Pro Mundo Mori? The Problem of Cosmopolitan Motivation in War
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Abstract: This article presents a new understanding of the problem of cosmopolitan motivation in war, and argues that it could be usefully compared to the motivational critique of social justice cosmopolitanism. I argue against metaethical and ethical interpretations of the problem, and maintain that the salient issue is not whether an individual soldier is able to be motivated by cosmopolitan concerns, or whether being motivated by cosmopolitanism would be too demanding. Rather, the problem is a political one: given considerations of legitimacy in the use of political power, a democratic army has to be able to motivate its soldiers to take on the necessary risks without relying on coercion alone. Patriotic identification offers a way to achieve this in wars of national defense, but less so in armed humanitarian interventions (AHIs). I consider the implications of this argument for states’ responsibility to engage in humanitarian interventions.

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Modern states have traditionally been reliant on nationalist and patriotic sentiments as a legitimizing narrative for war. Invoking national interest—first and foremost the preservation of political and territorial sovereignty and the protection of fellow nationals—has served as an effective means of mobilizing citizens to support wars and soldiers to fight in them. From a normative perspective, however, this position has been radically criticized. Political philosophers and international legal scholars now broadly agree that justified reasons for war must be focused on the protection of human rights: either as instances of self-defense, where the state may justifiably engage in war to protect its own citizens from external threats, or as armed humanitarian interventions (hereafter, AHIs) to protect vulnerable people from third parties, including their own government. In other words, the justified reasons to engage in war are cosmopolitan reasons—reasons that are general in their justification, universal in their scope, and individualistic with regards to their unit of moral concern—rather than ones limited to national self-interest. This normative account, however, presents what Cheyney Ryan has recently called the “cosmopolitan soldier dilemma,” and what I will hereafter refer to, somewhat less elegantly, as “the problem of cosmopolitan motivation in war.” Ryan describes the problem thus:

In our post-patriotic age, we expect that universal values will provide the justifying reasons for soldiers’ actions. The question is whether they can also serve as motivating reasons, sufficient to inspire the self-sacrifice required. In the past, love of one’s country seemed to supply both; the question is whether respect for human rights can do the same.

My aim in this article is to clarify this normative problem. In what follows, I make two central claims: first, I argue that this problem of cosmopolitan motivation in war can be usefully compared to the much more commonly discussed problem of cosmopolitan motivation in global distributive justice; second, I argue that the problem of cosmopolitan motivation should be evaluated not as a meta-ethical or ethical concern over the duties of individual soldiers, but as a political problem; specifically, as a problem regarding the legitimacy of the use of state power in creating and sustaining combat motivation.

In the first section of the article I draw the general analogy between the twin problems of cosmopolitan motivation in global distributive justice and in war, and explain my framework for analyzing different interpretations of these problems. In the following three sections, I analyze different versions of the critique—meta-ethical, ethical, and political—ultimately defending the political interpretation. In brief, I argue that the salient issue is that, given considerations of legitimacy in the use of political power, a democratic army has to be able to motivate its soldiers to make the necessary sacrifices without relying on coercion alone; patriotic identification offers a way to achieve this in wars of national defense, but less so in AHIs. While my aim is to provide an account of the problem, I conclude in the final
section by briefly considering two potential implications, each aiming to solve the problem: either that AHIs should be privatized, or that national armies should be transformed to become more cosmopolitan.

**Motivational Critiques of Cosmopolitanism: A Framework**

Both proponents and critics of cosmopolitanism point to its “motivational gap”: the fact that people do not seem to be motivated to act as it prescribes. Assuming this motivational gap exists, there are obvious pragmatic and strategic reasons to address it if cosmopolitanism is ever going to be implemented in practice. It is more controversial, however, to argue that this motivational gap should constrain normative duties and responsibilities. It is not difficult to see why; if we allow people’s lack of motivation to limit their normative obligations, this would let them off the moral hook too easily. In other words, we need a theory to explain how, if at all, cosmopolitanism’s motivational gap has normative significance. Unfortunately, the answers to this question have so far been rather vague, as different lines of argument have been conflated with one another.

In order to resolve this analytical ambiguity, I suggest the following framework for distinguishing among the different versions of the motivational critique of cosmopolitanism, each taking a unique approach to the relationship between motivational facts and normative theories:

(i) Meta-ethical: the motivational capabilities of individuals are direct constraints on morality;  
(ii) Ethical: the motivational critique is a version of the moral demandingness objection;  
(iii) Political: the focus should be on the preconditions of political legitimacy and stability.

Approaching the meta-ethical, ethical, and political versions as separate arguments, with distinct premises and theoretical presuppositions, allows us to see which elements of each argument are useful for the construction of a plausible motivational critique, and which are either too implausible or plausible only in a weaker form.

The first step in analyzing the problem of cosmopolitan motivation in war is to clarify what it is supposed to be. According to John A. Lynn’s influential framework, we should differentiate between three concepts of the soldier’s motivation in war. First, there is *initial* motivation: what drives the soldier to enlist in military service in the first place. Second, there is *sustaining* motivation: this explains what keeps soldiers in military service. Finally, there is *combat* motivation: what explains the willingness to face the extreme costs and risks of war. In reality, the neat separation of these factors is somewhat blurred, but it is clearly possible for them to be separated to a degree. For example, it is quite plausible that a soldier’s motivation to enlist might not be the same reason she continues to fight under fire.
For our purposes, it is crucial to ask which of these three factors, if any, poses a problem for cosmopolitans.

