

The morality of war: A review and research agenda

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### **Abstract**

What is judged as morally right and wrong in war? In the present paper I argue that despite many decades of research on moral psychology, and on the psychology of intergroup conflict, social psychology does not yet have a good answer to this question. However, it is a question of great importance, as its answer has implications for decision-making in war, public policy, and international law. I therefore suggest a new way for psychology to study the morality of war, which combines the strengths of philosophical *just war theory* with experimental techniques and theories developed for the psychological study of morality more generally. This novel approach has already begun to elucidate the moral judgments third-party observers make in war, and I demonstrate that these early findings have important implications for moral psychology, just war theory, and our understanding of the morality of war.

*Key words:* moral psychology, war, intergroup conflict, just war theory, moral judgment

“All’s fair in love and war”

- *aphorism*

Despite the popularity of the aphorism above, it is abundantly clear that all is *not* fair in war. Soldiers abide by strong moral codes (Cole, Drew, McLaughlin, & Mandsager, 2009; The U.S. Army, 2016a, 2016b), international laws constrain what can and cannot be done in war (Geneva Conventions, 1977; Henckaerts & Doswald-Beck, 2005; International Committee of the Red Cross, 2005), and when a soldier oversteps the boundaries of proper behaviour, the public responds with moral outrage (Amnesty International, 2004; Hersh, 2004; Human Rights Watch, 2005; McGreal, 2012). Clearly, soldiers are judged according to standards of appropriate conduct. But what are these standards? What is judged as morally right and wrong in war, and how are such judgments made?

The answers to these questions have important psychological, theoretical, and practical implications. In the present paper I first propose an approach to studying the moral psychology of war that combines the most prominent moral philosophy of war (*just war theory*; Orend, 2013; Walzer, 2015) with the methodological and theoretical insights of contemporary moral and social psychology. I then discuss two recent experimental studies that use just war theory as a framework, and outline how this approach compares to, and complements, two other psychological approaches to war and morality. Finally, I explore the broader implications of my proposal for psychologists interested in war, for the philosophy and laws of war, and for our understanding of morality in war.

### Introducing “The Morality of War”

Imagine a soldier killing an enemy soldier in war. How morally defensible is this action?

Implicit in this scenario and judgment are four important distinctions, that together form the foundations of the present proposal. The first is that the scenario is set in a *war* - in a large scale, organized, violent, intergroup conflict (Lazar, 2017b; Orend, 2008) - as opposed to in peace, or in an “everyday” context. The second is that the judgment concerns an individual soldier and their actions, rather than (or as well as) the soldier’s country or the war as a whole. The third is that the judgment can be made by external, third-party, observers: lay people who are not from the same country or group as any of the soldiers involved. The fourth and final distinction is best captured by a continuum. At one end is the position that during war, morality is silent: The only judgment that can be made about a soldier is a prudential or practical one concerning the extent to which their actions contribute to their country’s war effort (see e.g., Cicero, 52 BCE; Clausewitz, 1832/1979). At the other end of the continuum is the position that morality applies equally in war and in peace. And, since killing in peace is absolutely morally wrong, a *soldier’s* killing cannot be morally defensible, justified, or required either (although it may under certain very limited conditions be excused, Fiala, 2018); which in turn makes war, on the whole, morally impossible. My proposal starts from a position between these two extremes: I assume that most people are able and willing to make *moral* judgments about the conduct of war - judgments of right and wrong - *and* that these moral judgments do not invariably commit them to a pacifist position. Rather, the conduct of war runs the gamut from extremely morally abhorrent to highly morally laudable, and third-party judgments vary accordingly (Watkins & Goodwin, 2019). This position is also staked out by the preeminent philosopher of war, Michael Walzer: “War is still, somehow, a rule-governed activity, a world of permissions and prohibitions - a moral world, therefore, in the midst of hell” (Walzer, 2015, p. 47).

These four distinctions and corresponding assumptions underpin my argument that moral and social psychologists should study the *morality of war*: the system of proscriptive and

prescriptive norms that guides the behavior of individual actors, and the judgments of uninvolved third-party observers, during war. Moral psychologists have not yet explored this particular moral world. However, detailed maps of its landscape are provided by *just war theory*, the most prominent normative theory of the morality of war (Orend, 2013, Walzer, 2015). In the remainder of this section I therefore describe this theory in detail, and discuss how psychologists interested in the morality of war can benefit from its framework. This section thus also provides a background to the subsequent discussion of recent relevant studies, and of alternative approaches to war and morality in psychological research.

### **Just War Theory: A Prescriptive Map of the Morality of War**

Just war theory is a normative - that is, prescriptive - philosophical theory which considers how we should make moral judgments about war. It has a long history, stretching back to Augustine and Aquinas, but found its contemporary form with the publication of Michael Walzers's *Just and Unjust Wars*, in 1977 (5th ed. published in 2015). As the most influential philosophical theory of morality in war, just war theory frames a great deal of contemporary debate about the morality and laws of war (e.g., Carter, 2003; Coady, 2011; Emba, 2015; Fiala, 2008; Obama, 2009; Reeves & May, 2013; Savoy, 2004; Thistlethwaite & Katulis, 2009). This debate is one that psychologists interested in the morality of war may benefit from paying attention to, and to which they can contribute a unique descriptive and explanatory perspective.

Just war theory starts from a position or assumption I have already mentioned: War is “a rule-governed activity, a world of permissions and prohibitions” (Walzer, 2015, p. 47). It then sets about analysing and systemizing this world of moral rules. Two further assumptions of the theory are 1) that war can sometimes be just (that is, provided certain conditions are met, *resorting to war* can sometimes be a just course of action; *jus ad bellum*), but 2) that we nonetheless place moral limitations on how a war is fought (the *conduct of war*, *jus in bello*).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> These two assumptions distinguish just war theory from two other prominent philosophical theories of war: pacifism and realism. Briefly, pacifism rejects the first assumption - resorting to war can never be a

Correspondingly, just war theory is divided into two parts: Resort to war can be thought of as referring to *international* rules, whereas conduct of war refers to *interpersonal* rules. Importantly, the principles outlined by just war theory concerning the conduct of war are not only intended to regulate combatants' conduct in war directly; they are also intended as guidelines for uninvolved third-parties judging that conduct. Additionally, the appropriate *relationship between* the morality of the resort to war and the conduct of war is vigorously debated in just war theory (a debate I return to in the next section).

