

In Defence of War

Abstract: This essay falls into two parts. In the first I offer a panorama of my book, *In Defence of War* (Oxford University Press, 2013), highlighting its main features. These comprise: its rhetorical position; its opposition to the ‘the virus of wishful thinking’, pacifism, legal positivism, and liberal individualism; and its promotion of the early Christian tradition of just war reasoning and of three kinds of realism—moral-ontological, Augustinian-anthropological, and practical. Then in the second part, I consider four controversial issues that the book raises: love, proportionality, Britain’s entry into the First World War, and the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

Keywords: just war, love, proportionality, First World War, Iraq

This essay falls into two parts. In the first, I offer a panorama of my book, *In Defence of War*, highlighting its main features.¹ Then in the second part, I consider four issues that have proven controversial: love, proportionality, Britain’s entry into the First World War, and the 2003 invasion of Iraq. I begin, then, with the panorama.

I

The clue is in the title. What I have written is, in the first place, a critical response to certain points of view that seem to me to be popular in the time and places where I live. As a rule I think it best for authors to be self-conscious and explicit about why they bother to write what they write, and about why they presume to bother the reader with it. So in my book I have sought to make clear what it is in my environment that I am reacting against, and why. One or two commentators have described the book as a ‘polemic’. I accept that, insofar as there are matters about which I care deeply and therefore viewpoints and ideas against which I react strongly, sometimes very strongly. But I am loath to accept that what I have written is ‘polemical’ in the sense that it is intemperate, unmeasured, and unfair. I don’t think that it is. It might be wrong, but it doesn’t rant.

Whether or not *In Defence of War* is polemical, it is rhetorical. That is to say, it understands itself to be located in a particular intellectual and cultural context, taking a particular set of positions, and trying to persuade a variety of kinds of reader. If the time and place, and its predominant intellectual currents, were different, I’d have written a different book. Under a different fate, I can imagine myself writing *In Defence of Peace*.

So the book is perhaps polemical and certainly rhetorical. In the first place, it is also defensive. However, notwithstanding its deliberately provocative—indeed unqualified and polemical—title, it does not defend war in general. It does *not* argue, as one reader of the incomplete manuscript reported, that “war is wonderful”. I am confident that no one who reads the opening pages of the Introduction with her eyes open could fairly conclude that. No, of course, *In Defence of War* is actually in defence of *just* war. More on that shortly. Right now, let me explain what the book is mainly defending against.

Three or so years ago I gave a talk in which I flew the intellectual kite that the 2003 invasion of Iraq could be morally justified. (This kite has grown up into the sizeable airplane that is now Chapter Seven). Afterwards, a clerical member of the

audience came up to me and said, “But there *must* have been a better way”. To which I responded, “Well, there might *in fact* have been a better way; but why did there *have* to be one?”. So the first target in my sights is “the virus of wishful thinking”. That’s a phrase that I have lifted from a passage in Michael Burn’s extraordinary autobiography, where he reflects on why it was that he was so enchanted by Adolf Hitler, whom he met in the 1930s.² I use it to refer mainly to the view attributed by Andrew Roberts to Lord Halifax during that same period, namely, “[t]he Whiggish view that there [is] a rational solution to all problems and all that [is] needed [is] to find a *modus vivendi* comfortable to all parties” and that these parties “[are] rational ... [and] sincerely [want] to reach solutions”.³ My opposition to this is based, not simply Christian dogma about the anthropological fact of sin, but also on corroboration by historical experience. As I argue in Chapter Four, the decisive causes of the First World War were not cultural forces common to all parties, or the nature of international structures, but the moral attitudes and choices of individuals: the slaughter in the trenches is primarily attributable to the thinking and decisions of the military and civil leaders of Wilhelmine Germany and Austro-Hungary. And as I argue in Chapter Six, one reason why it was right for NATO to go to war against Serbia over Kosovo in 1999 was that Slobodan Milosevič saw negotiations only as a way of pursuing his aggressive policies, not as an occasion to agree to change them. I am a realist, therefore, about the fact of intractable human vice on the international stage. Of course, as a Christian I do not believe that anyone has a monopoly of vice; but the fact that its spread is wide does not make it even. If all are somewhat culpable, some might still be more culpable than others. And while it is beyond human competence to pronounce any human being to be ultimately irredeemable, it is presently the case that some people cannot be talked out of grave wrong-doing and that they must therefore be forced out of it. So the first cultural current against which I seek to defend just war is “the virus of wishful thinking” about human good will and good faith.