My stipulation here is that the motivational critique of cosmopolitanism, in the context of war, refers primarily to combat motivation, the latter of these three concepts. The question of initial motivation becomes less dependent on ideology in the transformation from volunteer militias to professional armed forces, such as in most Western countries, such as the United States and France. While some individuals may join the armed forces for ideological reasons, recent sociological research has indicated that many pursue a military career for other reasons, including increased social status, pecuniary incentives, and the opportunity for professional mobility. The professionalization of the soldier on the one hand, and the normalization of military service in the universal conscription model in states such as Israel and Switzerland on the other hand, serve as plausible answers to the second question of what sustains the military as a stable organization. Insofar as these two questions pose a theoretical problem, it is mostly with an implicit reference to the third question: What drives the soldier to enlist and what keeps her in military service given that she is likely to face extreme risks and costs in combat?

The salient motivational question, therefore, concerns the willingness to face the extreme risks and costs of war, including the risk of death and serious physical injury, as well as the psychological damage induced by these risks, such as from the difficulty of killing or survivor’s guilt. Herein lies the potential problem for cosmopolitans. The protection of human rights requires states to engage not only in wars of national defense but also in AHIs for the protection of foreigners, even when these are not in the direct interest of the intervening state. This, I argue, is analogous to the motivational problem faced by social justice cosmopolitans: social justice, extended globally, requires those in affluent countries to sacrifice their wealth for the sake of distant others. The shared assumption at the heart of both problems is that patriotism is prima facie able to supply both the justification and the motivation to sacrifice for the sake of one’s fellow citizens in the case of domestic social justice and wars of national defense, whereas cosmopolitanism may provide the justification, but not the requisite motivation, to sacrifice for the sake of distant others.

I do not wish to suggest here that AHIs are only guided by cosmopolitan or altruistic motives; indeed, it is often the case that they occur when the intervening state can promote its own interests. Nevertheless, my primary concern is with interventions in which the intervening state has little or no direct interest aside from supporting cosmopolitan ideals (think, for example, of the lack of intervention in Rwanda and Darfur). It is in these cases where the motivational gap is at its widest, and where motivating soldiers is most difficult. Paraphrasing Mary Kaldor, while the “old wars” soldier had to be prepared to die for his or her country, the cosmopolitan soldier of the “new wars” must be willing to risk his or her life for humanity. This problem, however, is heretofore ill-defined in the literature; it could be plausibly understood as meta-ethical, ethical, or political. I consider each in turn.
Meta-ethical versions of the motivational critique attempt to secure the normative force of the motivational gap by appealing to the limits of possibility or rationality. Alasdair MacIntyre famously argued that moral impartiality—the kind endorsed by enlightenment liberalism and, by association, liberal cosmopolitanism—is a flawed ideal; it is incompatible with what he calls “the morality of patriotism,” whereby each member of the nation sees herself as part of a thick moral community to which she owes allegiance. The poverty of liberal impartiality becomes clear, MacIntyre argues, when the needs of the political community cannot be reconciled with individual self-interest. This is at its clearest in the case of war, as the morality of patriotism requires of soldiers “both that they be prepared to sacrifice their own lives for the sake of the community’s security and that their willingness to do so be not contingent upon their own individual evaluation of the rightness or wrongness of their country’s cause.” A plausible reconstruction of MacIntyre’s argument here would be that such liberal (cosmopolitan) morality is flawed, since its impartiality and neutrality cannot provide individuals with the necessary combat motivation required for heroic sacrifice.

This claim, however, seems exaggerated. Even if we accept MacIntyre’s contentious claim that morality must be embedded in practical tradition and social narratives, we would still need to accept two further claims for this motivational critique of cosmopolitanism to hold. First, we would have to accept that cosmopolitanism is unable to provide such narratives; and second, that only allegiance to a national community is able to provide the necessary combat motivation. Both of these claims are not only dubious, but also reflect the flaws of the meta-ethical critiques of cosmopolitanism more generally.

First, it is a mistake to equate cosmopolitanism with a transcendental, impartial position, unable to provide ethical meaning. Indeed, even in the context of war there are more than a few examples of soldiers motivated by cosmopolitan ideals. In a study of combat motivation in the Iraq War, Leonard Wong et al. note that, for American soldiers, “liberating the people and bringing freedom to Iraq were common themes in describing their combat motivation.” While we may doubt the validity of these self-reports, or the justifiability of that particular war, this sentiment does not seem implausible. Indeed, cosmopolitan motivation is not necessarily in contradiction with the idea that the soldier’s self-perception is a patriotic one. As recent research on Canada’s disproportional contribution to humanitarian missions shows, the willingness to sacrifice for distant others is part of the national identity of what it means to be “a good Canadian.” This is a point that MacIntyre himself concedes, albeit indirectly: accepting meta-ethical communitarianism does not preclude the possibility of moral attitudes toward nonmembers.

Second, the claim that only allegiance to the national community provides the necessary combat motivation is a minority view. Following the Second World War,
psychological research has moved away from intrinsic theories of combat motivation to a focus on the importance of extrinsic sources, such as social cohesion, regimental military training, and different combat tactics for combat motivation and the avoidance of psychological breakdown. In other words, even if patriotism were a major source of combat motivation, it is very unlikely that it is the only or even the main source. In one sense, of course, these alternative sources of motivation may be as problematic for cosmopolitan arguments as they are for MacIntyre’s (more on this below), but this conundrum cannot be resolved without a further normative argument, to which I turn next.