My focus in this article is mainly on third-party judgments of the conduct of war, as it is in the interpersonal realm that I see the most space for developing connections between moral psychology and just war theory. According to just war theorists, the key moral principles governing the conduct of war are the principle of discrimination (combatants are legitimate targets, civilians are not, Lazar, 2016), proportionality (combatants must "restrain their force to that amount appropriate to achieving their aim or target," Orend, 2008, Proportionality, para. 1), and a prohibition on means that are *mala in se* (bad in and of themselves, e.g., biological weapons; Orend, 2013). Importantly, these principles have been discovered and developed through a close study of moral judgments *in war*, and are intended to apply (only) in this specific context. That said, just war theorists also debate whether the morality of war is or should be considered continuous (or discontinuous) with the morality of a peaceful, everyday, context (see, e.g., Garner, 2016; Walzer, 2006; and below). This debate notwithstanding, key to understanding just war theory is understand that it - traditionally - treats war as a separate domain, distinct from peace. As we will see, this perspective on war distinguishes just war theory not only from psychological research focused on moral judgments in an everyday context, but also from other approaches to war in psychological research.

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just cause of action - and realism rejects the second assumption - *moral* limitations are irrelevant to the conduct of war; decisions about how a war is fought depend only on what is most effective and efficient with regard to national interest; cf. my fourth distinction in the previous section. For more on comparisons between just war theory, pacifism, and realism, see Walzer, 2015; Orend, 2008; Lazar, 2017b.

Just war theory has been highly influential - both in shaping international laws of armed conflict (Orend, 2013), and in popular discourse about contemporary wars (Coady, 2011, Fiala, 2008; Reeves & May, 2013; Savoy, 2004; Thistlethwaite & Katulis, 2009). Its overarching aim is perhaps unusually “real world” for a philosophical theory: “the point of just war theory is to regulate warfare, to limit its occasions, and to regulate its conduct and legitimate scope (Margalit & Walzer, 2009; p. 2). Aspirations of (assisting with) limiting violence are shared by many academic psychologists (Christie & Montiel, 2013), and a great deal of psychological research focuses on support for or opposition to military interventions (e.g., in Iraq in 2003, Liberman & Skitka, 2017; McCleary, Nalls, & Williams, 2009). However, when it comes to third-party moral judgments specifically about the interpersonal conduct of war, just war theorists, politicians, and legal scholars dominate the debate (Carter, 2003; Coady, 2011; Margalit & Walzer, 2009; Obama, 2009; Savoy, 2004).

One way for psychologists to begin to contribute to this debate, then, is to adopt “the language of” just war theory. Using this language during the descriptive study of the morality of war has a number of benefits. Drawing on the collective wisdom of many centuries of thought gives psychological researchers a “head start” in structuring their inquiries. If the question is “what is judged as morally right and wrong in war?”, just war theory provides not only a detailed (albeit prescriptive) answer, it also examines the various principles of conduct in war in relation to each other, in relation to the historical context, and in relation to larger issues of morality, war, and peace. This “map” will be practically useful to anyone new to the moral landscape of war.

Further, just war theory’s approach to the conduct of war concerns as mentioned uninvolved third-party (“observer”) judgments specifically of interpersonal decisions and actions in war. When (social) psychologists study judgments of intergroup conflict, they generally take a group identification perspective (e.g., Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002). This means that participants - even if they are judging the conduct of a war in which they did not directly participate - are generally *partial* to one side of the conflict (i.e., their own side; more on this in

the section on moral disengagement, below). While my proposal draws inspiration from the broader psychological study of morality and intergroup conflict, I argue specifically for using just war theory as a framework for these descriptive investigations. Aligning a psychological study of the morality of war with just war theory provides a novel view - an external and potentially impartial view - of the conduct of war. This new vantage point will not only generate new lines of research; it also has the potential to reveal new information about moral judgment and decision making that can in turn inform the policy and laws of war. In the next section I demonstrate this approach in practice, drawing on two sets of recent experimental studies. I also outline promising directions for future research.

### **Judgments of the Conduct of War: Two Experimental Studies**

The two studies outlined below draw on the prescriptive principles of the conduct of war (according to just war theory and the laws of war) to raise descriptive (and explanatory) research questions about the moral judgment of combatants. They thus provide examples of the approach I propose for combining just war theory and psychology in order to explore the morality of war.

#### **The Principle of Discrimination**

Just war theory prioritises *the principle of discrimination* as the paramount moral principle in war. Its priority is echoed by customary international humanitarian law (IHL), which codifies how wars should be fought (i.e., places legal limits on how war can be conducted). Of the 161 rules of IHL, 96 concern variations on the principle of discrimination, in that they determine who (and what) is a legitimate target for attack during war (Henckaert & Doswald-Beck, 2005). According to this principle, civilians (non-combatants) are not legitimate targets of attack (Orend, 2013), and should be protected as far as possible (ICRC, 2014). Combatants, by contrast, are legitimate targets of attack, and part of the challenge is to define a “combatant” in an appropriately restrictive way (Gade, 2010; Kutz, 2005). The principle of discrimination is not a recent invention. Warrior codes of ethics and humanitarian limits on conflict appear to have



included - throughout history - some version of the principle of discrimination, in that there are some categories of people who are considered more legitimate targets of attack than others (French, 2005; Traven, 2015). The prescriptive philosophical, legal, and historical literature thus suggests that the principle of discrimination will be an important part of a descriptive morality of war as well.

Two studies have investigated whether lay judgments of the conduct of war align with the principle of discrimination. Benbaji, Falk, and Feldman (2015) asked a representative sample of Israeli participants to imagine that “they were military commanders with an opportunity to gain a significant military advantage in an attack that targeted individuals” (p. 3), in a hypothetical war between two unnamed states. Overall, participants were more reluctant to order the attack when the targeted individuals were civilians, rather than soldiers. Watkins and Laham (2018) similarly found that U.S. participants made harsher moral judgments of a hypothetical soldier (from a fictional country) who killed an enemy civilian, compared to if he killed an enemy soldier. The findings of this latter study speak directly to the philosophical and legal principle of discrimination, as participants were positioned as uninvolved “third-party” observers to the conflict. Further, not only did lay people discriminate between the killing of civilians and soldiers, they also discriminated between the killing *by* civilians and soldiers: Soldiers were judged as more morally permitted *to kill* in war than were civilians. This is important because the principle of discrimination determines not only who is a legitimate target, but also who is a legitimate moral agent in war (Gade, 2010).

The prescriptive and descriptive principles of discrimination thus appear closely aligned. But *why* are soldiers and civilians judged differently? In the philosophical and legal literature, the emphasis is often on posing a *threat* to others. On this analysis, a civilian who engages in hostilities can acquire the status of “combatant”, and be liable to attack (Deakin, 2014), while a combatant who is hors de combat is afforded some of the same protections as are civilians (Geneva Conventions, 1977). In the Israeli study cited above, the principle of discrimination was

moderated by involvement in wartime activities: Enemy combatants who were directly involved in the fighting were seen as the most legitimate targets for attack, civilians who were uninvolved were seen as the least legitimate, and uninvolved soldiers and involved civilians fell somewhere in between (Benbaji et al., 2015). And, in the U.S. study, (Western) soldiers were perceived as more harmful than their civilian counterparts (as well as braver and colder), and perceptions of harmfulness mediated the effect of soldier status on moral judgments (Watkins & Laham, 2018). The current evidence thus suggests that the psychological principle of discrimination is indeed closely related to the perception that soldiers are generally more actively involved in causing harm. This is consistent with previous research (using animals and aliens as targets) demonstrating that *harmful* creatures are afforded less moral concern than harmless creatures (Piazza, Landy, & Goodwin, 2014).

