

## A Terrible Love of War

JAMES HILLMAN

Penguin, \$23.95 cloth, ISBN 1-59420-011-4

*A Terrible Love of War* begins with a scene from the movie *Patton* where the general walks onto a field of burnt tanks and dead men, kisses a dying soldier, and says, "I love it. God help me I do love it so. I love it more than my life."

The shock and difficulty of comprehending how men might love war firmly sets James Hillman's theory that to tame war, it must first be understood. To do so, he cites Heraclitus: "War is the father of all." And Hobbes: "The state of peace among men living side by side is not the natural state; the natural state is one of war." Consider our own history as a nation. While we may consider ourselves peace-loving, the birth of the United States occurred on the frontier as an act of first taking land by force from Native people, then rebelling against British rule, invading Canada and Mexico, and slaughtering one another over states' rights and slavery. Thereafter we opened Japan by force of our navy, invaded Cuba and the Philippines, became bogged down in the quagmires of Korea and Vietnam, and have now invaded Iraq. As Hillman says, war is the "normal" condition—normal because it is accepted.

*Wars could not happen unless there were those willing to help them happen. Conscripts, slaves, indentured soldiers, unwilling draftees to the contrary, there are always masses ready to answer the call to arms, to join up, get in the fight. There are always leaders rushing to take the plunge. Every nation has its hawks. Moreover, resisters, dissenters, pacifists, objectors, and deserters rarely are able to bring war to a halt.*

Why war? Sometimes, as in the invasion of Canada and then Mexico, to take something from someone else. Sometimes, as in the two Iraq wars, to protect against a perceived enemy—perhaps real, perhaps imagined due to deception. According to Hillman: "The invasion of Iraq began before the invasion of Iraq; it had already begun when that nation was named among the axis of evil."

Once the enemy is evil, any means to kill the enemy becomes right—or so we are told. And once caught up in the horror of killing and death, how does a man survive? In combat he may become intoxicated with utter fearlessness, as if godlike and immortal. Because combat "is as close to the unlivable ... the maximum of intensity and maximum of impossibility at the same time." Because the risk and proximity of death can make a man more alive than he has ever been before. Because, as Stephen Ambrose has written so well, a group of fighting men becomes a band of brothers, and because in the worst of human depravity there can rise the most selfless acts and the finest traits of human nature.

To comprehend this, Hillman analogizes to the myth of Mars, the Roman god of war, entwined as a lover with Venus, the goddess of love, "expressed allegorically in the child of their union, Harmonia." So, too, does Hillman consider Blake's poem "The Tyger," one line of which asks, "Did he who make the Lamb make thee?" The answer is yes, because our very nature finds beauty in the destruction of our perceived enemies. And in the

midst of terror grows a bond among men that compels some to sacrifice themselves for others—like the firemen who ran up the stairs of the Twin Towers on 9/11 to save the occupants, all crushed as the steel structures crashed down.

But how to tame war? Hillman searches for an answer in the Enlightenment in Europe—a time in which, he asserts, the mad dog of war was placed in an Aphroditic halter; when poetic virtue, a sense of restraint and proportion, a love of metaphysical truth as an intimate part of life, found more respect than military might. While this can be seriously disputed, there is no question that the popular culture of America lacks any such aesthetics—to the extent that our engagement with the Arab world remains ignorant of its culture, art, literature, and religion. If we adopted the same courage necessary for combat that might be required to understand our perceived enemy's culture—or as Robert McNamara now belatedly says, "Empathize with your enemy"—we might not be deceived by leaders who lead us into war under false pretenses.

*American imagination in dance and writing, in music and painting, receives worldwide recognition, but the penetration of this culture into the popularism of the American political mind arrives only in the armored car of money delivery. The civilizing influence of aesthetic imagination never makes it to the mall. It is as if the nation as a whole is immune to culture, protected against it as something freak, unnatural, a disease of decadence, a corrupting of what Americans live by and live for. ... Culture which could possibly leash the violence of war with a love of equal strength is so blocked by the American ways of belief that we must conclude that war's sinister godfather and secret sharer in its spoils is religion.*

Religion is where Hillman focuses much blame for the love and normalcy of war. He declares, "War is religion" and "Religion is war." But how can religions such as Christianity and Islam, both supposedly grounded in love and forgiveness, foster war? Hillman asserts that the problem begins with monotheism: "Because a monotheistic psychology must be dedicated to unity, its psychopathology is intolerance of difference." This spills over to justification to conquer and convert. As Hillman notes, America may be the most Christian of nations, with the highest proportion of population regularly attending religious services, but it also wields the most military power. Thus the religious paradox: arrogant intolerance while professing goodwill and charity.

*Hypocrisy in America is not a sin but a necessity and a way of life. It makes possible armories of mass destruction side by side with the proliferation of churches, cults, and charities. Hypocrisy holds the nation together so that it can preach, and practice what it does not preach.*

Hillman suggests that when a martial spirit is confined within any single-minded belief (think President Bush's fixation on Iraq without credible evidence of weapons of mass destruction or Osama bin Laden's fixation on destroying the West), the result is intolerance, domination, and war. Consider this frightening parallel between Nazi Germany and Attorney General Ashcroft's attacks on those who dissent

against the war:

*“The people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders,” said Hermann Göring at his trial at Nuremberg. “This is easy. All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same in every country.*

Or as was once said, “Patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel.” The cure offered by Hillman (not entirely persuasive, although certainly a step in the right direction) is a form of courageous tolerance—a courage as strong as that necessary to rush into combat—so that the same force that impels us to war might be harnessed to prevent it. Such courage, however, requires the strength to face the charge of cowardice and conduct akin to desertion of one’s own country. A case in point: Presidential candidate Kerry voted for the resolution authorizing the second Iraq war. Now, like many others, he says he was misled. He probably was. A veteran of combat himself, he could not see through the fog to find a barrier of restraint to stop the war before it started. Who, in the face of the perceived enemy, will risk being characterized as Chamberlain appeasing Hitler? Politicians prefer to emulate Churchill, warning of a dire threat. When it comes to al Qaeda, no one suggests inaction, which might allow an allegation of weakness.

In the end, Hillman may help us understand the terrible love of war, but he can offer only difficult, if not impossible, means to restrain it.

*There is no practical solution to war because war is not a problem for the practical mind, which is more suited to the conduct of war than to its obviation or conclusion. War belongs to our souls as an archetypal truth of the cosmos. It is a human accomplishment and an inhuman horror, and a love that no other love has been able to overcome. To this terrible truth we may awaken, and in awakening give all our passionate intensity to subverting war’s enactment, encouraged by the courage of culture, even in dark ages, to withstand war. ... We may understand it better, delay it longer, and work to wean war from its support in hypocritical religion. But war itself shall remain until the gods themselves go away. ■*

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