senses of meaning that emerge in a psychology of war. Thus to do American capitalist culture, in its purest sense, produces culture-selves capable of warlikeness through action and attitude.

### **Outliers: Unwarlike American Culture-Selves**

As was briefly mentioned in a previous chapter, there are exceptions. All of what has appeared above comprises a particular set of modes of being and becoming for American culture-selves which can emerge as a warlike psyche. I have already strongly alluded to the reality that these sociocultural embodiments are “in the air” for Americans to implicitly encounter on a daily basis. For example, most Americans can hardly refrain from using money, either through paper bills or credit cards, as a quantifiable representation of human activity and worth. Most people, in effect, end up embodying the cultural sentiment that one’s active work has an ultimate teleology of acquiring goods. Thus, the temporal bulk of many people’s existence (working to make a living during most of their waking hours) becomes deeply entrenched in the cultural “truth” that what one does is only valuable insofar as it potentiates what one has or can have<sup>73</sup> (e.g., young

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<sup>73</sup> For a magnificent social-critical commentary on this phenomenon, see Erich Fromm’s (1976) book *To Have or To Be*.

people are taught that “being successful” means having a good job and earning a respectable income). But, despite the pervasiveness and depth with which these sorts of sociocultural habits or values operate in American life, some find themselves resistant, if not impervious, to them. How do we account for those for whom warlikeness does not emerge in American context?

The main answer I wish to advance is perhaps unexciting from a philosophical and sociocultural psychological perspective. In other words, there is nothing terribly complicated about the existence of culture-selves whose psyches have emerged with ethical capabilities and imaginative capacities that so blatantly go against the grain of American ways of being and becoming that have been explored in this chapter. As culture-selves in their own right, those who are psychologically unwarlike may be said to have occupied a larger bulk of their sociocultural embodiment (or habituation) in contrary ways. That is, the embodied habits that shape their psyches must be qualitatively and quantitatively different. A person of peace is likely to partake less in warlike modes of being and becoming. And if not, that person would have a moral compass that allowed for the sort of self-examination that named their actions for what they were and, in so doing, insulates them from the unconscious shaping of warlikeness. For example, Martin Luther King, Jr., though American and not unexposed to the cultural realities of American capitalism, possessed a ethical commitment to nonviolence that had to do either with the embodied-habitual or narrative-meaning dimensions of his life that trumped any unconscious warlike formation. His adamance in refusing to meet violence with violence or his insistence on responding to injustice with, say, a peace march signifies embodied action whose concurrent psychological framework shaped him more

strongly than other forms of American life would have seemed to. King's sociocultural embodiment, therefore, was quite obviously against the grain in that his culture-self was fundamentally and qualitatively different. To rest this case, it seems rather obvious that he was not a "typical American."

And so, exceptions do happen. Not all American psyches are socioculturally vulnerable to the warlike shaping of American capitalism and the manners through which these embodied modes of resistance materialize certainly vary. So, the unexciting response to the question: "What about those Americans who do not end up warlike?" is "Those people are shaped differently by embodying cultural modes of being and becoming that render them less permeable to the violent shaping of American capitalism." Such persons literally are different and form embodied meanings and existential positioning in life that emerge in an unwarlike psyche. This may seem like begging the question, but only if one presupposes a dualistic stance of inquiry to begin with. By presuming no clean distinctions between psychological makeup and embodied action, one can logically and coherently claim that one culture-self can differ from another on the grounds that they do different things, and thus are phenomenologically different from one another. This is not, therefore, to beg the question but rather to observe concrete difference and alterity.

**The psychology of habit and automaticity.** To make this point a bit more clearly, it may be helpful to briefly explore the theoretical landscape of the matter. The psychological infrastructures of people, and thus their ethical capacities, are beginning to be thought by certain social scientists as automatically emerging from the actualities of habit. It is important to note that "automatic" is a term being used in the non-behavioral



sense. That is, actions, attitudes, and psychological ethics are not to be thought of as mere responses to external stimuli and thus mechanistically or deterministically automatic. Rather, internalized meaning occurs as much of human behavior “becomes highly automatized” insofar as “consciousness has delegated the onset and proceeding of behavior to the unconscious” (Aarts & Dijksterhuis, 2000). That is, what one does habitually actually shapes an unconscious infrastructure whose conscious life becomes almost unreflective and automatic. This does not lead to the conclusion that human beings are automatons but simply indicates that what one continually and habitually partakes in does much to form (or inform) the contours of conscious life. In this vein, embodying American capitalism in an unreflected, habitual way can give rise to automatic psychological characteristics of warlikeness. An American person whose psyche seems unwarlike will be so from out of a different source of habituated automaticity.

To return to the issue of exceptionality, this, of course, leaves room for the possibility of Americans whose habitual ways of being are largely contrary in terms of what I have explored in this and the previous chapter. Moreover, one’s ways of being and becoming (one’s habits) can shape them in such a way that negotiating the features of American capitalism results in a sort of non-integration. In other words, American people who are unwarlike likely find themselves to be this way by virtue of psychological infrastructures that prevent them from assimilating as habits the sociocultural rhythms that otherwise result in the automaticity of American warlikeness. In short, some culture-self frameworks resist the fruition of others. This adheres to the culture-self paradigm or methodology, but, in a way that takes seriously alternative ways of being and becoming.

This means that different cultural (and thus psychological) ways of developing and becoming indeed emerge. From Martin Luther King Jr. and the Amish to Howard Zinn and the Vietnam War protestors of the 60s and 70s, we do in fact observe that America has contained, and continues to contain, culture-self textures that spurn the formation of warlikeness that might otherwise emerge from the embodiment of American capitalism. And so, American culture-selves who are not warlike emerge from ways of being and becoming that shape them to be either resistant to or separate from (or both) the warlike ways of being and becoming implicit in American capitalism. Such exceptions would simply be found to embody a different set of habits and embodied modes of personhood. Some culture-selves “in” America embody warlikeness while others do not.

### **A Land Built on Blood**

It would be highly problematic to conclude a chapter on the psychology of violence and warlikeness in America without at least mentioning the historical realities of the land itself along with the sociopolitical configurations associated with that history. In this vein, two glaring historical facts that are steeped in concrete systems of injustice, oppression, and utter violence should be pointed out: (a) the United States, in its very sociological lineage, contains a history of genocidal obliteration upon stolen land, and (b) the United States, from the time of its inception, contains a history of slavery that it is still reeling from. These two historical realities are of course not secrets. However, they rarely receive the attention they deserve in the context of sociocultural analyses about violence and warlikeness in America. And so given that the purpose of this dissertation is to explore the psychology of American warlikeness from the standpoint of a culture-

based methodology, it stands to reason that the material-cultural realities of American history should not go unmentioned.

We should, therefore, pay attention to the sociopolitical reality of America's violent history through these two abhorrent domains (Native American obliteration and African slavery). It is beyond the scope of this project to provide a detailed exposition of this history. Instead, by simply providing an admittedly too brief mention of these atrocities, I hope that I will simultaneously provide the reader with an opportunity to pause and consider the ways in which the core essences of the aforementioned values (or lack thereof) of American capitalism (i.e., exploitation and greed, domination and control, and commodification) may actually be detected through these concrete examples (the colonization of natives and the enslavement of Africans) of historical dehumanization that too often go undiscussed. Historical embodiments go a long way in shaping our current psychological ethics and modes of perceiving. We do well, therefore, to consider the ways in which oppressive and destructive American history is still unfolding today on implicit and unconscious cultural levels.

Sociologist and historian James Loewen writes that while Christopher Columbus is celebrated as an American hero, the truth of the fifteenth century expeditions he carried out is based on an intricate combination of militarized arms races, domination of others for the sake of material gain and religious reassurance, and literal declarations of war against noncompliant American Indians (Loewen, 2007). Mythic images of pilgrims and natives sharing a Thanksgiving meal after the "discovery" of the new world callously gloss over the realities of invasion and murder that took place. These actions of warlikeness, as Loewen makes us privy to, are situated in the psychological outplaying of

notions of progress, technological advancement, military might, exploitation and greed, and so forth. The essence of capitalism runs deeply through American history and it occupies a bloody space of dehumanization. From the standpoint of African slavery, we can make similar observations. Human beings were literally captured, kept and transported in cages, and the few that survived were sold for large profits (Zinn, 2003). African slavery can be defined as the dehumanization and destruction of some humans at the hands of other humans for the sake of material gain and personal security. This emphasis on individual success, domination, financial profit, and indignity towards others rests centrally to the history of slavery in this country. The historical embodiment of these modes of being in all likelihood engendered a psychology of warlikeness whose sociological residue lingers explicitly and implicitly within the culture of the present day.

And so, through these gruesome historical realities, we see that the capitalist spirit of human destructiveness is far reaching and dates back to the historical roots and inception of the United States. It very well may be, therefore, that the psychology of war is evident through the embodiment of particular, material, and historical culture-self modes of being and becoming rather than in some abstract, timeless notion of human nature. If, psychologically speaking, we are what we do, then perhaps the United States and its culture-selves do well to contemplate and lament what its founders have done.

## Chapter 5

### Mysticism as Peace: Towards a Theological Reorientation of Receptivity

*What you seek is seeking you.*

--Rumi (2014, p. 184)

*Deeper meaning resides in the fairy tales told to me in my childhood than in any truth that is taught in life.*

--Friedrich Schiller (2003, p. 5)

#### Preliminary Considerations

Prior to embarking on the final chapter of this dissertation, I see it necessary to pause and make some preliminary remarks that will help situate the contents of this chapter. I hereby ask the reader to make the following consideration: Chapter 1, as the chapter outlining theories on human psychology regarding violence and war, in its feel and sensation, may have seemed inadequate. You (the reader) may have noticed that the chapter, in its content, felt stiff, rigid, overly technical, and unplayful. Perhaps this can be attributed to my own presentation of the concepts and my accompanying writing style therein. However, if it did in fact occur to the reader that those theories were missing something (even if not on a philosophical level), I suggest that we pause to consider what that “something” might be. Namely, I believe that the stiffness of that chapter sheds light on the fact that such modes of human psychology (with particular attention towards violence, of course) miss the mark of what makes us feel most alive, real, present, and thus perhaps, most human. Such technical theorization misses the mark of what gives us meaning in embodied, face-to-face encounters with nature, with others, with art and

music, etc. These arenas serve as markers that capture our deepest and “truest” sense of being human. They are avenues through which we feel most human precisely because they remind us of a core aspect of what it means to be human: that we are, in some sense, in search of something, that we are insignificant, that we are bound up with finitude.