The principle of discrimination is a central part of the morality of war. Importantly, the principle is not about favouring *my* soldiers over enemy soldiers (though such biases certainly exist as well, Benbaji et al., 2015; Hewstone et al., 2002; Pratto & Glasford, 2008), but is instead an aspect of how people make moral judgments about the conduct of war from an uninvolved third-party perspective. The principle is well established in the philosophical and legal literature on war, and I have here discussed two studies that investigate discrimination between soldiers and civilians from a psychological, descriptive, perspective. Tackling the principle of discrimination using psychological methods (i.e., vignette studies) and constructs (i.e., from the person perception literature, Piazza et al., 2014) can help illuminate not only the extent to which the principle describes lay people's judgments, but also its possible causes.

### **The Independence Thesis and the Moral Equivalence of Combatants**

The principle of discrimination is one of the prescriptive principles of the conduct of war. Importantly, combatants on both (all) sides of a war are expected to comply with this and other principles (Boyle & Brown, 2011; Orend, 2013). That is, judgments of combatants' conduct should be made *independently* of which side of the war they are on, and independently of that

side's decision to initiate military action in the first place (Walzer, 2015). The second set of studies I discuss here address precisely this "independence thesis" drawn from traditional just war theory: They investigate the relationship between moral judgments of the conduct of war and the resort to war.

The independence thesis states that the prescribed rules of conduct in war - the world of permissions and prohibitions - apply equally to all combatants, regardless of the country or cause for which they are fighting (Lazar, 2017a). Consequently, as long as they do in fact follow the prescribed rules of conduct, the actions of combatants on either side of a war are morally equivalent, and should be judged symmetrically (referred to as the "symmetry thesis"). The independence and symmetry theses are key aspects of traditional just war theory. However, these theses have recently been subject to a great deal of debate. "Revisionist" theorists counter the "traditionalist" position by arguing that moral judgments of combatants' conduct *should* take into account the cause for which they are fighting (Lazar, 2017a; McMahan, 2004). And if the (just or unjust) reason the combatants' country had for going to war in the first place ought to influence judgments of the combatants themselves, then even if they are engaging in the same conduct, combatants on either side of a war are no longer moral equals. Their conduct should be judged *asymmetrically*, with greater leniency afforded to the combatants fighting for a just cause.

The argument between revisionist and traditionalist just war theorists is partly an argument about the relationship between the two aspects of just war theory - the resort to war (the international aspect) and the conduct of war (the interpersonal aspect). The corresponding psychological research question, then, is how this relationship plays out in lay people's moral judgments. To what extent are third-party moral judgments of interpersonal actions - i.e., of the conduct of war - influenced by the country or cause for which the combatants are fighting (i.e., by the resort to war)? Are moral judgments of combatants on either side of a conflict symmetrical?

Watkins and Goodwin (2019) comprehensively investigated the conditions under which lay judgments of soldiers on either side of a war are symmetrical or asymmetrical. In a large set of studies, they presented participants with information about various wars, in which there was a “just” and an “unjust” side (for example, an aggressor state invaded a neighbouring state, which defended itself). They then asked participants to judge a soldier from either the just or the unjust side, engaged in the *same* action (e.g., killing enemy soldiers). Across all studies, covering many different types of wars and many different actions, lay people judged the conduct of soldiers on the just side of a war as more morally defensible than the same conduct by soldiers on the unjust side. In other words, lay judgments were *asymmetrical*. The U.S. participants in these studies did not uphold the independence or symmetry theses, and thus their judgments appeared to be most in line with these aspects of revisionist just war theory.

Despite the main effect - an asymmetry in moral judgment - aligning with the normative position of revisionist just war theorists, there is currently no evidence that it is driven by “ordinary people’s appreciation and endorsement of the philosophical bedrock on which revisionist theorizing is based” (p. 21, Watkins & Goodwin, 2019). According to revisionist just war theorists, one justification for asymmetrical judgments is that combatants on the unjust side of a conflict causally contribute to an unjust cause (whereas just combatants contribute to a just cause; Lazar, 2016). But Watkins and Goodwin (2019) found that the asymmetry remained unchanged whether the soldier’s actions causally contributed to their side’s war effort or not; suggesting - contra the revisionist argument - that this factor is not contributing substantially to the asymmetry. Meanwhile, according to traditional just war theorists, one justification for symmetrical judgments is that combatants on both sides of a conflict are operating under a “shared servitude” (Walzer, 2015). But Watkins and Goodwin (2019) also found that the asymmetry remained unchanged whether the soldiers were acting under orders or on their own initiative, suggesting that this factor is not contributing substantially to the asymmetry either.

So what *does* explain the asymmetry? Which psychological processes are leading lay people in the U.S. to judge the actions of combatants on the just side of a conflict as more morally defensible than the identical actions of those on the unjust side? Watkins and Goodwin (2019) found support for two processes. First, in these studies, participants tended to assume that the soldiers on either side of the conflict endorsed and supported their own country's cause for war. When this assumption was overturned - that is, participants were told that the soldier *did not* endorse their country's cause for war, but was fighting out of a sense of duty - the asymmetry was attenuated; primarily because the conduct of the soldier on the unjust side was judged more leniently under these conditions. This finding is consistent with previous research, in an everyday context, showing that an agent's *identification* with a morally bad act increases condemnation by third-party judges, even as the outcome remains the same (Woolfolk, Doris, & Darley, 2006). Second, in these studies, participants considered a war between two hypothetical countries. However, in making their judgments they tended to implicitly align themselves with the just side of the war, which meant that part of the asymmetry in judgments of the combatants was driven by "ingroup" bias (see, e.g., Hewstone et al., 2002). When this implicit alignment was overturned - by explicitly asking participants to imagine themselves either as citizens of a third, uninvolved country, or as citizens of the unjust country - the asymmetry was again attenuated (Watkins & Goodwin, 2019; see also Benbaji et al., 2015). Thus, the asymmetry appears to be substantially driven by two factors: An assumption about the combatants' endorsement of their country's cause for war, and a tendency of uninvolved third-party observers to align themselves with the just side.

The studies reported by Watkins and Goodwin (2019) uncovered a particular feature of the descriptive morality of war - asymmetry, rather than symmetry - and partially explained it by reference to psychological processes of perceived identification, and group alignment. Neither of these processes is emphasised in the philosophical or legal literature on the conduct of war; and, of course, the debate between revisionists and traditionalists will not be resolved by

reference to any single psychological study. But, this discrepancy between the descriptive and the prescriptive is important nonetheless.