The next current against which I swim is pacifism. I devote Chapter One to a critique of Christian pacifism, focussing on Stanley Hauerwas, John Howard Yoder, and Richard Hays; but running through other chapters is a series of skirmishes with the book-length apologia for *non-religious* pacifism offered by the American philosopher, Robert Holmes. Regarding Christian pacifism, I endorse the customary ‘just war’ reasons for resisting the pacifist interpretation of the NT, but I add to them that Jesus’ refusal of armed violence should be understood strictly in terms of his political context—that is, as a refusal of specifically religious-nationalist violence. I also add a series of moral distinctions between private and public violence, between sinful and un sinful anger, and between loving and vengeful violence—distinctions that are not merely expressions of sophistical logic-chopping (as Richard Hays has claimed), but morally, psychologically, and empirically plausible. I also draw the conclusion that Yoder appears never to have read Augustine, since he says things about Augustine that no one who had ever read him could possibly say. No, Augustine did not view the Christianised Roman empire as virtually identical with the Kingdom of God. That was Eusebius.

The third current I oppose is legal positivism—that is, the doctrine that the only law that carries authority is that which has been *posited* by human beings in customs, statutes, or treaties. Beyond these, according to positivism, there *is* no law. Against this, it seems to me that a Christian monotheist has to say, as Hugo Grotius does say, that there *is* a universal, natural, moral law that commands the attention of consciences even where there is no positive law and no courts. What’s this got to do

with the justification of war? Whether regarding Kosovo, Iraq, or Syria, it is commonly claimed that military intervention without the UN Security Council's authorisation is *ipso facto* illegal, since the text of the UN Charter forbids it. Those who are not legal positivists, and who believe in a higher moral law, cannot accept that claim.

The final cultural current against which my book defends just war is liberal individualism, especially as this finds expression in the work of Oxford's moral philosopher, David Rodin.⁴ Basic to much of Rodin's formidable critique of what he takes to be just war reasoning is the concept of an individual's 'right to life'. In Chapter Five I observe that in the twelve hundred-year history of Christian just war thinking, no such right was acknowledged. Nor has it been acknowledged by post-1945 theological proponents of just war such as Paul Ramsey and Oliver O'Donovan, although I fear and suspect that it might have seeped into recent, especially Roman Catholic Christian discourse. It is true that, in the mid-17th century, Grotius did implicitly ascribe to individuals a 'right not to be harmed', but this is highly unstable and contingent upon a range of factors, most of them beyond the individual's control—not only his moral culpability, but also his social obligations, the motive and intentions of other agents, and the proportionality of their acts. What do I infer from these observations? First, I infer that there is no natural, moral 'right to life'. Second, I infer that, while a state *could* confer such a positive right upon its own troops in the field (or, as some in Britain fear, could be *forced* to confer it by the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights), that could only be done at the practical expense of hamstringing its own military power. Its reasons for so doing would no doubt be noble, but in my anthropologically realistic view, such nobility would be imprudent, foolish, and therefore morally wrong.

So much for what *In Defence of War* is against. In a conversation with Jeremy Waldron, he implied that I had pursued a *via negativa* throughout my book, and wondered whether that was really sufficient. In theology the 'via negativa' defines God negatively by stating all that *cannot* be said of Him, holding that what *can* be said positively is only that He is mysterious and ineffable. On reflection it seems to me that *In Defence of War* is not simply negative, stating what I'm against, while staying silent about what I'm for. Rather, it pursues a *via defensiva*, within which runs a *via affirmativa*.