**The Ethical Critique: The Demandingness of Cosmopolitan War**

In ethical versions of the motivational critique, the link between the motivational gap and normativity is achieved by claiming that cosmopolitanism is too demanding—in other words, it imposes excessive costs on the relevant moral agent. Critics of cosmopolitan theories of distributive justice argue that given the extreme levels of global poverty and inequality, adhering to cosmopolitan morality would be excessively demanding on people in affluent countries. Similarly, according to the ethical critique, AHIs impose excessive costs on the individual soldier. Therefore, the individual soldier cannot be morally required to fight in such a war, and such a sacrifice should be viewed as supererogatory—that is, morally good but merely permissible, not obligatory. For some critics, this implies that AHIs, if they are fought at all, should only be fought by those who choose to fight them: either by heroic volunteers who take upon themselves the risks and sacrifices for moral reasons, or by private military contractors who explicitly accept these risks as part of the terms of their voluntary employment.

There are interesting analogies and disanalogies between this line of argument and the equivalent line of argument against cosmopolitan principles of distributive justice. In both cases, there exists a distinction between the domestic and the global case. While many individuals accept their duty to pay taxes to address domestic poverty, few would acknowledge an equivalent global moral duty. Global philanthropy is morally good, but not obligatory. The obvious disanalogy here, of course, is the type and moral significance of the required sacrifice: most accounts of moral demandingness draw the line at sacrificing one’s life, and often far earlier than that. So while the ethical argument from moral demandingness may seem suspicious in the distributive justice case—that is, it too often appears as a rationalization of unfair privilege—it certainly has some bite with respect to war.

Nevertheless, despite its initial plausibility, I argue that the moral demandingness argument fails to support a motivational critique of cosmopolitan motivation in war. Before we unravel demandingness as it applies to the individual soldier, it is helpful to understand how it may be leveled at, and subsequently countered by, states. First, it construes duties to wage AHIs as either supererogatory
or as imperfect duties of easy rescue open to the discretion of the state. Thus, apart from instances in which intervention will be virtually costless, states can reserve the right not to intervene. This, however, begs the question against cosmopolitans, as it is not clear why we should think of the duty to intervene as either supererogatory or as a duty of easy rescue, rather than a duty of justice. According to this latter interpretation, states are not merely permitted to engage in armed intervention for the protection of strangers, they are (at least pro tanto) required to do so. Some theorists even argue that the supposed general distinction does not exist: a state is either morally obligated to intervene or morally forbidden from doing so.

Even if we reject this position and accept that the state’s duty to engage in AHIs can, in principle, be made optional by excessive costs, we still need to define what costs count as excessive. This is a perennial problem for all accounts of moral demandingness, and as yet there has been no convincing solution to it. For one, “excessive” costs cannot be defined solely with reference to the moral agent; whether a cost is excessive or not will depend on the context, on the cost to the patient in a case of a failure to act, etc. In cases of major atrocities, rejecting a duty to intervene on the basis of (relatively) minor costs seems perverse. Admittedly, if engaging in an AHI would cause the destruction of the intervening state, then it seems plausible to argue it would be too demanding. But quite clearly this would seldom be the case for regional or global powers. The cost to the state, in terms of both soldiers’ lives and material resources, will be often outweighed by the severity of the atrocities it ought to prevent.

To return now to the individual, one may rightly object here that while the cost to the state may be minimal, for a soldier the risks of fighting in an AHI are too great a price. Given this disparity, John Lango argues that AHIs present a moral paradox: even if it is morally required of the state to wage an AHI, it cannot be morally required of individual soldiers to fight in such a war, given the serious physical and psychological risks they face. But even if we concede Lango’s paradox, it still remains unclear whether it supports the ethical critique. Recall that this argument is supposed to serve as a challenge to AHIs, but not to wars of national defense. Presumably, even though there is no reason to think that the costs for the individual soldier are any different in both kinds of war, proponents of the ethical critique would take them to be excessive in the first case but not in the second; in other words, they relieve the soldier from the duty to fight in an AHI, but not from the duty to fight a war of national defense. But why is this the case?

One possible explanation of this disparity is that the implicit contract between soldiers and the state involves consent to sacrifice for the national interest, but not for the sake of foreigners. As Martin Cook argues, imposing the costs of war without such implicit consent is a violation of a soldier’s moral autonomy, and what follows from this is that soldiers in national armies cannot be made to fight in AHIs. The appeal of this argument is clear, as it invokes the notion that sending soldiers to fight in “wars of choice” demonstrates a lack of respect for the state’s fiduciary duties toward its citizens. Yet the claim that the implicit contract between soldiers and the
state justifies only wars of national defense is unconvincing, both normatively and empirically. First, as I argued above, classifying all AHIs as “wars of choice” is incompatible with the generally shared idea that states have a duty to protect the human rights of foreigners, which is accepted even in the formulation of Lango’s paradox.21 Second, even if this claim had some merit in the past, it is becoming quickly outdated as AHIs become more common. Even before enlisting, soldiers can arguably expect that their state may engage in an AHI at some time during their term of service.22