At the same time, this spiritual sense of finitude brings with it a quest for that which is infinite. The existential feeling of insignificance conjures up a sense of significance. It ignites within us an impulse for and towards transcendence. This is the orientation that we need to be and become more human, more still, more attuned to ourselves and others, more in touch with nature, and thus more peaceable. So, if chapter 1 felt stale, if it felt as though it contained an inability to tap into humanity in its deepest and most genuine existential-psychological truth, then I urge the reader to consider why that may have been. Perhaps that which it lacked is precisely that which makes us human. And is not that which makes us human central to psychology? As such, this chapter will serve as something of a point of departure from the aspiritual nature of the dissertation thus far so that our discussion on the psychology of war can reorient into a sphere whereby we consider what it means for humans to be culture-selves in the deepest and most spiritual sense. By doing so, perhaps our psyches can be tapped into in ways that previous reflections did not allow for. Therefore, if this chapter goes on to read with a different “feel,” I can say that it will have done so with complete intentionality.

### **Where the Discussion Has Led Us**

Up to this point, this dissertation has built an argument that has culminated in something of a diagnosis. My argument thus far has been that, since human beings—as culture-selves—are psychologically shaped into that which they are, the American psyche

of war is best understood as emerging as a result of embodying and internalizing capitalist culture. I have provided critique, methodological considerations, deconstruction, and cultural-psychological analysis that have supported this claim. Thus, and in this vein, it will be the purpose of this chapter to provide a constructive contribution that I believe can bend towards peaceable existence. First, I will begin with a summary of what I have argued thus far in the dissertation.

In chapter 1, I presented and critiqued prevailing theories on violence, war, and human psychology. Eminent scholarship to date has tended to address the issue of war and the human psyche from the standpoint of a nature versus nurture approach (what I referred to as the innateness view versus the socialization view). These approaches are deficient, as I argued both in my critique of them and through the methodology I proposed in chapter 2, in that they fail to account for the holism of culture as something central to being human. Instead, they mistakenly presume splits between both mind and body as well as between self and culture. This results in notions of human mind (or human nature) that are described independently of any practical action or performative existence on the parts of people. I argued that the culture-self is a better, more holistic way to conceive of human beings and that this implies that, psychologically speaking, human beings are what they do from a sociocultural standpoint. This led to a discussion of American culture. I argued, throughout chapters 3 and 4, that American capitalist culture contains within it features, values, and habits that, when “done,” embodied, or internalized, result in the emergence of a warlike psyche. Warlikeness was thus described as a potentiality that exists within a culture-self’s psyche that had been shaped by violent

modes of being and becoming, such as those contained within American capitalist culture.

From this, my central claim put in straightforward terms is this: American culture shapes, forms, and produces agents capable of warlikeness. If, therefore, we are interested in cultivating a psychology of peace, the questions that arise in response should be: if culture shapes us into agents of war, then how can we become resistant to this shaping? How can we instead be shaped into agents of peace? This chapter, in its most basic sense, is intended to contain answers to these questions. As such, I will argue in this chapter that, in maintaining the same culture-self methodology, peaceable existence is best manifested when human beings orient themselves in modes of mysticism. This mystical orientation inherently positions culture-selves as receptive rather than assertive. I will argue that the embodiment of this mystical receptivity (i.e., “doing” mysticism) is the key to peace and nonviolence since it is derived from the transcendent ground of all being and becoming (God) rather than from humanly constructed sociocultural ways of being and becoming that always carry the risk of shaping people into agents capable of war. In short, any hopes for peaceable existence are best grounded in an orientation of mysticism towards the world whereby culture-selves make themselves receptive to being shaped, formed, and produced by God into who and what they are and become psychologically.

As contained within the word itself, mysticism brings with it mystery. This undergirds much of what my conception of mysticism will be throughout this chapter. The mystical orientation is one in which culture-selves recognize their own place in the world and live in constant modes of reception, openness, stillness, and acceptance rather



than assertiveness, certainty, hyperactivity, and restrictiveness. Mystical living embraces the unknowingness of life. The mystical life is one of invitation rather than visitation. People, I submit, are more likely to dominate, destroy, and harm others if they feel certain about their victims, who they are, what they represent, what they intend, what they deserve, etc. An orientation of mysticism, on the other hand, places people in positions whereby they are never certain of that which lies before them, other people included. In fact, the mystical life is one of being and becoming that constantly navigates the tensions of faith and certainty, receptivity and giving, inaction and action, and so on, while, in so doing, recognizing one's own finitude. In short, culture-selves who live and embody modes of being and becoming with a sense of mysticism are able to be shaped into agents of peace impervious to violent ways of being and becoming contained within given cultures, such as American capitalism.

In what follows, I will elucidate this argument by unpacking vital tenets of this theologically grounded mysticism. I will begin by putting forth a conception of God that differs radically from those commonly proffered within religious, theological, and philosophical discourses. This will open up a deeper discussion on mysticism as a mode of faith whose foundations rest upon unknowing and finitude. The implications of this mystical orientation will be that certain internalized, existential embodiments of it can shape culture-selves and their psychological dispositions. In other words, particular habits of mysticism can orient people in peaceable ways that render them impervious to violent or warlike modes of being and becoming that may be, and often are, contained in culture. This discussion will later be made explicit in relation to American capitalism in that I will

argue that the sort of mysticism I posit is inherently antithetical to several practical themes of capitalist culture in America that have been touched on thus far.

It should be noted, as a disclaimer, that the word mysticism can hardly be used without evoking interpretive concerns, controversy, and ambiguity. And so it may not be the “ideal” term to use. Yet, at the same time, I can think of no better word to use that captures the essence of what I intend to convey in this chapter. I can only say what may seem obvious: that what appears below will comprise my best effort to articulate what I do mean by this term versus what I do not mean. Therefore, I ask the reader to read on while withholding judgment as to the implications of the term mysticism. And so, mysticism should be thought of as what I go on to describe it as, not as what readers’ preconceived associations with the term may be.

Another note on mysticism is necessary and along these lines. I do not presume nor pretend that this chapter in any way summarizes or aligns with preceding literature on mysticism. The goal of this chapter is not to take an overview of what great mystics have written and/or said in the past. Great as they are, I am invoking the term to represent something that may or may not occupy the same space of thought as these spiritual forebearers. In fact, theologically speaking, the term finds historical use predominantly in reference to a particular trajectory of Christian thought. My use of the term is not necessarily meant to follow in this tradition. Nevertheless, I will go on to use it because it seems to me to communicate an impulse for which I cannot currently think of a better term. My intent is not to argue for some broad notion of mysticism, but one that grounds a culture-self’s orientation in ways that I go on to explore below.

### **What is God?**

If, as I have already stated, I am to employ a theologically-based (or God-based) notion of mysticism, it seems entirely necessary to begin with addressing the question of “What is God?” My approach to this question is one of deep aversion to anthropocentrism. In other words, by beginning to form conceptions and categories of what God is and how to think about God, one will have already stepped into the realm of human-oriented philosophy and away from the realm of mystical theology. In this sense, the title of this section is already problematic in that the question “What is God?” implicitly begs for such human categories. Despite this grammatical issue, the question is nevertheless important to ask: “What is God?” Addressing the question is important because it will go on to couch the nature of mystical life that I go on to call for.

**The greatest possible Being?** Nietzsche is often quoted as having proclaimed the death of God. The words “God is dead” are readily associated with Nietzsche and indeed he did write them. However, a failure to contextualize his thinking in this regard leads to the overlooking of an important matter. The use of these three words, on Nietzsche’s part, appear within the story of a “madman” who sought God and wondered where the reverence of his fellow humans had gone. What is most telling, however, is what comes after these three commonly cited words. After imploring his hearers, the madman utters: “God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him” (Nietzsche, 1887/1974, p. 181). We have killed him. Nietzsche’s point, therefore, can and should be interpreted more as a sociological diagnosis than as a metaphysical claim. Though he is a philosopher, here he is hardly providing a logical argument against the actual, ontological existence of a deity. Rather, his goal is to shed light on the decline of traditional sorts of theologically-grounded values that for so long held particular communities together. The

“we” that Nietzsche implicates in the killing of God is everyone—everyone who no longer lives with the same ethical and spiritual sensibilities as their ancestors. We live as though God were dead and so, in socio-pragmatic terms, God is dead.

But even if Nietzsche’s point here was more philosophical than sociological (which, again, it is not), would it make sense? How could God see demise? How could humans kill God in the more literal sense? In order to begin even wrapping our minds around such a question, an initial move is necessary: we must think of God as a being, an object, a thing. This being, if it were to be “killed” would have to “be” in its ontological sense to begin with. God would, after all, have to exist; only then could God be killed (or cease existence). These considerations lead us to a vital question that must be explored at the outset: is God a being? The answer to this question sets the course for theological reflections and plays an enormous role in the sorts of metaphysical and ethical conclusions that theists arrive at. And so it is necessary to provide a discussion that explores and answers this question. From there, elaboration on the aforementioned theism can begin to take on a particular form.

St. Anselm argued that God’s supremeness and fullness made God a perfect and necessary being (Barrows, 1893). Modeling itself more within a Greek framework than an ancient Middle Eastern one, Western theology has followed this line of thinking, whether directly or indirectly. But is this an appropriate starting point? Must we couch our entire understanding of ultimate reality in a concept of being? Is it possible that something (such as God) transcends even that category? These questions have fueled much in the way of theological and philosophical debate about what God is. In the sections below, I will briefly explore the work of two theologians who argue that it is

problematic to conceive of God as a being. From that point, we can begin to explore the implications this has on theological mysticism and its impact on the culture-self in terms of psychology and warlikeness.

**Tillich's method of correlation.** Paul Tillich was a German theologian who elevated the role of philosophical, psychological, and existential thinking within theological discourse. For Tillich, making sense of theology requires that people first make sense of their own existence. If done properly, such discernment can lead to deeper realizations about what is true or untrue within theological language. This is because one could only then begin to decipher between anthropologically-laden theology and what might be considered a "truer" theology that results less from human construction. Tillich's corpus is quite extensive so it will be helpful to hone in on certain writings of his that focus on the matter at hand: his ontological conception of God. Early in his book *Systematic Theology*, Tillich (1957) situates his discussion on the notion of being with regards to God when he writes:

Such an understanding of the idea of God is neither naturalistic or supranaturalistic. It underlies the whole of the present theological system. If, on the basis of this idea of God, we ask: "What does it mean that God, the ground of everything that is, can stand against the world and for the world?" we must refer to that quality of the world which expresses itself in finite freedom, the quality we experience within ourselves. The traditional discussion between the naturalistic and the supranaturalistic ideas of God uses the prepositions "in" and "above," respectively. Both are taken from the spatial realm and therefore are unable to

express the true relation between God and the world—which certainly is not spatial (pp. 5-6).