Looking to international laws, the symmetry and independence theses (of traditional just war theory) emerge as an attempt at impartiality. The International Criminal Court is a third-party institution, applying the laws governing the conduct of war to individual cases irrespective of the countries involved (The International Criminal Court, 2002). Ad hoc international tribunals set up post conflict, such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa (South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1995), and the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, 1993), likewise aim at fairness and even-handedness when dealing with both perpetrators and victims of these complex conflicts.

Watkins and Goodwin suggest that “traditional just war theorists face an uphill battle in convincing lay individuals to judge soldiers on either side of an unjust war as moral equals” (p. 21, 2019). Certainly, these tribunals are not always successful in being, or appearing, impartial: They are plagued both by accusations of “victor’s justice” and by recalcitrant UN Security Council members (Goldsmith, 2003; Meernik, 2003; Schabas, 2004). These problems are part of what motivates revisionists to re-examine the assumptions of traditional just war theory: “What revisionists hope is that their work can be a source of guidance in establishing new international institutions that will eventually make it possible to reform the law of armed conflict” (McMahan, 2012, para. 32). One of these reforms concerns combatants’ taking responsibility for their endorsement (or otherwise) of their country’s cause for war: Revisionist just war theorists believe their insistence on *non*-independence and asymmetry “can be used to instill a sense of individual responsibility and conscience in citizens and members of the armed forces” (Leveringhaus, 2012, p.17).

Both the ICC’s impartiality, and revisionists’ desire for “individual responsibility,” represent worthy values and goals. I do not intend to adjudicate between them. But, in working

towards these goals, or in trying to reconcile them and reform international institutions, philosophers and legal scholars may wish to take into account what psychology reveals about the capacities and limitations of lay people's morality of war, or risk developing theories and guidelines that are at odds with such a morality.

### **Intermission and Future Directions**

Just war theory provides a prescriptive map of the morality of war, and the studies outlined above illuminate some psychological, descriptive, features of this map. The two sets of studies differ in that one found that moral judgments of lay people (in the U.S., Australia, and Israel) were generally consistent with the principle of discrimination; while the other found that moral judgments of lay people (in the U.S.) were inconsistent with the independence and symmetry theses. This latter discrepancy is particularly interesting in light of a recent debate within just war theory, between traditionalists who maintain that the independence thesis is the normatively correct position, and the revisionists who instead argue for normative asymmetry. Despite this difference in their correspondence to (traditional) just war theory, both sets of studies also diverge from just war theory in a similar way: They both demonstrate that in *explaining* lay moral judgments we must look beyond philosophical justifications (for the principle of discrimination and the independence thesis) and instead draw on established psychological phenomena and mechanisms such as person perception, (perceived) identification, and side-taking (e.g., DeScioli, 2016; Piazza et al., 2014; Woolfolk et al., 2006). These studies thus suggest the potential to learn a great deal about the morality of war, if our research questions are informed by just war theory, and our methods and investigations are informed by past psychological research.

**Moving Forward with Methodological Pluralism.** The studies discussed in the previous section are also similar in that they focus on a dialogue between the moral philosophy of war, the international legal literature, and vignette-based experimental studies. Vignette-based studies allow researchers tight control over experimental factors (Aronson & Carlsmith,

1969), and can often be adapted directly from philosophical thought experiments (e.g., trolley problems, Cushman, 2014). But there are many other methodological avenues to explore and exploit as well. In addition to written vignettes, psychologists studying morality in general (not in war) have for example developed comprehensive image- and video-sets that capture the key features of moral judgment (Clifford, Iyengar, Cabeza, & Sinnott-Armstrong, 2015; Crone, Bode, Murawski, & Laham, 2017; McCurrie, Crone, Bigelow, & Laham, 2017); brain imaging techniques have been used to investigate the neural correlates of justified and unjustified harm (Domínguez, van Nunspeet, et al, 2018), and of moral versus non-moral cognition (Theriault, Waytz, Heiphetz, & Young, 2017); and beyond the lab, experience sampling methods provide a snapshot of the moral judgments people make in everyday life (Bollich, Doris, Vazire, Raison, Jackson, & Mehl, 2016; Hofmann et al., 2014). Further, through conceptual analyses of anthropological, religious, and philosophical texts (Haidt & Graham, 2007, Haidt & Joseph, 2004), linguistic analyses of speeches by religious and political leaders (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009), and analyses of legal distinctions in systems of criminal law around the world (Mikhail, 2007), general models of moral judgment such as Universal Moral Grammar (Mikhail, 2011) and Moral Foundations Theory (MFT; Haidt and colleagues, 2004, 2007) have been developed.

MFT has been particularly influential in demonstrating that in an everyday context, judgments of right and wrong can be categorized using taxonomies of moral values, or foundations. According to MFT, five key foundations - care/harm, fairness/cheating, loyalty/betrayal, authority/subversion, and sanctity/degradation - comprehensively capture the content of moral judgments across cultures. Although debate remains as to whether additional (or perhaps fewer) foundations are necessary (Iyer, Koleva, Graham, Ditto, & Haidt, 2012; Janoff-Bulman & Carnes, 2013; Schein & Gray, 2015), this taxonomy may also generate future research on the moral psychology of war. For example, can moral judgments made in war be captured by these five foundations as well, or are some foundations - perhaps



authority/subversion, and loyalty/betrayal - more relevant to the conduct of war than others?

What is the relationship between the sanctity/degradation foundation (which captures the intuition that some actions are wrong on the grounds that they are degrading, unnatural, or impure, Haidt, 2012) and judgments of weapons that are *mala a se*? The *mala a se* principle applies to weapons that are bad “in and of themselves”, and as such has been leveraged to develop prohibitions on, for example, landmines, blinding lasers, incendiary weapons and biological weapons (Dige, 2012; Human Rights Watch, 2015; International Campaign to Ban Landmines, n.d.). In contemporary military affairs, the use of (autonomous) armed drones is hotly debated, with opponents arguing against “killer robots” in ways that appear - anecdotally - closely aligned with concerns about the sanctity of human life, the degrading effects of involving a machine in the kill-chain, and a visceral disgust and anger at the unnaturalness and unfairness of remote warfare (Asaro, 2012; Chamayou, 2015; Garcia, 2015; Human Rights Watch, 2005). Is the “impurity” of certain weapons what is at stake in these debates?

In studying these and related questions, I hope that researchers will be as inventive and pluralistic in their methodological approaches to the moral psychology *of war*, as moral psychology has been in general; employing self-report surveys, image-stimuli, video-stimuli, experimental manipulations and economic games, brain imaging, big data and linguistic analysis. As with morality in general, comparisons between these methods, and the findings they yield, will no doubt reveal some disagreement - between individuals, groups, nations, or historical eras - as to what the most relevant values and most inviolable rules of war are (Coker, 2008). And, there will be occasional disagreement among researchers, about the best way to describe and explain this context-bound morality. But, if we share the framework of just war theory, we will collectively get closer to figuring out what is judged as morally right and wrong in war, how these judgments are made, and the broader implications they have.