A second possible line of argument suggests that unlike AHIs, wars of national defense are fought for the protection of a public good (national security or political sovereignty, for example). For this reason, they trigger a civic political obligation of citizens to share the burden of war. Refusing to fight in such a war will consist of free-riding on the sacrifices of others, and is therefore immoral; dying for the state can be required by the state.23 This objection rightly points out that the relevant question is not whether each individual has the duty to fight a war, but whether the burdens of the collective duty to fight a national war can be fairly distributed among members of the group. However, if we agree that the state has even a minimal duty to engage in AHIs for the protection of foreigners, this is similarly a collective duty that triggers a civic political obligation. Unlike the burden involved in fulfilling distributive duties, admittedly, this burden cannot be equally distributed—even universal conscription is never truly universal. But this does not preclude other mechanisms for fairly allocating the burden, for example, through mandatory general conscription, or through a draft lottery.24 Therefore the disanalogy between burden-sharing in wars of national defense and AHIs does not hold up: unless we assume that placing the burden of risk on soldiers in wars of national defense is also unfair, we cannot argue that there is a demandingness problem for AHIs.

**The Political Critique: The Legitimacy of Sustaining Combat Motivation**

Thus far I have shown that both the meta-ethical and the ethical versions of the motivational critique of cosmopolitanism in war are flawed in important ways. The meta-ethical critique’s strong conclusions are unwarranted: at least some people are capable of finding meaning and motivation in cosmopolitan morality; and, in any case, given empirical psychological research, we have little reason to assume that patriotism is the only explanation for combat motivation among individual soldiers. As for the ethical critique, the risks of an AHI cannot be plausibly conceived as excessive costs that relieve soldiers of their duty to fight in such a war—at least, not unless we are willing to make the same argument with regard to wars of national defense.

The shortcomings of these two critiques should lead us to think that the problem posed by cosmopolitanism’s motivational gap should not be assessed with
reference to individual morality. Assuming that this kind of critique could be made plausible at all, it needs to ask not whether a person’s lack of motivation constrains her moral obligation, but whether people’s general lack of motivation affects the preconditions for the legitimate use of power by political institutions.

An example of such an argument in the context of social justice is John Rawls’s *A Theory of Justice*. For Rawls, given certain psychological facts about human beings, and specifically the conditional nature of their willingness to cooperate under conditions of a generalized prisoner’s dilemma, adherence to certain otherwise attractive normative principles would be unstable. Even though each individual could potentially maximize her interests by regulating her behavior in accordance with the principles of justice, she is faced with the temptation to defect, or free-ride, so as to improve her position at the expense of others. Any moral principles that cannot provide a good solution to this problem, however otherwise attractive they may be, are thus unfit to serve as politically justified principles.

It may be argued here that Rawls’s understanding of the stability problem, and the possible solutions to it, is dependent on a questionable account of political legitimacy. Rawls is committed to the idea that all solutions to the stability problem must be ones that provide stability “for the right reasons,” or, in other words, show that a liberal, well-ordered society could provide its own internal motivation without relying on coercion. This is a highly questionable move, as some recent critics of Rawls argue. For the purposes of my argument, however, these concerns can be safely sidelined. Even more “realistic” accounts of legitimacy would need to differentiate between legitimate and illegitimate uses of political power, to sustain the distinction between domination and legitimate coercion; as such, they should be sensitive to facts about human motivation, and how normal human beings are likely to behave.

Rawls’s objection to social justice cosmopolitanism as a political principle in *The Law of Peoples*, as well as other prominent political objections to cosmopolitanism, could be plausibly and coherently construed as arising from this motivational critique. For Rawls, as for nationalist and republican theorists, what solves the stability problem within the state is the existence of a shared public culture as a basis of social trust. The lack of a global equivalent of this public culture is the central political problem of social justice cosmopolitanism.

One obvious application of this view for the problem of cosmopolitan motivation in war is to translate it to the language of global distributive justice, with soldiers’ lives considered as a valuable natural resource. Citizens may be willing to spend this resource for the protection of their own state, but not for the sake of others. Conceptualized in this way, the problem then turns to the legitimacy of imposing costs on citizens for the sake of foreigners, asking whether it is they or the beneficiaries of AHIs who should bear the costs. Unlike some critics, I am generally sympathetic of this act of translation. The political interpretation of the problem I wish to pursue here, however, is different: its focus is on the motivation of soldiers
as citizens, specifically their combat motivation, not on the motivation of citizens in general.

Moving from the question of civic motivation to the question of combat motivation, it is clear to see that the stability problem at the heart of Rawls’s analysis is one that plagues military institutions as much as civilian ones, if not more so. Even when soldiers are morally committed to the goal for which they fight, they find themselves faced with a collective action problem. Each soldier’s individual contribution to the war effort is likely to be minimal, and the costs of complying are unusually high. In these cases, the rational action for each soldier in battle is to flee, rather than to fight.\textsuperscript{30}

Returning to Ryan’s dilemma, introduced at the beginning of this article, we can now see that political legitimacy must do the heavy lifting to explain the problem of why a soldier will fight in a cosmopolitan war. In other words, the soldier’s motivation to fight will depend on the available solutions to the stability problem, and these solutions will differ in their degree of effectiveness and legitimacy. For Ryan, the only acceptable solution to this problem is democratic public reason. The principle of civilian control on the military, specifically in democracies, means that “the military’s reasons must be those of society in general” and that these reasons should be Rawlsian “public reasons,” known by and convincing to citizens and soldiers alike, as “soldiers are citizens too.”\textsuperscript{31} Other means of creating and sustaining combat motivation, while technically possible, would fail to treat soldiers appropriately, and would therefore be illegitimate.\textsuperscript{32}

Ryan’s account effectively demands that, in order to meet the requirements of legitimacy, both (1) the justifying reasons for war will be public reasons in the sense that they can be each soldier’s reason to fight, and (2) the soldier’s combat motivation—her motivating reasons for action—would be generated primarily by appeals to morality and identity through reasoning and dialogue.\textsuperscript{33} This, however, is too strong of a constraint of the use of political power. Both claims are philosophically contentious, to say the least, and are far more demanding than most accounts of political legitimacy available in the literature, including Rawls’s own.