In my description just now of what the book argues against, I have already implied much of what it argues for. It is *for* the early Christian just war tradition that runs from Augustine, through Aquinas, de Vitoria, Suarez, to Grotius. Especially in Chapter Five I make a deliberate point of quoting this tradition liberally, because I want to recover it from impending oblivion—an oblivion that threatens because of current moral philosophy's tendency to suppose that the only just war thinking worth engaging with started with Michael Walzer. Of course, I want to recover the early Christian tradition, not just because it is being forgotten, but also because it is worth remembering. Unlike some contemporary moral philosophy, it isn't mesmerised by rights-talk. What is more, it regards the paradigm of just war, not at all as self-defence, but as the rescue of the innocent.

In affirming this Christian tradition of just war reasoning, I also affirm moral realism—that is, the historically and culturally transcendent principles of natural law. Courts are not the only place where justice is done; the battlefield can be another. War's justice might be rough, but it is still justice.

In addition, I affirm non-cynical, non-Hobbesian anthropological realism. On the one hand, human beings are *not* simply driven by a monomaniacal, animal lust for

avoiding pain and death. Citizens want their country to do the right thing; they want to enjoy moral self-respect, and not only to be safe and fat. They are sometimes capable of moral nobility. On the other hand, human beings are not Rousseauvian innocents, whose corruption is simply social. They are capable of loving the wrong things or at least of loving the right things wrongly. They are capable of being fascinated by false gods. They are capable of habitual malevolence. Hobbes and Rousseau (and Jefferson) were wrong; Augustine was right.

Finally, there is a third kind of realism that *In Defence of War* affirms, and which I have not yet mentioned: not just moral and anthropological, but also practical. I am concerned that the kind of just war theory that I espouse is one that faces squarely the evils, tragedies, ambiguities, risks, and uncertainties of war, and laments them. Equally, however, I am concerned that it exposes the evils, tragedies, ambiguities, risks, and uncertainties of peace. The fact that Britain and the U.S. didn't go to war in 1994 and 1995 was good for us; but it wasn't so good for the 800,000 Tutsis who were hacked to death in Rwanda, or the 7,000 Muslim men and boys slaughtered at Srebrenica in Bosnia. Our staying at peace left the Hutu and the Serbs at peace to commit mass murder. Peace is not simple. So I am concerned that we be realistic about the moral ambiguities of both action and inaction. But I am also concerned that what I write about war be something that a soldier in the field could take seriously. For that reason, I am extremely pleased that several soldiers with battlefield experience have found empirically plausible my claim in Chapter Two that the use of lethal violence can be motivated, not at all by hatred, but by love—even for the enemy.

So, there is what the author thinks that *In Defence of War* is about. But as with life, so with books: authors are not always the best judges of what they are doing.

II (i)

In the second part of this essay I shall consider four controversial issues: love, proportionality, Britain's entry into the First World War, and the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

First, then, love. The logic of Christian just war thinking takes love for the neighbour to be an absolute moral obligation, binding always and everywhere—and including neighbours who are enemies. Just warfare, therefore, has to be 'loving'. Is this remotely plausible, empirically speaking? Yes, I think it is, provided that love is understood in non-romantic terms as due respect and care for persons. As such, love can qualify warfare, certainly insofar as it is conducted to save the innocent from grave injustice. It can even qualify warfare, insofar as its conduct is restrained by respect for the common creaturely and sinful humanity of the enemy, and by the intention of stopping his wrongdoing rather than annihilating him. Thus one may not harm an unjust oppressor, when he has ceased to pose a threat. This rule has been incorporated into the Geneva Conventions—and was violated by the now infamous Royal Marine, who was caught on film shooting dead a wounded Talib insurgent.

Not all Christian ethicists agree with me, however. In a recent issue of the interdisciplinary journal, *Soundings*, Lisa Cahill claims that compassionate care and love of enemies, not violence and killing, are works of love "properly speaking"; that war is "not fully compatible" with the intention of love; that the Christian gospel's vision is "non-violent"; that the empirical evidence I adduce in Chapter Two demonstrates that war "not atypically" disposes to hatred and war crimes; and that to describe war as 'loving' is to obscure its moral ambiguity, encourage wholehearted endorsement, and divert us from the need for constraints and the difficulty of

maintaining them.⁵ One might infer from this that Cahill is a Christian pacifist, eschewing violence always and everywhere. But apparently not, for she admits that using violent force can “very rarely” follow from loving threatened neighbours.