Here, Tillich makes an important point. He establishes God not as a being but as the ground of being. Following Heidegger who philosophically equated space with time, Tillich's analysis, in noting the non-spatiality of God, accordingly suggests that God must also be non-temporal. Since temporality and spatiality are necessary traits of "beings," the implication is that God is not a being, but rather a transcendent reality that grounds all being.

In this vein, Tillich's existential theology carries major significance. Primarily, it sheds light on the categorizations that can be projected onto God by virtue of spatio-temporal notions of being. As finite creatures with certain modes of understanding reality, human beings have the tendency to subsume all notions of reality into those categorical frameworks. God can quite easily become an instantiation of this type of cognitive maneuver. What Tillich proposes is a shift away from these sorts of projective tendencies by refusing to assign spatial or temporal classifications to God. Avoiding the tendency of conceptualizing God as "a being" thus prevents human beings from creating gods in their own image that actually amount to little more than their own categories. To construct a notion of God is already to limit and contain god within the confines of human understandings of being. The result is a god born out of human narcissism. Speaking of an ontological God is, to some degree, to look into a mirror. Tillich's task is to develop a theology that avoids this narcissism, the likes of which is commonly referred to in the philosophy of religion as onto-theology (i.e., theologies based on or out of human notions of being).

Avoiding onto-theology, however, presents a problem. If human beings are only capable of thinking in such categories to begin with, how could they possibly experience God independently of them? The key word in this question is “experience.” Tillich addresses this issue when he differentiates between literal-symbolic language about God and existential-symbolic meaning as derived from something more spiritual or non-verbal in nature. He writes:

Every religious symbol negates itself in its literal meaning, but it affirms itself in its self-transcending meaning. It is not a sign pointing to something with which it has no inner relationship. It represents the power and meaning of what is symbolized through participation. The symbol participates in the reality which is symbolized...Thus it follows that everything religion has to say about God, including his [sic] qualities, actions, and manifestations, has a symbolic character and that the meaning of “God” is completely missed if one takes the symbolic language literally (Tillich, 1957, p. 9).

Tillich is appealing to religious experience as a viable mode of evading the trap of onto-theology. He notes that language that employs notions of God needs not be thought of as being about God so much as bringing about God. This is what he means by the “power and meaning of what is symbolized through participation.” For Tillich, symbolic categories (such as language used to refer to God) are not indicators pointing to some being “out there” in the world. Rather, they are modes of experientially evoking communion with God as the transcendent ground of all being. Words take on existential value insofar as they conjure up a religious sensibility of transcendence. To speak of God, therefore, should not be thought of as reference to an object but as experiential,

embodied, participation in something transcendent and holy. And so, Tillich appeases the concern that moving away from onto-theology renders theology impossible due to the subsequent need to eliminate categories. Maintaining categories presents no major problem as long as they are put in proper perspective as nonliteral instantiations giving rise to religious experience as opposed to literal modes of reference that point towards a being. He presents this by conveying something of God that is more existential and experiential than intellectual and categorical.

**Tillich and mysticism.** We have seen thus far that Tillich's theology steers us away from ontological conceptualizations of God. If we are to conceive of God, we must not do so in terms of categories traditionally associated with the notion of being. Rather, God, as the ground of all being, is a reality with whom communal experience can be manifested. In this mode of thinking, God is not to be thought of as an object (no matter how "great" or "perfect") but rather as a mysterious force from which all that is comes into being. God is not a thing, but an essence to be experienced.

The mystical dimensions of Tillich's way of doing theology may thus already be becoming apparent. To this end, he writes about mysticism in terms of courage by first exploring further the notion of being from its human, existential standpoint. Regarding being, he writes: "The basic anxiety, the anxiety of a finite being about the threat of nonbeing, cannot be eliminated. It belongs to existence itself" (Tillich, 1952, p. 39). Here, Tillich speaks of an existential state of human psychology; being comes hand in hand with the contemplation of nonbeing. That is, to be human is to have the capacity to contemplate one's own being and thus one's own nonbeing and its resultant anxiety. In this analysis, Tillich is clearly aligning himself with the philosophical-psychological



work of Kierkegaard (1849/1983) on despair and Heidegger (1926/2008) on the self-contemplative attribute of *dasein*. For Tillich, the notion of courage encompasses an ability for the human to stand in the face of the threat of nonbeing while possessing a faith that relies not on onto-theology but mystical theology. Faith in God, therefore, is courageous faith amidst the experiential embodiment of nonbeing.

This notion of courage lies at the heart of Tillich's comments on mysticism. He connects threads of courage and death anxiety with infinitude all while maintaining the aforementioned view of God as the ground of all being. He writes:

In the strength of this courage the mystic conquers the anxiety of fate and death. Since being in time and space and under the categories of finitude is ultimately unreal, the vicissitudes arising from it and the final nonbeing ending it are equally unreal. Nonbeing is no threat because finite being is, in the last analysis, nonbeing. Death is the negation of that which is negative and the affirmation of that which is positive. In the same way the anxiety of doubt and meaninglessness is taken into the mystical courage to be (Tillich, 1952, p. 158).

This, on Tillich's part, is a technical way of claiming that true faith in God requires dwelling in the mystery of the unknown (which is nonbeing). The "courage to be" is to face one's own finitude and nonbeing and its experiential domain as perhaps the only way of true communion with God as nonbeing. In other words, nonbeing and its total acceptance is the pathway to experiencing God. Later, we shall explore how Tillich's theology, and the subsequent mysticism that arises from it, can shape culture-selves as peacemakers who are resistant to violent sociocultural ways of being and becoming. For

now, I wish to touch on the thinking of another theologian whose work contains similar implications as those of Tillich's.

**Marion's *God Without Being*.** A French, Catholic theologian, Jean-Luc Marion has also written with a charge that avoids ascribing traditional ontological status to God. In the book *God Without Being*, Marion begins by identifying and defining two possible modes of theology conceiving of God either as idol or icon. The former is what he ultimately wishes to avoid. He writes that the idol "never deserves to be denounced as illusory since, by definition, it is seen...It even consists only in the fact that it can be seen, that one cannot but see it" (Marion, 1991/2012, p. 9). He goes on, "The idol is erected there only so that one can see it...The idol depends on the gaze that it satisfies, since if the gaze did not desire to satisfy itself in the idol, the idol would have no dignity for it" (Marion, 1991/2012, p. 10). From the start, therefore, we see that Marion equates the notion of idol with the notion of being insofar as beings (or objects) are things that can be, and even need to be, seen. And given that it is the "gaze" that characterizes the idol, it seems that it can have very little transcendent quality since it would have been generated for the sake of the gaze, by he or she who does the gazing. All idols, therefore, function as beings.

Icons, on the other hand, are not related to the gaze. Rather, icons are transcendent in that they make a claim on he or she who receives them without being constructed. Marion writes: "The icon does not result from a vision but provokes one. The icon is not seen, but appears" (Marion, 1991/2012, p. 17). Notice that Marion ascribes some sort of movement (perhaps even a sense of agency) to the icon in that it appears without needing to be placed forth or erected like an idol. It does what it does regardless of the human's

placing it there (as with idols) to begin with. He makes this point more firmly when he writes:

The icon...teaches the gaze, thus does not cease to correct it in order that it go back from visible to visible as far as the end of infinity, to find in infinity something new. The icon summons the gaze to surpass itself by never freezing on a visible, since the visible only presents itself here in view of the invisible. The gaze can never rest or settle if it looks at an icon; it always must rebound upon the visible, in order to go back in it up the infinite stream of the invisible. In this sense, the icon makes visible only by giving rise to an infinite gaze (Marion, 1991/2012, p. 18).

We are easily reminded here of Tillich's emphasis on experience in the face of ultimate anxiety in contemplation of nonbeing. Here too, Marion focuses on the role of experience amidst the encounter with the icon. He notes that, amidst such an encounter, the icon "teaches the gaze" insofar as it ushers us into the realm of the infinite.

The realm of the infinite leads us right back to the philosophical question of being that we saw unpacked in Tillich's analysis. After establishing idol and icon as categorical modes of conceiving of God, Marion joins company with Tillich in arguing for icon through his treatment of the nonbeing of God. He writes:

The advent of something like "God" in philosophy therefore arises less from God himself than from metaphysics, as destinal figure of the thought of Being. "God" is determined starting from and to the profit of that which metaphysics is capable, that which it can admit and support. This anterior instance, which determines the

experience of the divine starting from a supposedly unavoidable condition, marks a primary characteristic of idolatry (Marion, 1991/2012, p. 34).

Idolatry, therefore, is inextricably connected to the starting points of philosophical metaphysics. That is, by beginning with ontological frameworks furnished by the tradition of Western philosophy, the only possible theology that can emerge is one that identifies God as a being. Elevating such an identifier by adding the words “greatest possible” ahead of the word “god” does nothing to rescue this sort of thinking from becoming idolatrous according to Marion. By beginning with notions of being as prerequisite in one’s theological ventures, one cannot help but construct an idol and neglect the icon.

This leads Marion to a realization that no human system, no constructed method of conceptualization, suffices as a view of God in the transcendent sense. God can only be experienced insofar as God persists with God’s original givenness. Implicitly redirecting us to the notion of icon, Marion (1991/2012) writes:

Idolatry therefore can be surpassed only in letting God be thought starting from his [sic] sole and pure demand. Such a demand goes beyond the limit of a concept—even that of metaphysics in its onto-theo-logy—but also the limit of every condition whatsoever...God can give himself to be thought without idolatry only starting from himself alone: to give himself to be thought as love, hence as gift (pp. 48-49).

In order that we might be able to move from idolatry to “iconatry,” Marion offers a conception of God as nonbeing who acts out of love. This original givenness of God transcends the world as well as any concepts contained within it. It begins with love (or

gift) as the first mode of theology rather than any ontological foundation or metaphysics. Along these lines, Marion is deeply influenced by Emmanuel Lévinas and his insistence on ethics as first philosophy (Lévinas, 1989). A God who gives out of love is a God who presses forward into the world as a transcendent force rather than as a maximally great being. This is the same theology that has led thinkers like John Caputo to state: “I do not believe in the existence of God but in God’s insistence. I do not say God “exists” but that God calls—God calls upon us like an unwelcome interruption, a quiet but insistent solicitation” (Caputo, 2013, p. ix). In this sense, human beings must respond to the insistence of God. God is not a being that exists; God’s existence is contingent upon our response to this insistence. In some sense, therefore, God’s existence is up to human beings.