Nevertheless, while Ryan’s account of political legitimacy may be too demanding, the framing of the problem of cosmopolitan motivation as one of political legitimacy is a helpful one. It will be useful, therefore, to consider different methods of creating and sustaining combat motivation — both those Ryan considers as alternatives to democratic public reason, and those he does not — and evaluate them in light of the limits of legitimacy on the use of effective political power. This, I argue, would help explain the problem of cosmopolitan motivation in war.

\textbf{Narcotics}

This long-standing tradition of war is the first alternative Ryan considers to democratic public reason.\textsuperscript{34} Different types of narcotics, from alcohol to methamphetamines, have historically been used (and are still used) to induce aggression, overcome fear, and sedate the nerves in battle, and so would seem to be a potential solution to the collective action problem presented by combat; in other
words, if the problem is that a rational soldier would not risk dying, the solution is to turn the soldier irrational.\textsuperscript{35} Ryan does not reject this option completely, as he considers the possibility that in some cases the use of narcotics would not violate the status of people as autonomous persons (for example, anesthetizing patients before surgery).\textsuperscript{36}

When considering the problem as one of political legitimacy, however, this analogy does not hold. Even if we accept that soldiers may permissibly use narcotics to allow themselves to overcome psychological stress, and that the coercive, paternalistic, and hierarchical nature of military institutions would permit the administration of such narcotics without explicit consent, the imposition of narcotic substances to undermine rational judgement is the clearest example of illegitimate domination, as it undermines the status of soldiers as moral agents.\textsuperscript{37}

\textit{Manipulation}

The second alternative Ryan considers is manipulation and the use of falsehoods, specifically, falsely presenting military interventions as instances of national defense.\textsuperscript{38} As examples, he provides former U.S. Secretary of State Alexander Haig’s statement that failing to hold the line against Nicaragua would lead to the “total destruction of our country and everyone in it,” as well as instances of Soviet leaders motivating soldiers to fight in Afghanistan by telling them that they would be fighting against Americans. The most blatant example in recent times is arguably the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq. It is now widely held that the threat of weapons of mass destruction was, at best, based on flawed and distorted evidence, and at worse, an outright lie.

This solution is again quite obviously problematic from the point of view of political legitimacy. Although a case could be made that absolute honesty is not a realistic or even desirable demand of political leaders, such blatant untruths undermine the legitimacy of the state as a trustee of its citizens. More importantly, manipulation and the use of falsehoods cannot serve as independent solutions to the problem of combat motivation as I understand it. Indeed, both examples of manipulation provided by Ryan are parasitic on some other source of motivation (in the U.S. case, national self-defense; in the USSR case, ideological commitment) about which the soldiers held false beliefs.

\textit{Positive and Negative Incentives}

The two alternatives discussed above concern altering the psychology and beliefs of soldiers, respectively. Yet these two solutions—tellingly, the only ones discussed in Ryan’s article—are far from being the most common in the history of war and are also the most normatively suspect.

A more common way to motivate soldiers to face the risks and costs of combat has been through extrinsic motivation, or the use of positive and negative incentives to resolve the collective action problem. For positive incentives, Geoffrey Brennan and Gordon Tullock give the example of the “spoils” system that was used by the British Navy, in which the loot of cargo from captured ships was divided
between the fleet admiral, the captain, the officers, and the enlisted men. Other positive incentives may include more honorific rewards, such as medals, privileges, or rank. Conversely, armies have always used punitive means to secure soldiers’ motivation to fight, including demotion, imprisonment, flogging, and even executions. In the Second World War, the German Army executed at least 15,000 of its own troops, and the Red Army executed a similar number in Stalingrad alone. The use of positive and negative incentives, at least in the general sense, does not constitute an illegitimate use of political power, and may indeed be justified in many cases. Returning to the analogous problem of motivation for social justice contributions, states routinely use positive and negative incentives to encourage socially beneficial behavior and deter free-riding, fraud, and crime. Apart from hardcore libertarians, most political theorists agree that state coercion is at least sometimes justified and legitimate, so it may prima facie be legitimate to coerce citizens who are also soldiers.

There are, however, two main problems in applying this line of thought to motivation in war. First, as the potential cost for each individual soldier is relatively heavy, the incentive should be proportionately large so as to be effective. Empirical research into combat motivation demonstrates that medals and other signs of honor “are hardly of much importance during the life-or-death decision making that characterizes combat.” The proportional negative response, that is, the threat of the death penalty, would not be considered legitimate in liberal democracies, whether relying on a professional or conscription model of recruitment. In any case, relying solely on coercive means to generate combat motivation would either push the problem to the recruitment stage, as this will affect the motivation to enlist, or generate new normative problems.

A second problem is that any use of incentives, in order to be effective, would have to rely on the ability to monitor soldiers’ behavior in battle. In peacetime, such monitoring is achieved by state institutions, such as the police, tax agencies, and courts, and even then it is imperfect. In combat, however, as long as lack of compliance is exemplified not by blatant desertion, but by passivity and lack of engagement, monitoring would be difficult if not impossible to maintain.