I find this at once thought-provoking and puzzling. It is clear that Cahill considers herself to be arguing against me. But how, exactly? Is it that she thinks that Christian love *cannot* qualify the use of violent force? No, because she claims that violence is not a work of love “properly speaking” and that they are not “fully compatible”, implying that violence is an *improper* work of love and that they are *somewhat* compatible. What sense should we make of this? The most promising candidate is that there is a *prima facie* oddness about an act of love that causes temporary pain or harm to the object of love—as, for example, when a parent punishes a child. In ordinary cases the appearance of oddness fades, once the benevolent intention becomes clear. When punishment involves the infliction of permanent or lethal harm, however, the oddness remains as an irreducible sign of lamentable tragedy. This I fully accept, but I observe two things: first, that it serves to confirm rather than deny my argument that Christian love can qualify the waging of war; and second, that it does not sit easily with the characterisation of the Christian gospel as ‘non-violent’. Nevertheless, I agree with Cahill that to describe war as ‘loving’ simply and without qualification is to endow it with a dangerous lack of moral ambiguity, and if I have done that, I resolve not to do it again. I think it fair to point out, however, that I argue that it is precisely Christian love for the enemy as fellow-sinner, whose life may not be taken malevolently or disproportionately, that *generates* moral constraints upon the use of violence. It does not—indeed, given its nature, it *can* not—hand just warriors a *carte blanche*.

Still, there is a crucial practical question, which Cahill raises, about how psychologically possible it is for combat soldiers to withhold themselves from hatred. This is crucial, since, if it is not possible, then Christian love cannot *actually* qualify the use of violence. Cahill reports that the chapter where I address this question “actually proves that not atypically war forms dispositions to hatred and war-crimes”. This is not quite accurate, Cahill having seen what she wanted rather than what was there. The phrase “not atypical” is a curious one, meaning, I suppose, “not exactly typical, but not very far from it”. In fact, all that I say and show is that rage can overtake soldiers in combat under certain circumstances, that it is not always unwarranted, that it is not normal, that it can be contained, that its prevalence depends on the quality of military leadership and discipline, and that combat soldiers in several wars have been horrified to find a prevalence of hatred among civilians that was entirely missing among their comrades. My recent re-reading of George Orwell’s *Homage to Catalonia* has added further empirical backing to these claims. George Orwell served in the Republican front-lines as a member of a communist militia in the Spanish Civil War from 1936-7. Within eleven months of returning to England he published an account of his experiences, *Homage to Catalonia* (1938). Here he observes that vilification of the enemy was usual among civilians, but not among combatants: “One of the most horrible features of war is that ... all the screaming and lies and hatred, comes invariably from people who are *not* fighting”.⁶ Implicitly substantiating his claim about combatants, he reports feeling “a vague sorrow” at the screaming of “the poor wretch” caught in the explosion of his hand-grenade during an attack on the enemy’s trenches.⁷ And of his reaction to the sniper who shot him through the throat he writes: “I could not feel any resentment against him. I reflected that as he was a Fascist I would have killed him if I could, but that if he had been

taken prisoner and brought before me at this moment, I would merely have congratulated him on his good shooting”.⁸

II (ii)

The second topic on which I shall linger for a while is the criterion of proportionality. This is the requirement that war, to be justified, must be ‘proportionate’—both before it is launched and in the waging of it. The best sense that I can make of proportionality is elastic and permissive. This permissiveness troubles me, but I can see no rational way of tightening it. One conceivable way of tightening it is to think of proportionality as a state of affairs that can be seen to obtain when a cost-benefit analysis shows an excess of goods over evils. My problem with this is that, while it may be conceivable, it is not possible. This is because such cost-benefit analysis falls prey to the incommensurability of the relevant goods and evils. That is, the relevant goods and evils are so radically different in kind that this is no common currency in which to measure them: they are *incommensurable*. So, for example, how does one weigh against each other, on the one hand, the goods of regime-change in Berlin in 1945, the liberation of Europe from fascism, and the ending of the Final Solution against, on the other hand, the evils of sixty to eighty million dead and the delivery of eastern Europe over to the tender mercies of Stalin.