For Marion, as for Tillich, therefore, God is not a being. Rather, God is a transcendent force who grounds all being and whose essence can be experienced only through a posture of reception and not through construction. Building a “God concept” with the categories of philosophy only results in idolatry since the categories of philosophy are terrestrial and identifiable rather than transcendent and mysterious. To dwell in mystery, therefore, is to dwell in the gift of God in and the reception of it.

### **Mysticism and Significant Insignificance**

My discussion thus far has been intended to illuminate the following considerations: (a) theologically-grounded mysticism and its embodiment can shape people, as culture-selves, into agents of peace; (b) in order to build towards this claim, we must first recognize that the theological aspect of it leads to the question of what is meant by the word “God;” (c) the works of thinkers like Tillich and Marion show us that

conceiving of God as a being is a product of anthropocentric, philosophical attempts at constructing theology; (d) conversely conceiving of God in terms of nonbeing can incite a sense of infinitude and mystery while bringing people face to face with a sense of their own finitude; (e) when considered in these terms, God becomes experienced as a transcendent force that presses forward in and through love and givenness rather than as a human-made, categorizable idol who can be understood and systematically conceptualized; (f) dwelling in this sense of nonbeing, infinitude, and mystery brings about a different sort of “belief” in God whereby one’s embodied, experiential, and communal reception of God’s love, gifting, and insistence becomes the primary mode of faith rather than an orientation of the believer as someone who seeks confirmation of the “existence” of God through pre-determined, ontological categories; (g) in this sense, God is not a being whose existence is known, but rather a mysterious, transcendent force whose insistence is received.

This has led us to a somewhat clearer conception of what I intend with my use of the words mystical or mysticism. What I mean is this: mysticism encapsulates the adopting of the orientation in and conception of the world whereby humans relish in postures of mystery and embrace of a theologically-based view of reality; this orientation brings people into experiential modes of encounter with the infinite through acceptance of their own finitude. In other words, mystical living signifies an orientation of human beings in the world that relies more upon unknowing, seeking, and reception than upon knowing, deciding, and assertiveness of one’s own will.

Staring into the abyss of the infinite, human beings can quickly come into contact with what I have already referred to as insignificance. That is, when one considers one’s

own nonbeing, one confronts one's own death anxiety while also contemplating God as a force that grounds all being, all that is. This gives rise to a sense of awe and wonderment. That sense can quickly transform into a sense of personal finitude. The person oriented in a mystical fashion can at once recognize their own finitude and the infinitude needed to evoke such a realization and make it possible from the outset. Amidst and among the grand expanse of all that is, human beings can perceive themselves as part of something marvelous while at the same time being minuscule in the context of this marvelousness. I refer to this existential state as recognition of significant insignificance and I argue that it lies as the cornerstone not only of theo-mystical life but also of what is necessary for shaping a psychology of peace. The latter half of the previous sentence will be elaborated upon shortly. For now, I wish to provide a point of clarification on the notion of insignificance.

One may already be formulating the detraction that a view that perceives humans as insignificant is precisely the view that enables the destruction of them. After all, if insignificant, human beings can be seen as expendable (just as I argued they are seen as through commodification in the context of capitalist culture). The counter to this is rather straightforward. Insignificance must be thought of as coupled with an existential state of awe as described above (i.e., significance). Hence, what arises is a view of humans as significantly insignificant; that is, as members of something mysterious and wondrous while at once only representing infinitesimal parts of that whole. Accurate internalization of this truth engenders a psyche of appreciation rather than one of destruction. If life is seen as an awe-inspiring gift in the context of the grandness of all that is, one can hardly justify his or her own decision to destroy in the name of "insignificance."

And so, significant insignificance encompasses an orientation of appreciation rather than domination. Selves and others are seen as insignificant but only in the context of a significant notion of total infinitude. The result of this mystical orientation is an embodiment of stillness rather than active destruction. Through its encounter with infinite (God as nonbeing and ground of all being), mysticism leads human beings to the internalization of the reality that life itself is not a possession but a gift. In what follows, I will expand upon this line of thought by exploring ways in which culture-selves, when “doing” mysticism, emerge with psychologies that render them peaceful. From there, I will provide an overview of ways in which the culture-self of mysticism is directly antithetical to the culture-self of American capitalism.

### **Mystical Culture-Selves and Peace**

A culture-self’s embodiment of mysticism can shape psychologies of peace through two primary modes: enactment and reception. The first has to do with the internalization of what was referred to in the previous chapter as existential thematic meanings. That is, by “doing” mysticism, one is living out value-laden modes of being and becoming that constantly orient them in accordance with certain values about and towards the world. The second mode (reception) has to do with the literal acceptance of God through the embodiment of transcendent communion with the infinite through mystical encounters. I will take each of these in turn.

**Mysticism and enactment.** Enacting mysticism has to do with one’s general ethical orientation towards the world and towards others. This has, to some degree, already begun to be introduced in the previous section. In essence, this has to do with internalized values and perspective. A culture-self who internalizes the thematic



meanings of what the likes of Tillich and Marion touch on is a culture-self whose ethical framework is bound to be one of humility and appreciation rather than of pride and ingratitude. One who constantly contemplates their own finitude through encounters with ultimate nonbeing and infinitude (God) is one who internalizes the sense that life is not really theirs. Conquering death anxiety and an aversion to nonbeing by embracing mystical interaction with God as ultimate nonbeing shapes a psychology of giftedness rather than one of entitlement. People who view their lives through the lens of their being significantly insignificant are less likely to invoke language such as “human rights” in favor of language such as “the gift of life.” The mystic is therefore not entitled to life but embodies an orientation of gratitude regarding the life he or she has. The embodied living out of this sort of value system can shape a psychology of peace since its mystical quality emerges in an ethical disposition in which life is something to be cherished not harmed. This applies outwardly as well. Thus, culture-selves who do mysticism are likely to emerge with psychologies that preclude the possibility of war by viewing the life of both self and other as gifts from the infinite rather than objects of being to be tampered with and/or destroyed. To enact mysticism is therefore to internalize the value-based, thematic meaning of the givenness of life, which renders culture-selves as peaceable holders of a gift rather than as aggressive owners of what they perceive as their own lives.

**Mysticism and reception.** The second, and more profound, mode of mysticism that culture-selves can embody is that of reception. This can occur in many capacities such as: (a) communion with God as infinite nonbeing; (b) face to face encounters with the other; and (c) transcendence through music to name a few. Below, I will elaborate how each of these can encompass a culture-self’s doing a way of life that, through

reception of God as the transcendent ground of all being and of all good, can shape a psyche of peace.

First, it is important to pause for a philosophical sidebar. There are several key assumptions that undergird what I go on to argue below. The first assumption is that if God is the reality that has been described thus far in the chapter, then God is not only the ground of all being but also brings the world and life into being through love. In this sense, as Marion points out in Lévinasian fashion, we begin with the assumption of love as first philosophy rather than ontology as first philosophy. In other words, the starting point of this view of reality is that God, through love, acted to produce all that is. The starting point is not, therefore, reality or nature (that is, being) but nonbeing as the ground of reality. And so, God is infinite nonbeing and all being came into being through an initial act of giving. This givenness is understood as an act of being from nonbeing, and thus an act of agentive, non-obligatory love from prior non-love. A second, and related, philosophical issue is whether or not God is good. Of course, due to the incomprehensibility of this theo-mysticism, it would be foolish and hypocritical to posit categorical assertions about the moral nature of God. Still, I submit that this is in fact not a problem because it is in the end the only hope for anything like objective morality. In other words, in the absence of God, we are left with little more than mere sociocultural relativism. But if God insists through love, and God is good (and here we may emphasize that these are admittedly conditional statements) then we are free to respond to this infinite force with a posture of receptivity. Only then is “true” goodness possible since it would derive from the reception of infinite transcendence rather than from socio-

anthropological construction. Otherwise, we are not only left without a ground of all being, but without a ground of any objective morality whatsoever.

**Communion with God.** To repeat, communion with God must by nature be receptive. If, in efforts to be shaped by God, one begins with one's own concepts, one does little more than worship an idol. Human-made concepts of God rarely tap into notions of nonbeing and infinitude and they therefore often emerge as instantiations of ontological finitude. The failure to receive God as God arises when the blockage of ontology appears. Marion (1991/2012) describes it this way:

What renders the idol problematic does not stem from a failure (e.g., that it offers only an "illusion") but, on the contrary, from the conditions of its validity—its radical immanence to the one who experiences it, and experiences it, rightly so, as impassable...Therefore, the idol always culminates in a "self-idolatry" (pp. 28-29).

Idols are "impassable." In other words, they limit God within the confines of an ontological category and emerge as the worship of that category. Idolatry is predicated upon imposition rather than reception. Thus, in order to experience true communion with the entirely transcendent God, one must master the embodiment of total reception. This means that culture-selves need to be shaped by modes of seeking the transcendent rather than already established modes of "knowing."

Seeking God, therefore, is an act of receptivity and mystery, not an act of intellectual understanding of that which exists. By diverting one's attention away from the existence of God and towards the reception of the mysterious force of God, one truly embodies what may be called communion. The more inexplicable such experiences are,

the more likely they are to have tapped into reception of God as infinite nonbeing. Communion with God implies mysticism in that human beings, through this communion, are filled with increasing experiential senses of their own finitude while encountering the infinite. The moment people feel as though they “understand” God or have gotten a grip on God, they should wonder whether or not what they experienced was anything more than their own ontological concept of something like a being, and thus a finite, anthropocentric construction. On the contrary, indescribable experiences of transcendence that cannot quite be conceptualized or put into words are more likely to, through the mode of reception, indicate communion with God as infinite nonbeing. These experiences, by virtue of their inherent reliance on reception, shape culture-selves as unimposing and thus, nonviolent.