### **Alternative Approaches to Morality and War**

Above I have argued for, and demonstrated, a particular approach to studying the morality of war: using just war theory as a framework, and eliciting moral judgments about combatants' actions from third-party (uninvolved) observers. However, there are other ways of studying war and morality. In this part I outline two alternative approaches, drawn from social and moral psychology, and compare and contrast them to the above approach (a summary of the comparison is provided in Table 1). While both alternatives have provided many insights into morality and/or war, and both have particular strengths, I demonstrate that neither approach provides a direct answer to the question of what is judged as morally right and wrong in war.

[Table 1 approximately here]

#### **The Conflict Approach: Interpreting War through the Morality of Peace**

If we ask what is morally right and wrong in an everyday context, many answers will correspond to some version of "it is morally wrong to intentionally harm people". That is, a prohibition on *intentional harm* is a key moral value, recognized in most taxonomies of everyday morality (Haidt, 2013; Hofmann et al., Schein & Gray, 2017; Greene, 2014). But if one of the primary dictates of everyday morality is 'do no harm', what is going on with war?

As the world was shocked and horrified by the atrocities committed by the Nazi regime during WWII, one version of this question - "what turns ordinarily "moral" and "peace loving" people into killers in war?" - provided the impetus to a great deal of research in social psychology (Leidner, Tropp, & Lickel, 2013; Reicher, Haslam, & Rath, 2008; Ross, Lepper, & Ward, 2010). This body of work provides the first alternative approach to morality and war, and I will refer to it as "the conflict approach". The conflict approach highlights - and responds to - a conflict between the dictates of an everyday morality, on the one hand, and actions committed during war and other kinds of intergroup conflict on the other hand: People have a "psychic need (...) to resolve two seemingly inconsistent cognitions when they decide whether or not to support war: the desire to maintain a favorable view of the self and the need to justify actions

that violate socialized self-sanctions against harming others” (Aquino, Reed, Thau, & Freedman, 2007, p. 386). How are these “inconsistent cognitions” resolved?

One comprehensive answer is provided by Bandura’s *moral disengagement theory* (Bandura, 1999, 2002; Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996). Bandura proposed that we all possess a self-regulatory system which monitors our (moral) behavior, judges it as good or bad, and reacts (if necessary) to modify subsequent behavior. This system thus “keeps conduct in line with personal standards”; people behave morally because doing otherwise would “bring self-condemnations” (p. 194, Bandura 1999). Importantly, however, the self-regulatory system can be selectively disengaged (preemptively or retroactively). Moral disengagement strategies include - among others - minimizing one’s responsibility for a bad act, downplaying its negative consequences, morally justifying it, or denying the victims’ humanity (Bandura, 1996).

While originally conceived of as a “first-person” phenomenon (allowing the moral agents themselves to act immorally), moral disengagement has also been extended to “indirect” commission of immoral acts; that is, endorsement of immoral acts committed by others with whom one shares a group identity (for example, fellow citizens of a particular country). And, research using this theory has shown that when faced specifically with the dissonance evoked by war, people will indeed respond by morally disengaging: morally justifying the acts involved (e.g., Aquino et al., 2007; Hartmann, Krakowiak, & Tsay-Vogel, 2014), diffusing responsibility (de Graaff, Schut, Verweij, Vermetten, & Giebels, 2016), and dehumanizing both the enemy (Castano & Giner-Sorolla, 2016; Giner-Sorolla, Leidner, & Castano, 2011; Leidner, Castano, Zaiser, & Giner-Sorolla, 2010), and innocent bystanders (Rai, Valdesolo, & Graham, 2017). Moral disengagement theory is primarily discussed by Bandura as a *process*, however when moral disengagement is assessed as a *trait*, it is also related to support for war and violence in general (Grussendorf, McAlister, Sanström, Udd, & Morrison, 2002; Jackson & Gaertner, 2010; McAlister, 2000, 2001; McAlister, Bandura, & Owen, 2006; Moore, 2015). Overall, then, moral

disengagement theory has been highly influential and generative in investigating how individuals can commit or support acts - including killing in war - that they might “ordinarily” condemn.

My proposed approach differs from the conflict approach in a number of ways. The simplest difference relates to the distinction between the *resort* to war and the *conduct* of war (Table 1, Column 2). I believe moral disengagement theory is potentially a good match for analysing *resort to war*; that is, the guidelines proposed by philosophers and legal scholars for governing a country’s decision to deploy the military and go to war. Considering this international aspect of just war theory, the prescriptive question is “When is a country morally justified in going to war?” And the answer is - according to just war theory - “when the war has a just cause; when it has the right intention; when the correct authority declares war; when the war effort will not be disproportionate; and when it is used as a last resort” (Orend, 2005). A researcher taking a conflict approach to war might analyse these prescriptive philosophical and legal requirements as examples of institutionalized moral disengagement. The “just cause” and “right intention” requirements sound like “moral justifications”, in that they portray the war as serving valued social or moral purposes (Bandura et al., 1996). Insisting on a “correct authority” seems to involve diffusion or displacement of responsibility. Considerations of proportionality possibly minimizes harm to the victims. And so on.

This is no doubt an interesting project (and similar examples are used in the moral disengagement literature, Bandura, 2002), but it is not the one I am proposing to undertake here. I am instead proposing that researchers focus directly on the interpersonal *conduct* of war, as a separate project. This means setting aside the decision to *resort* to war, side-stepping the contrast between “ordinarily peace-loving people” and their support for war (more on this below), and instead investigating what is judged as morally right and wrong *in war*. Once a war is underway, how is its interpersonal violence regulated? Which actions are proscribed or prescribed during war? This simple shift in focus represents the first difference between my proposed approach and the conflict approach.

The second, more conceptual, difference relates to the relationship between morality and war (the “continuum” in Table 1, Column 4). The conflict approach starts from a baseline assumption about “everyday morality”, in which ordinarily peace-loving people are socialized into avoiding and condemning intentional harm. If researchers treat the moral norms of peace - norms which include a strong prohibition against intentional harm - as the default, then the fact of killing in war indeed represents a troublesome violation of those norms. But using everyday morality as the starting point anchors the investigations at the “pacifist” end of the continuum. It forces research questions about moral judgments of the conduct of war into a comparison with the (assumed default, harm-avoiding) morality of peace. This inherent comparison in turn shapes, and perhaps restricts, the type of questions that are raised, and answered, by moral and social psychologists (Fiske & Rai, 2015, Chapter 7). If we instead treat war as a discrete domain, with its own standards and norms, we can then ask a number of additional questions related specifically to moral judgments in this context. For example, who is considered a legitimate versus illegitimate target of violence in war? What role does implied consent play in these distinctions? How are judgments about the treatment of wounded or imprisoned enemy soldiers influenced by ideals of honor (e.g., “fighting fair”, O’Dea, Martens, & Saucier, 2019)? How do expectations of fairness and bravery in war relate to judgments of drone warfare (Schulzke, 2017)? What makes urinating on corpses seem so especially morally abhorrent (Bowley & Rosenberg, 2012)?

