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Heroes and Cowards: Genealogy, Subjectivity and War in the Twenty-First Century

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Abstract: From the wars of Ancient Greece to the collapsing Islamic State in the present, the same, apparently timeless protagonists appear and their stories told and re-told: the heroes, cowards and other combatants. This article proposes a framework which combines a Foucauldian genealogical approach with his conception of the subject as both constituted in relation to code-oriented moralities, and creatively self-formed in relation to ethics-oriented moralities (Foucault 1992, pp. 5, 25), to understand how it is possible to speak meaningfully of heroes and cowards in the age of the drone and the jihadist. Section one will explore the applicability of Foucauldian genealogy as the methodological basis for understanding present combatants in the context of war. The second section will assess Foucault's 'modes of subjectivation' and 'practices of the self' (Foucault 1992, p. 28), as a means of analyzing the emergence of the subject of war over millennia, with emphasis on the ethical dimension of subjectivity that can be applied to heroes and cowards. Then the third section will use insights from Homer and Augustine to begin to illustrate how Foucault's genealogical approach and his conception of ethical subjectivity combine to enable heroes and cowards to be meaningfully spoken of and better understood in the domain of war today. The purpose of such a study is to set out the basis on which political genealogy after Foucault can provide a nuanced conceptualization of subjectivity in modern war, as those subjects are formed, claimed, valorized and criticized by competing entities in contemporary political discourse.

Keywords: war; genealogy; Foucault; subjectivity; drone; soldier; jihadist

1. Introduction

From Afghanistan to Somalia, and from Ukraine to the Philippines, twenty-first century wars are combining new technologies with old practices: terrorism, insurgency, jihad, guerrilla warfare, ethnic conflict, civil war, proxy war, revolution, religious war, and more (Mumford 2013; Hughes 2014; Miller 2013; Cockburn 2015; Coyle 2017). It is common for these different types of warfare to exhibit a number of features, including: first, a desire on the part of political leaders—of governments or groups—to acquire and maintain popular support for the wars they are pursuing; second, for militaries, militias and informal fighting groups to maintain morale and effectiveness; and third, a desire to undermine an enemy's popular support, will to fight, and effectiveness. Just as the gods of Olympus have given way to new gods, and none, old ways of war continually give way to the new. So it is, also, with the stories of war: tales of war that were once captured on papyrus which would last for millennia are now shared on social media in a twenty-four hour news cycle.

At the core of war, however, from Ancient Greece to the collapsing Islamic State in the present, apparently timeless protagonists appear and their stories told and re-told: heroes, cowards and others. Consider some 'cowards' in contemporary political discourse. Journalist George Monbiot has described America's use of drones as 'fighting a coward's war' (Monbiot 2012). Meanwhile, a separate report speaks of 'ISIS cowards' running for shelter in order to escape the same kind of drone that Monbiot

criticized as cowardly (Brown 2015). In 2017, the Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani described the killing by suicide bomber 90 people in Kabul as ‘cowardly’ (BBC 2017). The common factor here is constituting the Other as ‘coward’ or ‘cowardly’ in relation to some act of violence—usually against noncombatants—and against some ethical standard or other.

This article proposes a framework which combines a Foucauldian genealogical approach with his conception of the subject as both constituted in relation to code-oriented moralities, and creatively self-formed in relation to ethics-oriented moralities (Foucault 1992, pp. 5, 25), to understand how it is possible to speak meaningfully of heroes and cowards in the age of the drone and the jihadist. The next section will explore the applicability of Foucauldian genealogy as the methodological basis for understanding a history of present combatants in the context of war¹. The third section will assess Foucault’s ‘modes of subjectivation’ and ‘practices of the self’ (Foucault 1992, p. 28), as a method for analyzing the emergence of the subject of war over millennia, with emphasis on the ethical dimension of subjectivity that can be applied to soldiers, jihadists and drone operators today. Then the fourth section will use insights from Homer and Augustine to begin to illustrate how Foucault’s genealogical approach and his conception of ethical subjectivity combine to enable heroes and cowards to be meaningfully spoken of and better understood in the domain of war today. Homer and Augustine have been chosen as the starting point for discussion because they each make a distinct, essential contribution to any genealogy of the hero and the coward in modern war. Homer’s Achilles has been portrayed as the archetypal military hero throughout the Western history of war, while Augustine—through his just war writings—added an essential ethical dimension to conduct in war that is still present in ‘hero’ and ‘coward’ discourses today. The purpose of such a study is to show how political genealogy after Foucault can open up a conceptual space that will provide a more nuanced understanding of subjectivity in modern war, as those subjects are formed, claimed, valorized and criticized by competing entities in contemporary political discourse.