**The face-to-face.** Another mode of reception on the part of culture-selves consists in the face-to-face encounter with others. There is something truly captivating about engaging another human being through a true encounter. In the literal, face-to-face encounter with another, one is forced into a spiritual sense of transcendence and is thus overwhelmed with the realization that all life is precious<sup>74</sup>. Emmanuel Lévinas taps into this when he writes: “To see a face is already to hear ‘You shall not kill,’ and to hear ‘You shall not kill’ is to hear ‘social justice’” (Lévinas, 1990, p. 8-9). In the literal face of the Other<sup>75</sup>, one’s responsibility is called upon and demanded. Lévinasian ethics

<sup>74</sup> This is what makes the advancement of military technology so disturbing. For example, killing in the context of war has evolved from occurring in close proximity (through hand to hand combat) to gradually becoming more remote. Nowadays, people can launch and detonate drone missiles from inside of a control room and have them land on the other side of the world. Killing of this sort is “made easier” since it is done in the absence of the face to face. The dignity of the human being who is the target of the killing is further overlooked when they literally cannot be seen.

<sup>75</sup> Throughout Levinas’s corpus, he at times alternates between capitalized and lower cased forms of the word *other*. The capitalized usage is not meant to exclusively refer to God versus non-God others and, in fact, Levinas apparently makes no clear distinction between the two.

disallows an assault on the Other precisely for this reason: the Other lays claim on me rather than vice versa. To have a claim laid on oneself is to be receptive to a transcendent force. To obey this force is to obey a calling that one's significant insignificance mandates the honoring of all life. The Other takes on the utmost value and my own needs fade into the background amidst the face to face under which I am taken captive by the humanity of the other. And so, to accept the dignity of others through face-to-face encounters that make claims on us is to live in reception of a transcendent and infinite God whose mysterious force gives life and does not permit the taking of it. To truly see others is to see transcendence, and thus God. Being gazed upon by an other is a way of being called into infinity. To engage in the face-to-face encounter with the other is to, at once, resist domination. As Lévinas writes: "...a relation with the non-encompassable, as the welcoming of alterity—concretely, as presentation of the face. The face arrests totalization" (Lévinas, 1969/1991, p. 281). True acceptance in the face of the other precludes the possibility of harm because it draws us to infinitude, not totalization. Reception and response in the face of this transcendence is an embodied way of being that shapes culture-selves as recipients of infinity (God) and thus shapes them as peaceful by discouraging the assertion of one's own needs or desires over those of others.

**Transcendence through music.** When I was 15 years old, my brother took me to a concert. We drove 45 minutes to the amphitheater, waited in line for another hour or so to get in, then waited as the headlining band prepared to come onto stage. Up until that point, things felt rather monotonous, routine, and matter of fact. Before long, however, the band came out and began playing. At one point late in the concert, I began to feel something that I can only describe as a spiritual-mystical experience. I felt completely

overtaken by the music. The music had claimed control over my psychic state. Tears began to well up in my eyes as I looked around at my fellow spectators, many of whom appeared to be in a similar place. In that moment I was unaware of time and space, I was completely lost in the music and the communal experience of it. It seemed as though the music had brought me to a psychological state whereby I felt ironically empowered and powerless and once. I felt energized yet simultaneously paralyzed. In short, I felt significantly insignificant.

My own interpretation of this experience is that I was in touch with God, and the infinite. In that exact moment I did not feel or see the world through categories; rather, I felt like I was in a trance. My own sense of being was washed away, perhaps engulfed, by a physiological-psychological state of nonbeing and transcendence. In a completely non-suicidal sense, I felt like I could have died in that moment without reservation. This was a mystical experience that I will always remember.

Pragmatic psychological questions in response to this are: “How was I being shaped in that precise moment?” and “What was the sense of transcendence doing to me as a culture-self?” Though there is no empirical way to answer these questions, the anecdotal answer I submit is that I was being shaped into an agent of peace by mode of reception. The state that I entered came unconsciously as a result of complete surrender to the music. The music had begun to trump my own anxieties (whether pervasive ones in life or just issues from that day in particular), and my own needs. I had not eaten in hours yet I was unaware of my hunger. I was singing along with the music yet involuntarily. I had my hands up in the air along with 20,000 other people, yet I had not consciously thought to do so. In essence, I was seized by the music. Coming to conscious awareness

of the moment, though taking me out of it, showed me that I had relinquished my own categorical understandings of the world at that point in time. To use different terms, my ego had gone out the window and the music's energy overtook me and transported me to a transcendent feeling of communion with absolute nothingness and infinity. God spoke to me through music and I received. I had embodied reception.

Culture-selves who surrender their own power to the force of music can be shaped through such experiences. This is because people can embody the reception of the gift of life and love through mystical encounter with their own insignificant significance. Music leads us to such encounters. It transcends the world of categories in the same way that mystical theology (in its rejection of onto-theology) can. Beethoven said of music that it "is a higher revelation than all wisdom and philosophy...the electric soil in which the spirit lives, thinks, and invents" (Martin, 2009, p. 211). Music ushers us to places of love and acceptance of that which is transcendent. I will end this section with a quotation from Nietzsche that summarizes what I intend to convey here in a far more elegant way than my own words are capable of doing. Nietzsche (1887/1974) writes:

One must learn to love. This is what happens to us in music: first one has to learn to hear a figure and melody at all, to detect and distinguish it, to isolate it and delimit it as a separate life. Then it requires some exertion and good will to tolerate it in sport of its strangeness, to be patient with its appearance and expression, and kindhearted about its oddity. Finally there comes a moment when we are used to it, when we wait for it, when we sense that we should miss it if it were missing; and now it continues to compel and enchant us relentlessly until we

have become its humble and enraptured lovers who desire nothing better from the world than it and only it (p. 262).

### **Mysticism as Antithetical to American Capitalism**

Through exploration of the work of Tillich and Marion, I have thus far suggested that mysticism involves an embodied-psychological encounter with the transcendence, infinitude, and nonbeing of God. Through such encounters, culture-selves are put into postures of reception rather than imposition. I provided a few short examples (communion with God as infinite; encounters with the other through the face to face; and transcendence through music) of how mystical reception (or receptivity) can be concretely embodied in life, thus instantiating the shaping of a psychology of peace. I will now explore the ways in which this sort of mysticism, if adopted as a culture-self's primary modes of being in the world, functions antithetically to the ways of being and becoming of American capitalism that, when embodied, emerge in a warlike psyche. The implication of this exploration will be that mystical culture-selves are not only peaceful by virtue of their above described receptivity but also that they are impervious to alternative cultural ways of being and becoming (such as those of American capitalism) that may otherwise shape them as violent or warlike. For purposes of clarity, I will refer to the above delineated ways of being and becoming through enactment, receptivity of the infinite, nonbeing, and loving givenness of God as mystical receptivity.

**Individualism.** In the previous two chapters, I noted how the habits and embodied thematic internalizations of individualism, as a feature of American capitalism, shape a psychology of warlikeness. This, I argue, occurs through self-prioritization and indifference towards others. Mysticism, as a mode of psychological being and becoming



for culture-selves, shapes a psychology that is resistant to these habits. When one operates through modes of mystical receptivity, their psychological-ethical lives reorient such that they place their absorption of God as the top priority. Focusing on one's own self is purely antithetical to such an endeavor. Moreover, the face-to-face mode of experiencing mystical receptivity generates a practical embodiment of others being valued over self. This selflessness shapes and gives rise to a psyche that is directly opposed to the habits of individualism, cultivating instead a communal culture-self whose primary focus is reception of God and others. This calls to attention Jesus' emphasis on loving God and loving neighbor as habits that serve as encapsulations of the entire spirit of ethical-theological life (Matthew 22:37-40, CEB). Mystical receptivity steers us away from individualism and shapes our psyches communally and thus peaceably.

**Fear.** I previously argued that American capitalism engenders states of fear, which give rise to habits and thematic internalizations of hypervigilance, docility and powerlessness, and hyperactivity. In other words, fear can at once be paralyzing while also inciting action (often of the sort that engenders violence) on the part of the culture-self. Tillich, in following both Kierkegaard and Heidegger, distinguishes between fear and anxiety. He does so by noting that fear is always directed at specific objects while anxiety is a general existential state of human beings. Fear, therefore, is always fear of or by something while anxiety is an existential response to perceived nothingness of nonbeing. Given its basic nature, anxiety is not to be acted upon, while fear is something that can be considered conquerable through action (Martin, 1963). And so we begin to see that adoption of anxiety, through mystical receptivity, can render a culture-self still and non-insistent on action whereas giving in to the internalizations of fear can do the

opposite. Persons who function according to the practical embodiments of fear surrender their adamantness upon vigilance and overactivity in the world. Recognizing one's own finitude and significant insignificance, in contrast with the ever-active values of capitalism, can bring this peaceable orientation about. Fear diminishes when culture-selves live in the absence of notions of being that are perpetuated by capitalist culture and its prioritization of earthly improvement, accumulation, mastery, etc. By doing mysticism, or mystical receptivity, fear falls by the wayside and a posture of calmness and stillness can arise in its place. Such a posture is key to peaceful living.

**Commodification.** What about the American capitalist habits of world-objectification and other-objectification as made manifest through commodification? Mystical receptivity most certainly works against this sort of culture-self orientation. This is because staring into the abyss of nonbeing and infinitude has a way of shaping one's values towards a realization: that nothing in the world is actually worth exploiting. When one sits in mystical awe and wonderment towards God and the world, they are literally unable to commodify in that moment by virtue of their receptivity. A prerequisite of commodification, and its subsequent world and other objectification, is that one sees the world as something to be owned and operated rather than received and honored. Mystical receptivity and the embodiment thereof, thus shapes culture-selves as peaceful and impervious to the temptation of commodification.

**Emptiness and alienation.** American capitalist culture also, through the embodiment of meaninglessness and insatiable dissatisfaction, shapes a warlike psyche through the features of emptiness and alienation. Mystical receptivity is also antithetical to these ways of being. By coming into contact with God, as infinite, and being filled

with the existential experience of communing with this transcendent force, a culture-self's life in fact begins to take on a similar transcendent meaning. Receiving the gift of life from the transcendence that is God, as the ground of all being, is an experiential encounter that runs directly against the existential feelings of meaninglessness and alienation. Rather than feeling detached from others and the world and exhibiting a robotic life devoid of transcendent meaning, culture-selves who embody mystical receptivity are shaped by meaningful and connected interactions with God that render them peaceable by virtue of interconnectedness. The insatiable dissatisfaction of American capitalist culture can be reversed through mystical receptivity by providing culture-selves with spiritual substance to be absorbed.