The conflict approach focuses on deviations from an everyday morality, that is, on explaining how violence is initiated or perpetrated. For this reason it does not facilitate the descriptive mapping of more nuanced distinctions in moral judgments *within* a context that is dominated by violence. But for researchers who want to explore and explain these particular judgments, it may be both more tractable and parsimonious to treat the morality of war as a separate landscape, rather than to assume that it is always merely a distortion of the morality of peace (see Rai & Fiske, 2011, for a related argument). Just war theory provides a (prescriptive)

map of this landscape, and may thus prove useful to researchers interested specifically in descriptive and explanatory questions about the morality of war.

The third important difference between my approach and the conflict approach concerns who is making the judgment. Although it does not distinguish between the morality of peace and war, or between resort to war and conduct of war, in the same way as just war theory does, the conflict approach *does* discuss violence at many levels - interpersonal and intergroup as well as international. According to moral disengagement theory and related analyses, group-based structures - governmental and educational institutions, and so on - facilitate disengagement at the individual level, and individuals collectively construct the institutions as scaffolding for their disengagement in turn (Bandura, 1999; Bar-Tal, 2007). Thus, first-party, collective, and intragroup processes all actively help people resolve the potential conflict between their (or their group's) immoral actions, and their sense of themselves as morally good people.

But the questions I raised above - about the nuances in moral judgment across different types of harm - can be asked not only of first-party or ingroup members, but also of uninvolved third-party observers. People who are *not* from the same country as the moral perpetrators or victims, but rather from the broader international community, can and do make moral judgments about the conduct of war. These third-party observers do not have the same motivation to morally disengage as do the moral agents; there is no conflict between *their* actions and self-concept. In theory, uninvolved third-party observers are free to apply their "everyday" moral standards when judging war as well, and to maintain - for example - that killing of civilians *and* soldiers is equally wrong: They are both equally human, and intentionally harming humans is wrong. And certainly, some individuals do reach this conclusion, and identify as pacifists (Fiala, 2018). Yet, as discussed in the section on the principle of discrimination, on average, uninvolved observers judge the killing of (and by) soldiers more leniently than the same killing of (and by) civilians. And, they perceive soldiers as more dangerous, cold, and brave (Watkins & Laham, 2018). Further, they make divergent judgments of the same actions by soldiers on

either side of a (just versus unjust) war (Watkins & Goodwin, 2019), and are more accepting of other people's parochial moral actions in war (Watkins & Laham, 2019). Since moral disengagement theory and similar lines of research focus on processes that are triggered by a (potential) *conflict* between actions and moral standards, they would have to explain whence this conflict is arising for these external, uninvolved, observers.

This is not to say that the conflict approach has been *wrong* to focus on first-party antecedents of violence (whether interpersonal or intergroup). It is important to know what enables the initiation and perpetuation of violence, and exploring how people disengage from moral self-sanctions has been highly influential: Research on *reducing* moral disengagement has for example shown promise in encouraging people to behave more morally (for a review, see Moore, 2015). But uninvolved third-parties also make judgments about the conduct of war, and these judgments are important. Both during and in the aftermath of war, uninvolved third-parties play a large role in judging - and potentially punishing - transgressions against the laws and norms of war (see e.g., the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, 1993). The legal frameworks that enable such third-party judgments in turn have their roots in moral theories of war (Orend, 2013). And, through informal, public, channels, third-party observers can also have an influence on the political and military elite (Holsti, 1996; Keck & Sikkink, 1999). Thus, which actions are judged as morally right or wrong by external observers *once a war is underway* represents an important alternative question, complementing the question of how individuals justify their own act of killing, or justify their group's going to war in the first place. And again, for researchers interested specifically in the morality of conduct in war, just war theory provides a fruitful starting point for investigating this question.

### **The Continuity Approach: No Distinction between Morality of Peace and War**

I called the above approach the "conflict" approach, because it starts from the observation that the core activity of war (killing) is in conflict with the dictates of everyday morality. The second approach to war in moral psychology involves no such conflict. In fact, the

second approach does not directly involve war at all. I call this alternative the “continuity approach”.

In Korea, a company of Marines was way outnumbered and was retreating before the enemy. The company had crossed a bridge over a river, but the enemy were mostly still on the other side. If someone went back to the bridge and blew it up, with the head start the rest of the men in the company would have, they could probably then escape. But the man who stayed back to blow up the bridge would not be able to escape alive. The captain himself is the man who knows best how to lead the retreat. He asks for volunteers, but no one will volunteer. If he goes himself, the men will probably not get back safely as he is the only one who knows how to lead the retreat. (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987, p. 611)

Should the captain order one of his men to stay back? Moral psychologists have a long tradition of creating moral dilemmas and scenarios (or drawing them from moral philosophy) for their research endeavours (Cushman, 2014). People’s reasoning about, or reactions to, these vignettes are then used to uncover general features of moral psychology - for example the domains of moral concern (e.g., Clifford et al., 2015; Crone et al., 2018; McCurrie et al., 2018), or the emotional (e.g., Russell & Giner-Sorolla, 2011) and cognitive (Cushman, Young, & Hauser, 2006; Feltz & May, 2017) processes underpinning moral judgment and decision making. Kohlberg’s scenario about Heinz who steals medicine for his sick wife is perhaps the most famous of these vignettes. More recently, *trolley problems* have become the “lingua franca” of moral psychology (Cushman, 2013). Trolley problems, as a broad class of scenario or dilemma, involve the possibility of sacrificing the life of one person, in order to save the lives of several people. There are many inventive variations on these (and other) vignettes (Moore, Clark, & Kane, 2008; Petrinovich, O’Neill & Jorgenson, 1993). What they have in common is that they are employed in an attempt to learn something general about moral psychology. Researchers frequently focus on broad commonalities or emotional and cognitive processes assumed to operate across domains, and are therefore less interested in differences between the domains in which these scenarios are set.