Some years ago, the BBC dramatised the memoirs of a Battle of Britain pilot, Geoffrey Wellum.⁹ At the end of the dramatisation, the real, ninety-year old Wellum appeared, looking out over the iconic white cliffs of the southern English coastline. And as he gazed out to sea, he said, “Was it worth it? Was it worth it? All those young men I fought and flew with? All those chaps who are no longer with us? I suppose it must have been. I am still struggling with that”. Now, did Wellum mean that he doubted that Britain should have fought against Hitler in 1940? I do not think so. Rather, I think he was giving voice to the truth that the loss of each life is an absolute loss, for which there is no compensation. I think that “Was it worth it?” is the wrong question, because there is no sensible way of answering it. Such a ‘weighing up’ of goods and evils cannot be done. Were it possible, proportionality could be determined with some precision. Since it isn’t possible, proportionality is more elastic.

Nevertheless, there are other concepts of proportionality that do make sense to me. One such concept is the aptness of means to ends—or, in the case of disproportion, the inaptness. Thus for NATO to have gone to war against Russia in 1956 to save the Hungarians, or in 1968 to save the Czechs, or even in 2014 to save the Ukrainians, and to risk world-destroying nuclear war, would have been to undercut its goal—a free and flourishing Hungary, Czechoslovakia, or Ukraine. Thus, too, to engage in military operations that result in large-scale civilian deaths, when a vital part of the counter-insurgency strategy is to win civilian hearts and minds, would be self-subverting and so disproportionate.

In addition to the aptness of means to ends, there is also the concept of proportionality as the efficiency of means to ends. Thus, Douglas Haig’s over-ambitious strategy at the Somme in 1916 was more expensive of his own troops’ lives than a less ambitious strategy would have been. In that sense, British casualties on the Somme were disproportionate, because inefficient.

Finally, proportionality makes sense in terms of sufficient resources of men, materiel, and political support to sustain successful belligerency: when one ceases to have sufficient of these to wage war successfully, to persist is disproportionate.

II (iii)

Next, I turn to the First World War and particularly Britain's decision to enter it. Until very recently, a dominant consensus endorsed the thesis of Fritz Fischer that Berlin was primarily responsible for the escalation of a regional Balkan conflict into a continental war. This view prevailed even among German historians. Recently, Christopher Clark's widely praised *The Sleepwalkers* has challenged this consensus. Clark concludes his account of the outbreak and escalation of the war by saying that "[t]here is no smoking gun in this story; or, rather, there is one in the hand of every major character.... the outbreak of war was a tragedy, not a crime".¹⁰ "The crisis that brought war in 1914", he tells us, "was the fruit of a shared political culture", which rendered Europe's leaders "sleepwalkers, watchful but unseeing, haunted by dreams, yet blind to the reality of the horror they were about to bring into the world".¹¹

I am not persuaded by Clark's argument, not because of its history, but because of its ethics. I think he draws too sharp a distinction between tragedy and crime, as if they are always mutually exclusive alternatives. Crime often has a tragic dimension. Human beings do make free moral choices, but our freedom is often somewhat fated by forces beyond our control.

In addition, Clark assumes that because blame was widespread, it was shared equally. I disagree. The fact that blame's spread is wide does not make it even. That said, it seems fair to distribute the blame for escalation beyond Berlin. Clark thinks that St Petersburg deserves a portion. Hew Strachan lays the larger part at Vienna's feet. So it does seem to be true that Germany was not the sole or prime cause of escalation from Balkan conflict to continental war.