**Primary Unit Cohesion**

As mentioned above, a dominant view in military psychology is that unit cohesion is the central factor influencing combat motivation. In simple terms, the argument is that soldiers are motivated to fight not through ideology, professional commitment, or rational calculation, but through bonds with “the primary group” — in effect, the small squad of individuals with which the soldier has personal, face-to-face relations. This concept has been widely influential in military theory and practice, so much so that it is considered by some to be a “dogma” of Western armed forces. From the point of view of political legitimacy, this approach seems preferable to the previous ones; its violation of soldiers’ autonomy is minimal, as the affective bonds are formed organically from the experience of training and fighting.
together. Relying on primary unit cohesion as the solution to the combat motivation problem, however, may be a double-edged sword. First, it is important to point out that it gives rise to wider ethical problems. For example, some argue that the exclusionary logic of social cohesion operates against equal service of women, minorities, and LGBTQ soldiers. Others observe that unit cohesion generates strong associative duties that justify the killing of enemy noncombatants. These effects indicate that while unit cohesion may arise organically from the interaction between individual soldiers, it is not free from questions of political legitimacy. Second, it is important to point out that while this theory of combat motivation is widely shared, there are also questions regarding the validity of seminal studies, and general methodological skepticism over whether they actually reflect social cohesion or task cohesion, borne out of military training.

The main problem with primary unit cohesion, however, is that from the point of view of the military organization it may lead to counterproductive behavior. Soldiers may indeed form bonds with their comrades that facilitate cooperation, but these bonds can be expressed not only through enhanced combat motivation but also through desertion, mutiny, or even outright lethal assault on fellow soldiers (“fragging”). In other words, interpersonal bonds between soldiers may enhance their loyalty toward each other, but this loyalty could potentially clash with their commitments to the ends of the wider organization. Thus, while primary unit cohesion is a powerful instrument for creating and sustaining combat motivation, it can also have the adverse effect.

Moral and Ideological Motivation

The idea here is simple: if some ideas are worth dying for, the risk of combat would not generate a collective action problem. However, two problems plague this strategy as an explanation of the problem of cosmopolitan motivation in war. First, the predominance of cohesion theories among military psychologists demonstrate that soldiers very rarely state ideological reasons as their explicit motivation. Second, interpreted as variations on individual moral motivation, it is difficult to see why patriotism is superior to cosmopolitanism. Even if we accept that soldiers are more likely to be motivated by patriotism as a matter of fact, it is unclear why they could not just as easily be motivated by cosmopolitanism.

A possible answer to this puzzle is found in military sociologist Charles Moskos’s concept of “latent ideology.” In his study of the Vietnam War, Moskos argues that former studies discrediting the role of ideology in combat motivation were overly dismissive. While soldiers did not express explicit ideological motivations, their implicit commitment to the values and goals of their civic society were an important factor in their combat performance, and served as a countermeasure to the possible negative effects of small unit cohesion. Moskos posits that cohesion will “maintain the soldier in his combat role only when he has an underlying commitment to the worth of the larger social system for which he is fighting.” Importantly, this ideology does not serve merely as a source of
individual moral motivation. Through an interaction between self-concern, primary group cohesion, and latent ideology, Moskos claims that the latter becomes a solution to the combat experience, as “individual behaviour and small-group processes occurring in combat squads operate within a widespread attitudinal context of underlying value commitments.” As Anthony King interprets this thesis, Moskos argues that “general commitments to national goals were drawn upon in the micro-interactions within primary groups and collectively used by soldiers to comprehend their sacrifices and to impose expectations on each other.”¹PRINT Latent patriotic ideology was not a substitute for the primary group cohesion, but rather defined, justified, and augmented the mutual obligations between soldiers.

Following Moskos’s theory, and given that currently the main institutions used for waging war are national armies, it is possible to maintain that patriotic identification serves more than simply a source of moral motivation for the individual soldier. In fact, it could be seen as an effective way for states and national armies to resolve the problem of combat motivation in a way that combines the respective merits of the alternative strategies discussed above. First, while sustaining patriotic identification may involve appeals to emotions and rhetoric as well as possible fictions with regard to national history, this is quite clearly less problematic in terms of political legitimacy than the use of narcotics or manipulation of the truth. Second, while the appeal to patriotism involves employing incentives and sanctions, these are not institutionally directed incentives and sanctions, but those embedded in a social and political culture, internalized within the soldier herself. Third, patriotism augments the necessary social cohesion, but this is wider than the small primary unit in an important sense. The soldier is not merely motivated by patriotism, but the fact that other soldiers are compatriots serves to secure the necessary trust, which at least mitigates the assurance problem. Finally, at least in wars of national self-defense, the institutional goals of the national armed forces and the personal motivation of the soldier align, or at least are largely compatible with each other.

A reasonable objection here is that relying on patriotism is a dangerous gamble. Patriotism often devolves into a false belief in the superiority of one’s nation, leading to the thought that protecting the national interest outweighs the wrongness of harm inflicted on the enemy. These psychological slippery slopes appear to put patriotic motivation in conflict with the mission of any justified AHI, and even wars of national defense would risk violating fundamental jus in bello principles.