Because of this emphasis on drawing general conclusions, the vignettes are often set in a wide variety of contexts. For example, the scenario about the marines and the Captain, above, is included in Kohlberg's moral judgment interview alongside the scenario about Heinz. Kohlberg and his colleagues sought to understand the development of moral reasoning; in particular, reasoning about *justice*. The differences between the specific scenarios - Heinz vs. the Captain - were less important than understanding the abstract reasoning processes which underpinned people's answers to both. A popular narrative about moral psychology begins with Kohlberg and his focus on reasoning about justice, and then emphasises how the scope of moral psychology has since broadened to include the study of intuitive and emotional processes, as well as concerns like authority, loyalty, and purity (Haidt, 2013; Monin, Pizarro & Beer, 2007; see Skitka, 2009; Skitka, Bauman & Mullen, 2016 for alternative narratives). Yet part of Kohlberg's legacy has not been shaken off. Scenarios incidentally set in a war context are still used alongside scenarios set in an everyday context, for example to investigate motivated moral reasoning (Ditto, Pizarro, Tannenbaum, 2009; Uhlmann, Pizarro, Tannenbaum, & Ditto, 2009), the authority (in)dependence of judgments about harm (Piazza, Sousa, & Holbrook, 2013; Sousa, Holbrook, & Piazza (2009), the relationship between intentions and harmful outcomes (Knobe, 2003), the dissociation between deontology and utilitarianism (Conway & Gawronski, 2013), authority as a moral foundation (Graham, Haidt, et al., 2013), and asymmetries in force attributions for morally bad versus neutral behavior (Phillips & Young, 2011). This use of war-based scenarios to investigate general processes and principles implies that these operate in the same way across both "everyday" and war contexts; and that war is simply another, relatively undifferentiated context, within which all our regular moral principles are present and active.

While the researchers I have cited above do not explicitly state that the moral principles they have uncovered will apply in all contexts, for all people, their practice in choosing scenarios implies a certain continuity between peace and war. I am not the first to point out potential

problems with this relatively “decontextualized” nature of moral psychological research, and to raise subsequent questions around morality’s potential context-sensitivity (Bauman, McGraw, Bartels, & Warren, 2014; Bloom, 2011). Moral judgments may for example depend on the relationships between the people involved in the scenario (e.g., family vs. strangers, Shaw, DeScioli, Barakzar, & Kurzban, 2017; Simpson, Laham, & Fiske, 2016) or the social context (e.g., intimates vs. task groups, Carnes, Lickel, & Janoff-Bulman, 2015). Watkins and Laham (2019) specifically compared moral judgments in war and peace contexts (using trolley problem scenarios), and found that people were overall more likely to accept a sacrifice of one life for many, in war compared to in peace. Thus, even though the use of a wide range of scenarios in the interest of generalizability might be justifiable or even desirable for some research programs, this approach will tend to obscure potential differences between war and everyday contexts.

It is an open question whether some moral principles or processes do, in fact, generalize across multiple contexts (including war and peace), while others do not. For example, while the symmetry thesis of just war theory has no parallel as such in everyday morality, the processes which appear to drive the asymmetry in lay judgments - perceived identification and implicit alignment - have been established in an everyday context as well (e.g., Woolfolk et al., 2006). Thus, these might be candidates for context-invariant principles. On the other hand, Watkins & Laham (2019) used both “footbridge” and “switch” versions of the trolley problems in their studies, and found that the usually robust difference in judgments between these two versions was significantly attenuated in a war context compared to in a peace context. Crucially, we cannot know which principles and processes will vary, and which will not, until we have a better grasp of the morality of war as distinct from the morality of peace.

My proposed approach thus partly provides a simple methodological critique of the continuity approach, in that I suggest some caution when using scenarios set in war and peace contexts interchangeably. But my critique is also broader, in that it touches on an important

theoretical debate about the distinctiveness of the war and peace contexts. To what extent *can* and *should* war be considered a unique sphere of activity, separate from peace?

On the one hand, it seems likely - common-sense and intuitive - that discontinuities between the two contexts exist. Traditional just war theory is explicit about the morality of war being different from the morality of peace (Shue, 2008; Walzer, 2006); the international community has (with some success) developed a separate legal framework for judging armed conflict, which is independent from domestic law (Blum, 2014); and outside of academia, writers (James, 1910/1968), soldiers (Harrison, 2002; Hedges, 2002), journalists (Junger, 2016), and filmmakers (Mechanic, 2016) have long observed how starkly different the war context is to the peace context, including the moral aspects of this context.

But despite these traditional, doctrinal, and pop-cultural precedents, insisting on a distinction between the morality of war and the morality of peace is not entirely uncontroversial, even within just war theory. As outlined earlier, traditionalist and revisionist just war theorists debate precisely how the relationship between the conduct of war and the resort to war should be understood (i.e., the debate about the independence thesis). This complex debate has far-reaching implications, and it hinges on the extent to which (moral judgments of) violence in war are, or should be, understood as continuous with (moral judgments of) violence in peace (Garner, 2016). Traditionalists insist that the two contexts are *discontinuous*, which is why they can (logically, morally) justify the independence thesis, for which no parallel exists in everyday morality (Walzer, 2006). Revisionists, however, believe the independence thesis is not (logically nor morally) justified, partly because they insist that the morality of war and the morality of peace must be continuous and consistent (McMahan, 2006). In a sense, revisionists thus provide a prescriptive version of the continuity approach to war in moral psychology, in that they assume that principles of morality are invariant across the two contexts. They also share with the conflict approach a concern about the many ways in which everyday morality is violated in war. But while the revisionist perspective is - coincidentally - well represented by existing

approaches to war in psychology (see Table 1), traditionalist just war theorists have no counterpart within psychology to draw on. One way to understand my argument, then, is to say that psychologists should take a leaf out of the traditionalists' book, and study the morality of war as if it was discontinuous with the morality of peace.

### **Summarizing the Proposed Context Approach**

Both lines of research reviewed above have advanced our knowledge of war and morality. The conflict approach has taught us a lot about how people maneuver around moral transgressions - committed by themselves or their group members - to maintain a moral self-image. The continuity approach has uncovered what appear to be broad generalities of morality. But I propose a third approach, which I refer to as the context approach. This approach differs from the alternatives in a number of ways (summarized in Table 1). First, psychologists should study the morality of war separately from the morality of everyday life, in order to empirically uncover continuities and discontinuities between the two contexts. Second, and relatedly, while the conflict approach tells us how people manage to *not* apply certain moral standards in war, it tells us less about which moral principles and processes *are* applied in war. Studying the morality of war *in its own right* will add nuance to our understanding of moral judgment and conduct in war. Third, these war-specific prescriptions and prohibitions on conduct in war can (and, according to traditional just war theory, *should*) be studied separately from broader questions about moral justifications for going to war in the first place. Finally, ingroup bias appears to be an inevitable part of human psychology, but third-party, uninvolved observers to a (interpersonal or intergroup) conflict also play an important role in condemning and condoning behaviour during the conflict (DeScioli, 2016). Regulating the conduct of war, through moral and legal judgments, is one effective way of reducing its scope and violence, and increasing our understanding of the psychological factors influencing these judgments is thus a worthwhile project. When it comes to understanding all the complexities and nuances of the morality of war, most likely all three approaches have merit for tackling different terrains in this moral landscape.

And, I hope the findings yielded by these three distinct approaches will eventually be integrated with findings by other researchers studying morality in war as well - be they ethicists training military leaders (French, 2005), clinical psychologists treating veterans for moral injury (Brock & Lettini, 2012), or political scientists investigating the military-civilian gap (Taylor, 2011). The context approach promises to uncover one unique piece of the puzzle, and I next explore the broader implications this approach may have for the practical, psychological, and philosophical aspects of judging the conduct of war.