However, when it comes to the western front, Germany was the prime cause of an unjust, preventative attack, which brought France and Britain into the war. Germany invaded France and Belgium because she feared that France would attack in support of Russia. According to just war reasoning, however, the mere threat of attack is no just cause for war. Only if there is substantial evidence that a threat is actually in the process of being realised would the launching of *pre-emptive* war be justified. It is not justified to launch a *preventative* war simply because one fears that an enemy might attack. In August 1914 France was not intending to attack Germany (and nor, of course, was Belgium). Indeed, France deliberately kept one step behind Germany in her military preparations so as to make her defensive posture unmistakable, and as late as 1 August she reaffirmed the order for her troops to stay ten kilometres back from the Franco-Belgian border.¹² Notwithstanding this, Germany declared war on France on 3 August on the trumped-up pretext that French troops had crossed the border and French aircraft had bombed Nuremberg. It was the German government, dominated by its military leadership, especially Helmuth von Moltke, that launched a preventative war against France and Belgium in August 1914. Why did they do it? Because, as social Darwinists they took it for granted that war is the natural way of deciding the balance of international power; because they foresaw that the longer the next war was delayed, the longer would be the odds against Germany's victory.

Clark's metaphor of the 'sleepwalker' is a powerful one, which picks out important features of the situation in the run-up to the outbreak of world war. But a metaphor is, by definition, always both like and unlike the reality it depicts, and should not be taken literally. Germany's leaders were not actually sleepwalkers, but fully conscious moral agents, making decisions according to their best lights in a volatile situation of limited visibility. In such circumstances, which are not at all unusual, error was forgivable. Not so forgivable, however, was their subscription to the creed of a Darwinist *Realpolitik*, whose cynicism about human motives owes

more to Thomas Hobbes's anthropology than to Charles Darwin's science, and which robbed their political and military calculating of any moral bottom line beyond that of national survival through dominance.

It is perfectly natural for a nation not to want to see diminished its power to realize its intentions in the world. But if social Darwinism thinks it natural for a nation to launch a preventative war simply to forestall the loss of its dominance, just war reasoning does not think it right. Just cause must consist of an injury, be it actualised or actualising, and Germany had suffered none.

So much for just cause. In sending troops to the continent to aid France against Germany in August 1914, what were Britain's intentions and were they right? In Britain a majority of the government's cabinet was against entering the fray until 2 August. The Entente Cordiale formally committed the British only to consult with the French in case of a threat to European peace, and not automatically to activate their joint military contingency plans—although the Foreign Secretary, Edward Grey, argued strongly that Britain was morally obliged to come to France's aid. What eventually decided the cabinet in favour of war on 4 August was Germany's violation of Belgian neutrality. In British minds 'Belgium' conjured up a variety of just causes: vindicating a treaty to guarantee Belgian independence and defending the rights of small nations against unwarranted aggression. Of course, it also involved Britain's national interest in its own security, since the Belgian coast faced London and the Thames estuary, and it had therefore long been British policy to keep that coastline free from hostile control, to prevent invasion and preserve command of the sea. It is true, therefore, that, in rising to Belgium's defence, the British also sought to forestall a German domination of north-western Europe that they menaced their security. Not all national interests are immoral, and this one seems to me unobjectionable. What's morally crucial, however, is Britain did not *initiate* a *preventative* war to maintain a favourable balance of power.

Germany had suffered no actual injury, nor was she under any actually emergent threat of suffering one. Unprovoked, she launched a preventative invasion of France and Belgium to assert and establish her own dominance. In response, Britain went to war to maintain international order by vindicating the treaty guaranteeing Belgian independence and by resisting its violator, as well as to fend off a serious and actualised threat to its own national security, in which it had a legitimate interest. In so doing, she did have just cause, I think, and right intention.

II (iv)

Finally, Iraq. My understanding of proportionality, which I explained earlier, is a major factor in determining my judgement that the invasion of 2003 was justified. In my view, the invasion of Iraq is a morally complex matter, which takes me seventy-five pages to sort out in my book. Since I cannot possibly replicate that here, a highly telescoped version must suffice.

On the hand, to the invasion's discredit, it is true that a falsehood was propagated by Washington, a misunderstanding was permitted by London, the threat of weapons of mass destruction was not as imminent as had been supposed, and the plans for reconstruction were woefully inadequate.