Given the possible alternatives, however, it is not clearly the case that patriotism is the most dangerous motivation in terms of jus in bello violations. It is difficult to see why, for example, soldiers motivated to fight by fear of punishment or by a desire for reward would be any more willing to constrain their violence—assuming, recall, that these incentives were supposedly powerful enough to motivate a soldier to face the serious risks of combat. As for unit cohesion, it too has a dark side: loyalty to unit members and the importance of maintaining one’s social
standing among peers can lead to turning a blind eye to, or actively taking part in, war atrocities.\textsuperscript{49} Even an individual soldier motivated by cosmopolitan ideals may be subject to violating \textit{in bello} principles, since belief in the moral rightness of one’s cause could just as easily lead to the same psychological slippery slopes.

Second, and more importantly, the objection against patriotism implicitly assumes that war atrocities could only be avoided by soldiers’ intrinsic restraint. This, however, is a curious thought; even if patriotism may be an effective way to generate combat motivation, this does not mean that other forms of incentives are not in play. Crucially, relying on patriotism as a source of motivation does not preclude disciplinary and legal sanctions against the violation of \textit{jus in bello} constraints. Indeed, it may even be undesirable and imprudent to rely solely on soldiers’ intrinsic motivation in this case, given that their institutional role is to achieve military goals most efficiently. This is true for the same reasons it would be undesirable and imprudent to rely on corporate managers’ intrinsic motivation to obey the tax code (given that their institutional role is, charitably, to maximize profits for shareholders), or on local politicians’ intrinsic motivation to avoid corruption (given that their institutional role is, charitably, to advance the interests of their constituency).

If this interpretation of the role of patriotism in combat motivation is persuasive, then the problem of cosmopolitan motivation in war becomes clear. Patriotism, as a latent ideology in national armies, serves to secure trust and commitment to wider social goals and to mitigate the limitations of alternative mechanisms. As long as cosmopolitanism remains merely a source of moral motivation for the individual soldier not accompanied by a widely shared latent ideology, militaries engaged in AHIs would have to rely on alternative mechanisms to resolve the problem of combat motivation. As these alternative mechanisms are problematic with respect to political legitimacy, states that engage their national armies in AHIs seem, therefore, to face a dilemma: either considerably limit the risk to their soldiers to avoid encountering failures of combat motivation, or risk undermining the legitimacy of their use of political power. This political interpretation of the problem of cosmopolitan motivation, therefore, sheds light on the difference between wars of national defense and AHIs.

\textbf{TWO POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS: PRIVATIZATION AND COSMOPOLITAN TRANSFORMATION}

I will now briefly consider two potential implications of my interpretation of the problem. One implication is that soldiers’ motivation for fighting a war need not be connected to the reasons justifying a war, and the duty to engage in AHIs can be outsourced to private contractors. Another implication is that national armies should be transformed to become more cosmopolitan in character. While it is beyond the
scope of this article to determine which of these solutions is preferable, it is important to understand what their pitfalls may be.

Privatizing AHIs

Ryan’s dilemma arises, as we saw, from an apparent disconnect between the reasons justifying war and the reasons that motivate soldiers to face the risks of war. But one may well challenge the necessity of this connection. It may be that soldiers’ motives for fighting a war are different from those justifying the war, but this in itself is not problematic. One possible implication of this argument is that AHIs should be fought not by national armies, but by private military contractors (PMCs), motivated by monetary incentives. If this is a feasible and desirable solution, Ryan’s dilemma is dissolved, and with it the supposed problem of cosmopolitan motivation in war.

One common argument against turning to PMCs is that the private contractor’s self-interested motives to fight undermine the moral value of his actions. This argument is unconvincing for two reasons. First, it would be impossible to distinguish between mercenaries and non-mercenaries on that ground. As discussed above, many soldiers in national armies join the force for self-interested motives, and evidence shows that many mercenaries join PMCs for ideological, sometimes even patriotic reasons.\textsuperscript{50} Second, as Cécile Fabre argues, even if the motives of individual soldiers do matter morally, the moral goodness of protecting potential victims of atrocities outweighs the moral badness of acting with the wrong motives, in the same way that the moral goodness of keeping a patient alive outweighs the badness of her doctor performing surgery solely for greed, or because he enjoys cutting people up.\textsuperscript{51}

It is important to notice, however, that this objection does not address the problem of cosmopolitan motivation in war as I interpret it above. The problem of political legitimacy, after all, is not with the permissibility of soldiers’ motives and what they do, but with the legitimacy of what is done to them.

Though there are potential problems of legitimacy with the use of PMCs for AHIs – for example, with regards to democratic control, communal bonds, and military effectiveness\textsuperscript{52} - a potential benefit is that the contractual obligations between states and the employees of private contractors is different in nature and scope than those between the state and its citizens.\textsuperscript{53} This holds even when employees of PMCs are also citizens of the state, as was the case, for example, for Blackwater (subsequently renamed XE and Academi) employees in Iraq and Afghanistan who are also American nationals. In this case, the problem is dissolved, since the constraints on the legitimate use of political power simply do not apply to private contractors. In addition, as observed above, this outsourcing of AHIs also has the interesting implication of translating the problem of cosmopolitan motivation in war to that of cosmopolitan motivation in distributive justice: since the citizens of the intervening state are still required to foot the bill for the intervention, the question becomes
analogous to those surrounding, for example, international development aid. While there is still a cost, it can more easily be distributed across the civilian population.