### **Implications of the Context Approach**

Thus far I have introduced a research question - what is judged as morally right and wrong in war? - and proposed a particular approach to answering it. I have demonstrated this approach by describing empirical studies investigating two different aspects of the morality of war (the principle of discrimination and the independence thesis), and I have compared this approach to two other psychological approaches to war and morality. In the final part of this paper, I turn to the broader implications of my proposal.

### **Implications for the Psychological Study of Morality and War**

First, and most simply, having concrete evidence about how moral principles are applied and processed in a war context will enable researchers to make more informed decisions about which scenarios to use in their investigation of *general* principles or processes. It is certainly possible that future research reveals that the morality of war and the morality of peace overlap to such an extent that scenarios drawn from the two contexts can be used interchangeably (see e.g., Watkins & Brandt, 2019). Such a finding would be a challenge to the present proposal, but consistent with the continuity approach and revisionist just war theorists' treating everyday and war morality as continuous.

Second, the studies reviewed above open up a range of further research questions at the intersection of the international laws of armed conflict, the moral philosophy of war, and social and moral psychology. For example, underpinning the discussion about the principle of

discrimination above, was the assumption that most people would default to thinking about a male soldier; most soldiers in the U.S. and other Western nations are indeed men (Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, 2013). How might the stereotype of a soldier interact with other identities? How do we think about female soldiers, child soldiers, or drone operators? Are these perceived as equally brave and harmful as male soldiers, and are they dehumanized to the same degree? As dehumanization (in other contexts) has consequences for how a social group is treated (Haslam & Loughnan, 2014), dehumanization of soldiers may also have important downstream consequences for the support they receive both during and after war (e.g., Bain & Hirst, 2011). In this way, a psychological study of the morality of war may speak to concerns of military and clinical psychologists, and veterans' organizations, about combatants' return to civilian life (Sherman, 2015).

Third, the present proposal has broader conceptual and theoretical implications for how (moral) psychologists study war. Investigating the morality of war using the context approach involves taking the perspective of an uninvolved third-party observer, in line with international humanitarian law (IHL) and just war theory, rather than the perspective of the (vicarious) perpetrator or victim. Although previous research on (for example) moral disengagement has been extremely influential in our understanding of (the perpetration of) violence and intergroup conflict, the uninvolved third-party perspective is also important because most people in the world today are not (direct or indirect) perpetrators of war (Hayes, 2012), nor do wars tend to break out within the territories of modern democracies (Wimmer, 2014). And war (and the judgment thereof) is being increasingly "individualized", in that the laws of war now consider combatants as "individual men and women, capable of and responsible for independent decision-making" to a greater degree than in the past (when they were more likely to be considered as "mere instruments or agents of an all-powerful sovereign", p. 62, Blum, 2014). In line with this individualizing movement, the recent edited volume *Just and Unjust Warriors* (Rodin & Shue, 2008) complements Walzer's original *Just and Unjust Wars* (1977) with a focus

specifically on the individuals fighting in war, and how we judge their conduct. Some of these judgments are not easily captured by current approaches to war (and morality) in psychology. The present proposal complements these approaches, to provide a fuller picture of the morality of war.

### **Implications for the Philosophy and Laws of War, and Beyond**

The above section outlines considerations for psychological researchers to take into account when exploring the morality of war. But I hope that psychological research systematically investigating third-party judgments of the conduct of war will also be able to more easily comment on (and potentially critique) just war theory. This will be important for developing an ongoing dialogue between philosophy and psychology (see for example Cushman & Young, 2009; Cushman, 2014), and between psychology and international institutions such as IHL and the ICC. One of the broad goals of the present paper is to initiate a conversation between just war theory (both traditional and revisionist forms) and moral and social psychology, in a way that serves the goals of both fields.

For example, international norms of war are currently aligned with traditionalist just war theory, which takes the morality of war to be discontinuous with the morality of peace. But as discussed above, it appears lay judgments - at least in the U.S. - are more closely aligned with some aspects of revisionist just war theory. Just war theorists may of course choose not to take into account information about what people do believe, given that their enterprise primarily concerns what people *should* believe (Abend, 2013; Birnbacher, 1999; Cushman & Young, 2009; Kahane, 2013; Kumar & Campbell, 2012). However, it seems likely that just war theorists hope to have a concrete impact on the world: Again, “the point of just war theory is to regulate warfare, to limit its occasions, and to regulate its conduct and legitimate scope” (Margalit & Walzer, 2009, p. 2). One way it achieves this aim is through international law and other institutions (McMahan, 2010; Orend, 2013; Rodin & Shue, 2008), which design and enforce a legal framework around war. As I have demonstrated, tools and theories from psychological

research can be constructively applied to phenomena drawn from just war theory, and reveal a complex picture of the morality of war. These studies thus begin to establish the current capacities and limitations of lay people's intuitive moral judgments in war.

Despite most people in the Western world not being directly exposed to war, modern democratic states (the UK, US, and western European nations) have been involved in more interstate wars in the last 200 years than less developed nations, even including China and Russia (Wimmer, 2014). Citizens of these democracies influence wars by voting, protesting, campaigning, or lobbying (Burstein & Freudenburg, 1978; Foyle, 2004). In so doing, they are clearly considering their political leaders' reasons for resorting to war - the international aspect of just war theory. But the interpersonal aspect of war - the details of its conduct - is also becoming increasingly important, as (for example) terrorists blur the lines between combatants and noncombatants (Clark & Raustiala, 2007), the sovereignty of states is being challenged (Brunstetter & Holeindre, 2018), and drones and other technological developments change the manner in which wars are fought (Schulzke, 2017). Gaining an understanding of what people judge as morally right or wrong in war, means - in turn, eventually - knowing how best to hold individuals responsible for their actions in war.

### **Conclusion**

When President Obama received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2009, his acceptance speech touched on many principles of just war theory, including a commitment to abide by the rules governing the conduct of war: "Where force is necessary, we have a moral and strategic interest in binding ourselves to certain rules of conduct" (Obama, 2009). In this, he was typical of his ilk of politicians and legal scholars, in using just war theory as a moral framework for discussing war. Resorting to war is clearly a morally loaded decision, and just the same, the conduct of war is governed by a moral sense of right and wrong – all is *not* fair in war; it may be hell but there is "a world of rules within it" (Walzer, 2015, p. 47). How do we describe and explain this sense of



morally right and wrong in war? In this paper I have proposed a new approach for psychology to take to the morality of war, and contrasted this approach with two others in psychology. The present proposal has the benefit not only of teaching us about the unique morality of war, but also of speaking the language of the most prominent philosophical theory of war. When Obama said that addressing the problems of war “will require us to think in new ways”, he may not have been thinking of moral and social psychologists. But psychologists should also think in new ways, and address the conduct of war using just war theory.

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