**Progress.** Progress, as a feature of American capitalist culture, gives rise to embodied habits of incessant exertion and ingratitude. The opposite of progress is stillness. Mystical receptivity engenders stillness by virtue of its reliance on receiving the transcendence of God. A gift cannot be received if one is not remaining still. The giver of the gift would, in such a case, need to chase the recipient about. Thus, to receive, to truly receive, the gift of God is to remain still and relinquish the insistence on progress that is demanded of us in capitalist culture. Remaining still in a posture of mystical receptivity not only opens us up to be shaped by God, but also precludes us from embodying habits of incessant exertion and ingratitude. Rather than ignoring or not noticing the gift of God's infinitude being brought forth into life, our attention is focused precisely on the reception of it through an orientation of gratitude in mysticism. Capitalist insistence on progress prevents the stillness necessary for mystical receptivity which can shape us into agents of peace. He or she who is shaped by reception, stillness, and gratitude rather than

progress, exertion, and ingratitude, is psychologically unequipped with what is necessary to fight a war. Thus mystical receptivity shapes a psyche of peace.

**Exploitation and greed.** As features of American capitalism, exploitation and greed lead to embodied habits of destructiveness and self-centeredness. Again, mystical receptivity is antithetical to this. Through economic and sociological ways of being that exploit others and view increased accumulation as the priority in terms of action in the world, exploitation and greed bring forth a psyche of violence. Mystical receptivity, on the other hand, orients the culture-self outwardly towards God and others. The reception of the infinite force of God, the face to face encounter with others, the reception of music as a mode of transcendence, each comprise embodiments of non-destruction and outward focus. The self loses importance amidst such habits and destructiveness is avoided by way of reception rather than imposition. To be destructive and self-centered requires first that a person be dominative towards the world. Mystical receptivity engenders a posture that is antithetical to these habits by focusing the culture-self on their own finitude and thus the ethical absurdity of exploiting the world and others through greed. After all, the mystic realizes that the world is not theirs to exploit.

**Domination and control.** Related to exploitation, mystical receptivity works antithetically to the practical embodiments of conquest and manipulation as made manifest through the American capitalist features of domination and control. To embody mystical receptivity is literally to remain non-dominative and invite God's infinite presence upon oneself. From within this posture, the domination or control of others (as is necessary in wartime) becomes an impossibility by virtue of the way that the gift is received and interpreted as an ethical-interpersonal stance. Marion himself interprets the

reception of gift in this way. He points out how the transcendence of God render the reception of gift as an invisible transaction that begs and calls for an interpersonal posture in the world. Referring to God as giver and the recipient as “givee,” Marion (2002) writes:

From this situation—gift accepted, givee unknown—what results? Far from blocking the gift or weakening it, invisibility reinforces the givee by universalizing him [sic]: every man could have been and can still become the face of the givee precisely because the latter knew how to make himself invisible (p. 92).

For Marion, therefore, the invisible, mystical transaction of the gift makes it so that the recipient in fact becomes unknown. Rather, the recipient becomes generalized, universalized to the extent that all people are deemed worthy of the gift (of life). This mystical posture runs antithetically to the habits of conquest and manipulation as brought about by domination and control since no person has the right to harm another and eliminate their existence amidst the gift of life.

Moreover, the person who seeks communion with God and others through reception is a person whose quest is to take-in rather than manipulate. The obsession with domination and control of the world and of others engenders a psychology of warlikeness by constantly imposing oneself into and onto the world. By undertaking habits of mystical receptivity, culture-selves embrace the opposite ethical stance towards the world by inviting God and others to make their way towards them rather than the other way around. By insisting on continued reception of the gift, people are dissuaded from the false presumption that they ought to do anything but be grateful for it. A psyche of peace

is shaped through the relinquishing of control and manipulation that mystical receptivity engenders.

**Certainty, instrumental reason, and disenchantment.** Finally, there is the aspirituality and sanctimonious rigidity that is fostered by capitalist culture's emphasis on certainty, instrumental reason, and disenchantment. Each of these existential thematic meanings, when internalized and embodied, shapes a person as directly antithetical to that of mystical receptivity. Mysticism thrives on uncertainty, the embrace of unknowing, and spiritual engagement with God, the world, and others. Rather than mastering the world through methods of reason and ontological knowing, mystical culture-selves remain vulnerable and in a constant state of flux whereby the infinitude that is God shapes them. Fluidity and willingness to be surprised reigns supreme rather than overemphasis on "absolute truth" through instrumental reason. Those who are mystically receptive seek an embrace of their own finitude as opposed to the comfortable feeling derived from overcoming that finitude. American capitalist culture, in its emphasis on sureness, leads to disenchantment. Mystical receptivity recovers the enchantment necessary to keep people from the aspiritual and sanctimoniously rigid modes of being that enable violence and warlikeness. If I am unsure of the world, I am unsure of myself. If I am unsure of myself, I am unsure of others. If I am unsure of others, I must receive them, not kill them. This progression of thought represents the core of a mystical receptivity that works against certainty and instrumental reason by recovering a religio-spiritual enchantment with the world. Awe and wonder beget peace while certainty and disenchantment fuel violence.

### Clarifications and Closing Remarks

I have argued in this chapter that mysticism, as an embodied mode of being and becoming, can shape psychologies of peace among culture-selves. This occurs by virtue of receptivity of God as the ground of all being whose infinite transcendence at once reminds us of our own significant insignificance while also shaping our psyches in ways that are antithetical to the prerequisite conditions of violence and warlikeness. I explored the work of Paul Tillich and Jean-Luc Marion in order to develop these theo-mystical concepts. Through its emphasis on reception, stillness, non-assertiveness, transcendence, and fearlessness, among other points, mystical orientation of a culture-self, when pervasively lived out, shapes a psychology of peace that is impervious to warlike modes of being and becoming that shape violent psyches. I also ended the chapter with a brief exploration of how mystical receptivity runs antithetically to American capitalist culture and thus renders culture-selves incapable of internalizing warlike modes of American psychological formation.

I would like to include one key point of clarification prior to closing out this chapter. Namely, it is important to note that I am not suggesting that mysticism (or mystical receptivity) be mechanically adopted as a peacemaking strategy. In other words, it is not as though people can just employ certain mystical practices and habits into their lives and assume that they will causally generate a peaceable orientation. In fact, to consider mysticism a “strategy” is already to miss the mark of what genuine mysticism is, as I have described it in this chapter. It is not a tactic that one implements in order to render results. Rather, it is a witness to a reality about the world, and the force that gave rise to it. Living a life of mysticism extends far beyond (or perhaps I should say deeper

than) the mere carrying out of practices such as prayer, listening to music, silent communion with God, etc. Those strategies are important in order to direct one's efforts towards transcendence, but the deeper (more pervasive and existentially perspectival) internalization of mysticism is what is more important. It is not enough to simply engage in certain practices several times a week; rather culture-selves need to become deeply, formatively, enculturated and shaped by a mystical receptivity towards and about the world. One must connect on such a basic (and primal) level to the reality of the world as being grounded in the infinite, nonbeing, of God that their entire existence is filtered through this lens of mysticism. Only then can things like prayer, music, etc. be made mystical and thus psychologically formative in any substantial way.

So, what I am calling and arguing for in this chapter is not a set of ideologies that need to be adopted. Instead, I am arguing that human beings, if constantly embodying and living by ongoing perspectives that keep them attuned to the mystery of God and the reality of their own significant insignificance, can be shaped into culture-selves who are peaceful and impervious to warlike modes of being and becoming that are potentially available in sociocultural spheres. This is not escapism. The goal is not for people to retreat away from the world in some spiritual withdrawal, but rather to live within it and encounter it with a new paradigm of reality; one of mysticism. Mystical receptivity, therefore, is not a strategy but a religio-spiritual orientation towards all that is.



### **Conclusion**

My primary hope and goal for this dissertation has been to engage a new method of discussing violence in general and war in particular. Prior theories in the social sciences have tended to speak of the psychology of war in largely inadequate ways. Human behavior has historically been examined through “nature-nurture” motifs and although such language is rarely invoked in contemporary scholarship, the methodological tendencies nevertheless persist. As such, the psychology of war has been thought of as a causal question pertaining either to innateness or socialization. This approach overlooks a great deal and, in the process, reduces human beings to passive organisms compelled to act either based either on genetic or social stimuli. Along the way discussions on ethics become muted, character formation and meaning-making are brushed aside, and the human psyche becomes relegated to the realm of scientism. Such scholarly trends have done little to illuminate deeper understanding on the psychology of war while also sparking nothing in the way of peace. New modes of conversation, both scholarly and not, are necessary for the issue of war and the human psyche to break through to a more promising terrain. In its most basic sense, this dissertation has been an attempt at demonstrating this need: a need for a new way of talking about the psychology of war.

#### **What Has Been Argued?**

In Chapter 1, I presented and critiqued prevailing historical and contemporary theories on violence, war, and human psychology. Eminent scholarship to date has tended to address the question of war and human psyche from the standpoint of a nature versus nurture approach (what I referred to as the innateness view versus the socialization view).

These approaches are deficient, as I argued both in my critique of them and through the methodology I proposed in Chapter 2, in that they fail to account for the holism of culture as something central to being human. Instead, they mistakenly presume splits between both mind and body as well as between self and culture. This results in static and passive notions of mind (or human nature) that are described independently of any practical action or performative existence on the parts of humans as agents with ethical capabilities. I argued that the culture-self is a better, more holistic way to conceive of human beings and that this implies that, psychologically speaking, human beings are what they do from a sociocultural standpoint. This led to a discussion of American culture. I argued, throughout Chapters 3 and 4, that American capitalist culture contains within it features, values, and habits that, when “done,” embodied, or internalized, result in the emergence of a warlike psyche. Warlikeness (and thus the capability to enter into or support war) was thus described as a potentiality that exists within a culture-self’s psyche that has been shaped by violent modes of being and becoming, such as those contained within American capitalist culture.

From this, my central claim put in straightforward terms has been this: American culture shapes, forms, and produces agents of war. If, therefore, we are interested in cultivating a psychology of peace, the questions that arise in response should be: if cultures shape us into agents of war, then how can we become resistant to this shaping? How can we instead be shaped into agents of peace? Chapter 5, in its most basic sense, was intended to contain answers to these questions. I argued that, in maintaining the same culture-self methodology, peaceable existence is best manifested when human beings orient themselves in modes of mysticism. This mystical orientation inherently positions

culture-selves as receptive rather than assertive. I submitted that the embodiment of this mystical receptivity (i.e., “doing” mysticism) is the key to peace and nonviolence since it is derived from the transcendent ground of all being and becoming (God) rather than from humanly constructed sociocultural ways of being and becoming that always carry the risk of shaping people into agents capable of war. In short, any hopes for peaceable existence are best grounded in an orientation of mysticism towards the world whereby culture-selves make themselves receptive to being shaped, formed, and produced by God into who and what they are and become psychologically.