2. Genealogy, Subjectivity and War

War is one of the oldest and most recorded of human activities. Poets, writers and dramatists have made immortals of those who have led and fought in epic battles throughout the ages. From Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian War* and Homer’s *Iliad* to the *Band of Brothers* made famous in Steven Spielberg’s television series, the traits and achievements of heroes and warriors are lauded (Thucydides and Finley 1972; Homer 2017; Ambrose 2017). As much as they are history, these texts and countless others are also concerned with the formation of subjectivity in war as a particular domain of moral experience. Despite the historical, geographic, cultural and linguistic distance between us, the modern reader, and the subjects of those texts, somehow our discursive glimpses of them still hold meaning. Partial meaning, even changing meaning, but meaning all the same. As McWhorter points out, ‘Human subjectivity is an historical and always less than complete and stable achievement’ (McWhorter 2017, p. 1). This is as true of the subject of war as it is in the emergence of sovereign personhood that McWhorter discusses.

Foucault’s genealogical exploration of the ethics of the self in *The Use of Pleasure and The Care of the Self*, offer one means of enabling us to understand how subjectivity has been constituted and re-constituted in war over time (Foucault 1992, 1990). After exploring the relevance of Foucauldian genealogy as the methodological basis of this paper, Foucault’s method for engaging with the ethics of the self in the domain of war will be explored in the next section. Such a genealogical approach will demonstrate how the formation of the hero or coward as ethical or unethical subjects of war in the present relies upon—and is continuous with—aspects of subjectivity that emerged in the past.

¹ This paper draws on concepts and material initially developed in my doctoral thesis, ‘A Genealogy of the Ethical Subject in the Just War Tradition’ (Lee 2010).

In addition, genealogy shows that contemporary constitution and self-constitution of the subject of war *excludes* aspects of ethical subjectivity from the past.

For Foucault, genealogy is ‘a matter of analysing, not behaviours or ideas, nor societies and their “ideologies,” but the *problematizations* through which being offers itself to be, necessarily, thought—and the *practices* on the basis of which these problematizations are formed’ (Foucault 1992, p. 11, *original italics*). The problematizations identified for further discussion in this paper are the ‘hero’ and ‘coward’. Not the apparently consistent characters who bestride history, but subjects who embody distinct ways of being—attitudes of existence—in every age, often as idealized subjects who somehow represent the best and worst of their particular societies. In problematizing heroes and cowards, Foucauldian genealogy is interested in how these subjectivities are formed out of the past. For Foucault, such an approach provides ‘a form of history that can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of objects, and so on, without having to make reference to a subject that is either transcendental in relation to the field of events or runs its empty sameness throughout the course of history’ (Foucault 2002, p. 115). He is not prescriptive about how such a genealogy should be undertaken and leaves open endless possibilities for the researcher. But he also makes clear that a genealogical approach to history is not some quest for a mythic source of a particular idea, theory or knowledge:

Genealogy does not oppose itself to history as the lofty and profound gaze of the philosopher might compare to the mole-like perspective of the scholar; on the contrary, it rejects the metahistorical deployment of ideal significations and indefinite teleologies. It opposes itself to the search for “origins” (Foucault 1977, p. 140)