However, if the analysis in the previous section is accurate, it still remains an open question whether PMCs are better placed than national armies to resolve the problem of combat motivation. First, PMCs face a similar predicament to national armies in creating and sustaining combat motivation, even if their employees are motivated primarily by financial remuneration, as the problem of combat motivation is distinct from that of initial motivation to join such a company. As argued above, however, relying on positive and negative incentives alone is likely to be a suboptimal solution, so PMCs will likewise have to draw on other sources of motivation. Second, the state does not relinquish its responsibility toward PMC employees, even if the responsibility is different in nature from that it has toward soldiers in national armies. If PMCs working for the state engage in methods that are harmful or manipulative to their employees, the state cannot simply wash its hands of this. The problem of cosmopolitan motivation in war is simply pushed back: while the state may not be involved directly in these practices, it facilitates them and is therefore complicit in a way that affects the legitimacy of its use of power.

Creating Cosmopolitan Armies

Another possible implication of the preceding argument is that cosmopolitan wars call for cosmopolitan armies. It is not that these wars cannot be legitimately fought by national armies—and therefore must be outsourced to private contractors—but that there is a need to transcend the social and political circumstances responsible for the problem. Elke Krahmann, for example, argues that new security challenges require the transformation of the political community, and by implication the republican citizen-soldier, toward a transnational community of shared risk. Recognizing the shared interest of regional and global communities would lead to a shift in societal values toward transnational solidarity and a duty to protect others, whereas drafting cosmopolitan soldiers from the same society would retain the “congruence between the norms and beliefs of the armed forces and the strangers whom they serve.”54 Defending the feasibility of this proposal, Krahmann writes that in countries whose national armies are routinely involved in international peacekeeping and humanitarian missions, such as Sweden, Norway, Germany, and Austria, support for these missions is greater among their conscripted national armies than it is among professional militaries in the United Kingdom and the United States.55

This is an attractive normative proposal that potentially splits the difference between the validity of cosmopolitan justifications for war and the effectiveness of patriotic identification as a solution to the motivation problem. There are still reasons for caution, however. First, as transnational solidarity is assumed to rely on common susceptibility to security risks, the link between prudent self-interest and
the solidarity it is supposed to motivate could prove rather contextual and unstable. While it is possible that these prudent actions will lead to the development of a shared transnational ethos, this causal mechanism remains rather vague. Second, as Krahmann herself concedes, these transnational political communities, although transcending national boundaries, would necessarily remain bounded, most likely as regional communities of risk (for example, Western European democracies through NATO). As such, it remains to be seen how the extended sense of political community would engender a motivation to engage in wars beyond the bounded scope of this community.

The concerns about these two implications are not insurmountable, but good answers to them will require considerable empirical analysis. Nevertheless, the political interpretation of the problem highlights the specific predicaments of states engaging in AHIs, and this interpretation should therefore guide states in evaluating possible alternatives. In doing so, we should avoid the tendency of either ignoring motivational facts, or considering them only instrumentally. Thinking about the problem of motivation in war as one of political legitimacy provides a more fruitful way forward, and should lead academics and political leaders to reconsider the role of national armies in AHIs.

NOTES


3 An argument along similar lines was made by Ned Dobos, “On Altruistic War and National Responsibility: Justifying Humanitarian Intervention to Soldiers and Taxpayers,” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 13, no. 1 (2009), pp. 19–31, although without direct reference to the combat motivation of soldiers, which will be my focus here.


6 In the 1970s, Charles Moskos claimed that the shift from an organization model to an occupation model in the American military altered the reasons to serve in the military toward monetary compensation. Charles Moskos, "From institution to occupation trends in military organization." *Armed Forces & Society* 4.1 (1977), pp. 41-50. For a recent challenge to this view, see T. Woodruff, Ryan Kelty, and David R. Segal, “Propensity to Serve and Motivation to Enlist among American Combat Soldiers,” *Armed Forces and Society* 32, no. 3 (2006), pp. 353–66. Yagil Levy argues that


9 Alasdair MacIntyre, Is Patriotism a Virtue? (Lawrence: University of Kansas, Department of Philosophy, 1984).


12 For a powerful defense of this line of argument, see Toni Erskine, Embedded Cosmopolitanism: Duties to Strangers and Enemies in a World of “Dislocated Communities” (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), especially chapter 6.


14 I here follow Thomas Nagel in understanding demandingness as the gap between a moral requirement and the moral agent’s personal point of view, represented as the cost to that agent. See Thomas Nagel, Equality and Partiality (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 10–21.


Crucially, even if it could be shown that each individual would prefer everyone’s actions to be regulated by the principles of justice, we are still faced with a collective action problem. See Paul Weithman’s discussion in *Why Political Liberalism?: On John Rawls’s Political Turn* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).


I thank an anonymous reviewer for pressing me on this point. For a discussion of this question, see Gerhard Øverland, “High-Fliers: Who Should Bear the Risk of Humanitarian Intervention?” in *New Wars and New Soldiers: Military Ethics in the Contemporary World*, pp. 69–87; Buchanan, “The


32 *Ibid.* , p. 126. Note that he is skeptical that cosmopolitan values could be similarly conducive to combat motivation (p. 127).


35 On the long history of the use of narcotics as a solution to the problem of combat motivation, see Dessa K. Bergen-Cico, *War and Drugs: The Role of Military Conflict in the Development of Substance Abuse* (Routledge, 2015), pp. 7–10.


42 Marshall, *Men against Fire*.

43 Strachan, “Training, Morale and Modern War.”


51 Fabre, *Cosmopolitan War*, p. 223.