But this has all been an effort, an effort at reorienting a conversation. I do not presume that I have solved anything, nor do I hold to any of my claims too tightly. I am not convinced that what I have written in this dissertation is “it.” Rather, I am thoroughly convinced that traditional approaches to the psychology of violence are not “it” and that what I have advanced herein is “closer to it.” Why? Because a psychology of war must take into account ethics, being and becoming, the centrality of habits to human psychology, the profound role that culture and language play in the shaping of our psyches, and the transcendence required for peace. No theory that I know of to date, has contained these threads, either methodologically or philosophically. By appealing to each of these arenas, I hope to have provided the reader not only with sufficient reason to reject innateness and socialization approaches, but also with a more adequate method of discussing human psychology as it pertains to war.

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Abstract for *Dissertation Abstracts International*

In both academic and non-academic spheres, the problem of human violence in general, and war in particular, is commonly thought of in terms of nature versus nurture. These approaches are deficient in that they disregard the holistic quality of human psychology. Neglecting this holism becomes problematic for psychological theorization on violence and war since its mistaken dualistic assumptions (such as that between mind and body or that between self and context) establish the fallacious view that the human psyche is something that functions independently from embodied-cultural life. If carried out without these dualisms, however, psychologies of war can then be understood through holistic considerations regarding cultural context, embodied practice, and phenomenological ethics. The author's goal is to first critique prevalent theories on psychology and violence, or warlikeness, and then to provide an alternative methodology that reorients the discussion towards this more holistic realm. This approach to understanding the psychology of war is then applied to U.S. American culture. It is argued—since psychology and warlikeness are to be understood as issues pertaining to context and embodiment—that capitalist culture, rather than some private, abstract, transcultural notion of the human mind, shapes the American psyche of war. A theological discussion ensues on how humans can avoid becoming psychologically shaped into agents capable of warlikeness, whether through action or attitude.

*Keywords:* violence, war, culture, embodiment, psychology

*Appendix A*

Plan for Submission

1. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*
2. *Journal of Peace Research*
3. *Journal of Conflict Studies*
4. *The International Journal for Peace Studies*
5. *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology*
6. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*
7. *The Journal of Political Psychology*

*Appendix B*

## Curriculum Vitae

# Barbod Salimi, M.A.

## Curriculum Vitae

### Current Professional Activities

2014-present      Boston University, The Danielsen Institute, Boston,  
 MA  
 Psychology Intern

Teaching and Research Interests:

Philosophical Psychology, Psychologies of Peace and Violence, Existentialism and Phenomenology, Critical and Social Theory, Cultural and Indigenous Psychologies, Psychoanalysis, Psychology of Religion, Histories of Psychology, Philosophical and Theological Ethics, Social and Political Psychologies, Language and Hermeneutics, Religion and Mysticism

Dissertation:

“One Nation Under War: A Sociocultural Exploration of the Psychology of Violence and the American Example”

### Education

2009-present    Doctor of Philosophy in Clinical Psychology (Ph.D.)  
 Fuller Graduate School of Psychology, Pasadena, CA  
 \*Advanced to doctoral candidacy

2013              Master of Arts in Theology (M.A.)  
 Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA

2013              Certificate in Psychoanalysis  
 Institute of Contemporary Psychoanalysis, Los Angeles, CA  
 Areas of Emphasis: Intersubjective and Relational Models

- 2011 Master of Arts in Psychology (M.A.)  
Fuller Graduate School of Psychology, Pasadena, CA
- 2008 Master of Arts in Sport Psychology (M.A.)  
John F. Kennedy University, Pleasant Hill, CA  
Honors: Summa Cum Laude
- 2005 Bachelor of Arts in Communication (Social Science) (B.A.)  
University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, CA

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## Teaching Experience

- 2010-2014 Azusa Pacific University, Department of Psychology  
Adjunct Professor  
Total Course Sections Taught: 12

### Peace Psychology: Culture, Violence, and Human Psyche

Number of times taught: 1 (Spring 2014)

This course explored the intersections of philosophy, social and cultural theory, and theology as pertaining to issues of peace, violence, and human psychology. Course readings and lectures emphasized existentialism, phenomenology, philosophical and theological ethics, sociocultural dynamics, and political discourse.

### Moral Psychology: Philosophy, Culture, Power, and Politics

Number of times taught: 1 (Fall 2013)

This course surveyed the moral and ethical dimensions of psychological theory and practice, historically and contemporarily. Course readings and lectures emphasized philosophical ethics, postcolonial theory, feminist studies, cultural history, historical psychology, and discourses of power and politics within the history of Western thought.

### Psychology and Theology: Integration Seminar

Number of times taught: 3 (Fall 2012, Spring 2013, Fall 2013)

This course examined philosophical, theoretical, and practical considerations pertaining to the intersection of psychology and religion. Course readings and lectures emphasized philosophical ethics, philosophy and psychology of religion, historical psychology, social and political theory, multiculturalism, and world religions.

### History of Psychology

Number of times taught: 2 (Spring 2011, Spring 2012)

This course surveyed the history of modern psychology beginning with its epistemological roots in Western philosophy. Course readings and lectures emphasized

various waves of psychological theory since the turn of the twentieth century. Critical theory and ethics were implemented as a method of critique.

#### Sport and Performance Psychology

Number of times taught: 5 (Fall 2010, Fall 2011, Spring 2012, Fall 2012, Spring 2013)

This course surveyed the existing theories and practices within sport and performance psychology. Course readings emphasized the history of the discipline, practical considerations, physiology, and cognitive science.

2011-2012 Fuller Graduate School of Psychology  
Teaching Assistant

#### Integration: Psychology and Theology

Number of times as TA: 2 (Fall 2011, Spring 2012)

Served as seminar discussion leader and facilitator. Discussions were oriented around the philosophical underpinnings of psychology and theology, and the integration thereof.

2008 John F. Kennedy University, Graduate School of  
Psychology  
Guest Lecturer

#### Master's Research Seminar

Guest lectured on the theory and administering of qualitative research methodology with particular emphasis on grounded theory and content analysis.

## Research Experience

2013-2014 Research Assistant, Weyerhaeuser Research  
Institute, Pasadena, CA.  
Principal Investigator: Alvin Dueck, Ph.D.  
Research emphasis: Psychologies of Religion, Culture, Peace,  
and Violence. Areas of focus included critical theory and  
ethics.

2012-2013 Research Assistant, Travis Research Institute,  
Pasadena, CA.  
Principal Investigator: Alvin Dueck, Ph.D.  
Research emphasis: Philosophical and theoretical  
psychology, Religion, and Ethics.

2009-2015 Student Researcher, Travis Research Institute,  
Pasadena, CA.  
Principal Investigator: Alvin Dueck, Ph.D.

Research emphases: Philosophical Psychology; Psychology and Culture; Psychology of Religion.

- 2009-2010                      Student Researcher, Fuller Graduate School of Psychology, Pasadena, CA.  
Principal Investigator: Scott Garrels, Ph.D.  
Research emphasis: Rene Girard's theories of mimetic rivalry, desire, and violence as pertaining to psychology.
- 2007-2008                      Student Researcher, John F. Kennedy University, Pleasant Hill, CA.  
Principal Investigator: Alison Rhodius, Ph.D.  
Conducted qualitative research towards Master's thesis.  
Thesis title: Career-Ending Injuries in Sport: An Exploration of the Psychological Impact on Self-Efficacy, Self-Identity, and (Re)Socialization.

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## Publications

### Book Chapters:

- Salimi, B. (forthcoming, 2015). The Futility of Peace Language: What Linguistic Philosophy and Abrahamic Faith can Teach us About Embodied Peacemaking. In V. Redekop (Ed.), *Spirituality, Emergent Creativity, and Reconciliation*. Ottawa, CA.
- Salimi, B. (2012). Aggression. In T. Teo (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology*. New York, NY: Springer Publications.

### Journal Articles:

- Salimi, B. (forthcoming, 2015). Playing Language Games: Linguistic Philosophy, Politics, Religion, and Peace. *Journal of Political Theology*. (Forthcoming edition).
- Salimi, B. & Ansloos, J.P. (2012) Social Justice and Advocacy: Professional Development in the Context of Faith-Based Institutions. *The Society for Counseling Psychology's Section on Ethnic and Racial Diversity Newsletter*.
- Salimi, B. (2014). The Nonviolence of Jesus: A Hermeneutical Approach. *Verbum Incarnatum*, Special Edition on Peace and Social Justice.



## Professional and Academic Presentations

Paine, D., Sandage, S. J., & Salimi, B., (2015, March). More Prayer, Less Hope: Empirical Findings on Borderline Spirituality. Poster presented at the fourth annual conference on Medicine and Religion: Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Salimi, B., (2015, February). Trauma, Religion, and Imagination: Futures in Creative Peacemaking. Interdisciplinary Innovations Public Lecture given at Lesley University: Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Salimi, B., (2014, June). Psychology and Violence: A Theoretical Discussion on how People Become Warlike. Lecture given to the Association of Iranian American Professionals: San Diego, California.

Salimi, B., (2013, November). Narrative, Culture, and Identity: A Middle Eastern Critique of Western Psychology. Lecture given to students in the Graduate School of Psychology at Fuller Theological Seminary: Pasadena, California.

Salimi, B., (2013, October). The Pathology of Peace Language. Poster presented at the annual 'Psychology and the Other' conference at Lesley University: Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Salimi, B., Ansloos, J.P., & Dueck, A. (2013, April). Culture, Psychopathology, and the Perversion of Power: A Critical-Indigenist Exploration of Violence in Positivist Psychology. Continuing education lecture given at the Annual Conference of the Christian Association for Psychological Studies: Portland, Oregon.

Dueck, A., & Salimi, B., (2013, March). A Critique of Cultural Psychology: Theoretical and Philosophical Issues. Lecture given to students in the departments of Sociology, Humanities, Criminology, and Psychology at the China University of Political Science and Law: Beijing, China.

Salimi, B. (2013, March). A Critical and Philosophical Overview of Waves of Psychoanalytic Theory. Lecture given to graduate students at the Wenxin Counseling Center: Changping District, Beijing, China.