On the other hand, to the invasion's credit, the following is also true. First, the regime of Saddam Hussein was massively and atrociously murderous, having killed up to half a million of its own people between 1988 and 2003, and it deserved to be toppled. If anyone doubts the regime's truly horrendous nature, I recommend that they read pages 351-2 of Justin Marozzi's *Baghdad*, where they will find a description of

the video-record of the activities of the ‘Saddam Special Treatment Department’.¹³ (*Note well*: in my argument this is crucial, since I regard the atrocious character of the regime as sufficient just cause for war.) Next, the regime’s intention to acquire nuclear weapons has been permanently thwarted. (And here I call in support none less than David Kelly, the British expert on biological weapons who tragically committed suicide in July 2003, who was convinced that only regime-change would end Iraq’s nuclear threat for good.¹⁴) Further, the Coalition spent six years and a lot of blood and treasure in supporting the creation of democratically accountable Iraqi government.

Finally, ten years after the invasion, the results include some very good things as well as some very bad things. Let me explain. Bad things include the following: the level of terrorist violence has remained far too high (although the blame for that lies first and foremost with the terrorists), the integrity of the country remains fragile (although *managed* disintegration might not be such a bad thing), sectarian mistrust continues to bedevil peaceful politics, and Iranian influence is greater than (some in) the West would like it to be. But among the good results are these: Iraq is no longer a military threat to its neighbours, it is no longer intent on developing nuclear weapons, children are no longer dying in their thousands from the regime’s political manipulation of economic sanctions, power has been peacefully transferred by democratic process, the Kurds are thriving, and the domestic oil industry is booming. Writing in *Prospect* magazine in May 2013, Antony Loyd, *Times* journalist with over twenty years’ experience of Iraq said this: “Contrary to the widespread perception among western publics ... the lot of the clear majority of Iraqis today is measurably improved. Many have a better quality of life, greater freedom of expression and more opportunity than during Saddam’s era... The killing has stabilised... In the north, the Kurds have never had it so good... The Shia areas of southern Iraq are at the edge of a similar economic renaissance”.¹⁵ So, the results of the 2003 invasion are mixed, not simply disastrous. And ten years is a short time. My view is well summarised by the spokesperson for a multicultural group of young Iraqi professionals, who visited me in March 2010: “It’s good that it happened. It could have been done better. And it isn’t over”.¹⁶

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NOTES

¹ Nigel Biggar, *In Defence of War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). Most of the first part of this essay was first published under the title, “In Defence of War: What Is it All About?”, in *Soundings*, 97/2 (2014). I acknowledge with gratitude the editor’s permission to reproduce it here.

² Michael Burn, *Turned toward the Sun: An Autobiography* (Wilby, Norwich: Michael Russell, 2003), pp. 70, and 69-78, 148.

³ Andrew Roberts, *The Holy Fox: A Life of Lord Halifax* (London: Papermac, 1992), p. 115.

⁴ I refer in particular to Rodin’s *War and Self-Defense* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002).

⁵ Lisa Cahill, “How Should War be Related to Christian Love?”, *Soundings*, 97/2 (2014), pp. 186-95.

⁶ George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), p. 64.

⁷ Ibid., p. 95.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 178-9.

⁹ 'First Light', directed by Matthew Whiteman and first broadcast on BBC 2 television in 2010.

¹⁰ Christopher Clark, *Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* (London: Penguin, 2013), p. 561.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 562.

¹² Hew Strachan, *The First World War*, vol. I: *To Arms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 91. See also David Stevenson, *1914-1918: The History of the First World War* (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 30.

¹³ Justin Marozzi, *Baghdad: City of Peace, City of Blood* (London: Allen Lane, 2014), pp. 351-2.

¹⁴ David Kelly, "Only regime-change will avert the threat", *Observer*, 31 August 2013.

¹⁵ Antony Loyd, "Will Iraq Burn Again?", *Prospect* (May 2013), p. 41

¹⁶ Some might be inclined to lay the current expansion of the horrendous Islamic State (or ISIL or ISIS or Daesh) at the feet of the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. I think not. The proximate causes of Islamic State's recent growth are the failure of the West to intervene early in support of the 2011 rebellion against Assad's regime in Syria, the funding of jihadist groups by individuals in the Gulf States, and President al-Maliki's pursuit of sectarian policies against Sunni fellow-citizens in Iraq. No doubt things would have been different, had the 2003 invasion not happened. But we do not know how they would have been different, since history does not march in straight lines and is usually determined by unpredictable contingencies.