Salimi, B., Ansloos, J.P., Dueck, A. (2012, October). Power and Pathology: A Postcolonial Proposal for Empowering Multicultural Constructs of Pathology. Paper presented at the fourth biennial conference of the Multicultural Research and Training Lab at Pepperdine University: Los Angeles, California.

Ansloos, J.P., Wilkins, A., Salimi B., Nahumck, C., Ng, E., Jarvinen, M. & Dueck, A. (2012, June). The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: New Directions for the Canadian and American Psychological Associations. Paper presented at the 73rd annual conference of the Canadian Psychological Association: Halifax, New Brunswick, Canada.

Ansloos, J.P., Wilkins, A., Salimi B., Nahumck, C., Ng, E., Jarvinen, M. & Dueck, A. (2012, June). Towards Critical Yet Peaceable Indigenous Psychologies. Poster presented at the 73rd annual conference of the Canadian Psychological Association: Halifax, New Brunswick, Canada.

Salimi, B. (2012, May). The Phenomenon of Psychological Denial as Evident within the Conflict in Israel-Palestine. Paper presented at the Spirituality, Emergent Creativity, and Reconciliation Conference at Saint Paul University: Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

Salimi, B. & Dueck, A. (2012, March). The God of Violence? Reflections on Human Nature, Psychology, and God's Character in the Hebrew Scriptures. Paper presented at the annual regional conference of the American Academy of Religion at Santa Clara University: Santa Clara, California.

Salimi, B., Liu, G., & Dueck, A. (2012, February). Culture, Community, and Schizophrenia. Poster presented at the annual Symposium for the Integration of Psychology and Theology at Fuller Theological Seminary: Pasadena, California.

Salimi, B. (2011, March). The Psyche and God: What Human Consciousness Reveals in Support of a Theistically Oriented Worldview. Paper presented at the annual conference of the Christian Association for Psychological Studies: Indianapolis, Indiana.

Salimi, B. (2011, April). Psychological Consciousness as Evidence for the Existence of a Transcendent and Intelligent God. Paper presented at the annual regional conference of the American Academy of Religion: Whittier College, Whittier, California.

Salimi, B. (2008, February). Grounded Theory Methodology: What Qualitative Research is Able to do that Quantitative Research Cannot. Lecture given to M.A. candidates at John F. Kennedy University: Pleasant Hill, California.

Coble-Temple, A., Salimi, B., Hodges, M. Myers, K., Rhodius, A., Parham, W., & Solt, G. (2007, August). The Future of Sport Psychology: The Co-Existence of Performance Enhancement and Clinical Psychology. Symposium presented at the annual conference of the American Psychological Association: San Francisco, California.

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## Awards, Honors, and Distinctions

- 2014 Winner, Annual Travis Award for best paper written on the integration of psychology and theology; Fuller Graduate School of Psychology.
- 2013-2014 Research Fellow, Weyerhauser Research Institute: Center for Theoretical Research on Psychology, Ethics, Culture, and Society; Fuller Graduate School of Psychology.
- 2012-2013 Research Fellow, Travis Research Institute: Center for Theoretical and Philosophical Reflections on Psychology, Culture, and Religion; Fuller Graduate School of Psychology.
- 2011 Winner, Annual Travis Award for excellence in research in the integration of psychology and theology; Fuller Graduate School of Psychology.
- 2010-2014 Honorable mention for excellence in academics by collective faculty of Fuller Graduate School of Psychology, annual review of doctoral students.
- 2009-2014 Charles E. Fuller Scholarship, Fuller Graduate School of Psychology.
- 2009-2013 Honorable mention for excellence in clinical skills by collective faculty of Fuller Graduate School of Psychology, annual review of doctoral students.
- 2008 Summa Cum Laude, John F. Kennedy University.

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## Professional Affiliations

I have been, or am currently, a member of the following associations:

American Psychological Association

- Division 9: Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues
- Division 24: Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology
- Division 39: Psychoanalysis
- Division 48: Peace Psychology

Canadian Psychological Association

American Academy of Religion

Christian Association for Psychological Studies

Colloquium on Violence and Religion

Association of Applied Sport Psychology  
 San Gabriel Valley Psychological Association  
 National Iranian American Council  
 Iranian Psychological Association of America  
 Association of Iranian American Professionals

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## Social Justice and Advocacy

Gun Buyback Program, City of Pasadena, CA: Committee Member  
2013

Part of a team, in collaboration with local city council members, the Pasadena police department, and local non-profit organizations, that organized a gun buyback program for the city. The aim of this program was to reduce the number of guns in circulation in the city while also promoting a campaign of nonviolence. This one-day event generated the purchase and melting down of 138 firearms.

National Psychotherapy Day; Co-Founder  
2012-present

National Psychotherapy Day is an annual campaign designed to raise money for underfunded community counseling centers, increase awareness and reduce stigma about psychotherapy, and mobilize professional and training therapists to donate time, money and energy to the advancement and betterment of psychological practice in the public sphere. [www.nationalpsychotherapyday.com](http://www.nationalpsychotherapyday.com)

Just Peacemaking Initiative to Israel-Palestine  
2011

A member of a delegation of graduate students and professors from Fuller Theological Seminary to Israel and Palestine. The purpose of this trip was to engage in peace dialogues, meet with and learn from local political officials, and absorb the richness of a 'dual narrative' which aimed at informing the delegation of the particulars of both sides of the Israel-Palestine conflict. This peacemaking initiative was done in collaboration with the Middle Eastern Justice and Development Initiative (MEJDI) and led by Drs. Marc Gopin and Glen Stassen.

Center for Urban Initiatives, Pasadena, CA  
2009-2010

Worked as quantitative and qualitative data collector for this non-profit, government-funded institution in collaboration with Fuller Theological Seminary. The aim of this project was to count the population of and obtain qualitative/demographic data on the homeless population in Pasadena, CA.

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## Clinical Experience

Boston University, The Danielsen Institute; Boston, MA

2014-present

Provide both individual and group psychotherapy as well as psychological assessment to an urban population of adults in the greater Boston area. Part of an interdisciplinary treatment team designed to meet the various mental health needs of clients. Specialized training, theoretical research, and practical emphases placed on: Relational and intersubjective psychoanalysis, existentialism, spirituality, and religious experience.

Supervisor:

Ryan Howes, Ph.D. and Associates; Pasadena, CA

2013-2014

Provided short and long term individual and couples psychotherapy to clients in a community-based private practice.

Supervisor: Dr. Ryan Howes

University of Southern California Counseling Center; Los Angeles, CA

2012-2013

Provided short and long term individual and group psychotherapy to clients in a university counseling center; Administered crisis intervention counseling; Conducted intakes and assessments; Prepared and delivered outreach events; Participated in weekly didactic training that provided exposure to various clinical theories, techniques, and interventions.

Supervisor: Dr. Kelly Greco

Los Angeles County USC Medical Center, Department of Neurology; Los Angeles, CA

2011-2012

Provided neuropsychological assessments and evaluations to medical patients in department of neurology of hospital; Administered exhaustive neuropsychological batteries and generated comprehensive written reports used by neurologists as part of patients' overall workups; Interdisciplinary correspondence with medical doctors; Also conducted full batteries in Spanish.

Supervisor: Dr. Nora Jimenez

Life Pacific College Counseling Center; San Dimas, CA

2011-2012

Provided individual and group therapy to students at Life Pacific College as well as members of the local community; Prepared and delivered outreach events.

Supervisor: Dr. Gayle Samples

Fuller Psychological and Family Services; Pasadena, CA

2010-2011

Provided short and long term individual and couples psychotherapy to clients in a community-based mental health clinic.

Supervisor: Dr. Rose Woo

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## Internships

De La Salle High School Wrestling; Concord, CA

2008

Worked as a sport psychology consultant with varsity wrestlers and coaching staff through the course of the 2008 season, including the California state championship tournament.

Concord Community Youth Center; Concord, CA

2008

Worked as a behavioral psychology consultant through the winter of 2008. Taught coaching clinics on sport psychology skills implementation and behavioral techniques as well as worked directly with athletes on site.

Claremont Country Club; Oakland, CA

2008

Worked on-site as the club's sport psychology consultant. Services were provided to members and staff of country club's golf course (including the club's head golf professional). Group seminars were also conducted on performance enhancement techniques.

Orin Allen Youth Rehabilitation Facility; Byron, CA

2007

Worked as a camp counselor and teacher in LEAAP program with incarcerated young males. LEAAP (Life Enhancement through Athletic and Academic Participation) has the goal of using sport psychology and behavioral therapy techniques to help inform and enable others on and with life skills.

East Gate High School; Pittsburg, CA

2007

Worked with troubled youth, many of whom were formerly incarcerated, on general life skills through education on and implementation of sport psychology and behavioral techniques. Taught four separate classes with a minimum enrollment of 30 adolescents who participated in the 11-week workshop.

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## Other Professional Experience

Program Analyst, National University College of Letters and Sciences; La Jolla, CA

2008-2009

Served as coordinator, administrator, and liaison between faculty and students for the Master of Arts in Counseling Psychology program at university; Duties entailed: addressing and resolving licensure issues with California and other state boards, advising students on curriculum and program requirements, assisting faculty with staffing and course related issues, and maintaining administrated records of all students in the program university-wide; Reported directly to Dean of college and Chair of psychology program.

Administrative Assistant II, John F. Kennedy University, School of Education and Liberal Arts; Pleasant Hill, CA

2006-2008

Served as primary administrator for the office team which included other administrators, Dean, and university faculty; Duties entailed: bookkeeping; general office support for program faculty; creation and editing of quarterly school newsletter. Recognized as valuable member of the office by both the Dean and direct supervisor.

Track and Field Coach, Poway Unified School District; San Diego, CA

2003-2006

Served as source of instruction, support, and guidance for student-athletes on Rancho Bernardo High School track and field team; Duties entailed: coaching hurdlers (freshmen through Varsity) and assisting the head coach as needed.

Center Assistant/Admissions Advisor, National University; San Diego, CA

2006

Served as administrative assistant and academic advisor for current and prospective students; Duties entailed: bookkeeping; admissions application processing; and conducting academic advising with students.

Server, California Pizza Kitchen; San Diego, CA

2003-2005

Duties entailed: waiting on tables and addressing customer satisfaction issues at Carmel Mountain Ranch Store; Consistently recognized by management for achieving highest base and add-on sales. Also recognized as one of the most skilled and valued employees on the wait staff.

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## Language Skills

Fluent in English

Fluent in Farsi

Proficient in Spanish

Literate in Classical Arabic