Rejection of a ‘search for origins’ by Foucault appears counterintuitive in genealogical terms. However, it is a specific type of ‘origin’ that he rejects: the ‘apocalyptic objectivity’ of the historian who seeks, or claims, to stand ‘outside of time’ (Foucault 1977, p. 152). Instead, Foucault sees genealogy in subjective terms, viewing and recording the history of humanity: ‘the history of morals, ideals, and metaphysical concepts’ (Foucault 1977, p. 152). His genealogy seeks “‘effective” history [which] differs from traditional history in being without constants’ because of the subjective focus of his work (Foucault 1977, p. 153). Edmonds summarises: ‘Genealogy is therefore both *effective* and *affective* history; it is an attempt to transform one’s habits through the study of history’ (Edmonds 2011, p. 48). Note that the subjective element is synonymous with Foucault’s genealogy. Carabine’s application of a Foucauldian conception of genealogy suggests that it ‘is concerned with describing the procedures, practices, apparatuses and institutions involved in the production of discourses and knowledges, and their power effects’ (Carabine 2001, p. 275–76). The ethical subject—the individual—is constituted and self-constituting within those discourses, knowledges and power effects. However, there is no originary, exemplar subject to whom the (Foucauldian) genealogist can look for answers. Each is constituted in discourse, emerging in her or his social, cultural and historical context. McWhorter makes the point more elegantly: ‘A genealogy casts personhood, on the contrary, as an historically emergent category rather than an ontological fact. By investigating the conditions of its emergence, genealogy exposes personhood’s entanglements with networks of power’ (McWhorter 2017, p. 3).

Dreyfus and Rabinow describe their own understanding of the functioning of a Foucauldian genealogy as follows: ‘Genealogy seeks out discontinuities where others found progress and seriousness. It records the past of mankind to unmask the solemn hymns of progress. Genealogy avoids the search for depth. Instead, it seeks the surfaces of events, small details, minor shifts, and subtle contours’ (Dreyfus et al. 1983, p. 106). Certain assumptions are enshrined in such a genealogical approach. The discontinuities mentioned here by Dreyfus and Rabinow indicate Foucault’s rejection of natural, or inevitable, development within human experience. Foucault rejects the validity of ‘writing a history of the past in terms of the present’, seeing relevance instead in ‘writing the history of the present’ (Foucault 1995, p. 31). He is not looking back through time and asking what happened in the past: he is looking at the present and asking how this particular present became possible.

Where genealogy seeks out the emergence of the ethical subject of war—such as the hero or coward—a number of assumptions apply. The first is that any truth or knowledge claims pertaining to that ethical subject of war are historically situated, constituted in relations of power within multiple social, cultural, institutional and religious discourses. In the West, the dominant discourses have been located in the just war tradition. Second, morality itself—as applied to the subject of war—is contingent upon, and subject to, prevailing, transient ontological and epistemological conditions. Third, subjectivity is similarly contingent and non-essential, with subjectivation and self-subjectivation occurring within relations of power, shaped by code-oriented and ethics-oriented moralities. The emergent ethical subject of war is therefore not a fixed, or even an evolving entity; rather the subject is continually reproduced, located in a line of situated discourses. Having presented a Foucauldian genealogy as the methodological basis for understanding the coward or hero as subjects of war, the next section will propose a practical method to help us understand *how* the ethical subject of war has emerged in different ways throughout history. That discussion will draw upon Foucault's conception of the ethical subject as having both code-oriented and self-forming dimensions.

3. Foucault and Ethical Subjectivity

In 1981, Foucault stated: 'If one wants to analyze the genealogy of the subject in Western civilization, one must take into account not only techniques of domination but also techniques of the self. One must show the interaction between these types of technique' (Foucault 1997b, p. 177). We see here the profound link between genealogy and subjectivity in Foucault's later work. It is in his genealogy that Foucault studies 'the games of truth in the relation of the self with self and the forming of oneself as a subject' (Foucault 1992, p. 6). While individuals may create their own subjectivity through technologies of the self, it is within relations of power that particular subjects—such as the 'hero' or 'coward'—are constituted in discourse. Foucault's technologies of power and technologies of the self operate along two trajectories that can never operate autonomously: external moral codes to which the subject is expected to conform and ethical self-subjectivation. Foucault says:

If it is true, in fact that every morality, in the broad sense, comprises . . . codes of behavior and forms of subjectivation . . . then we should not be surprised to find in certain moralities the main emphasis is placed on the code . . . on the other hand it is easy to conceive of moralities in which the strong and dynamic element is to be sought in the forms of subjectivation and the practices of the self. (Foucault 1992, pp. 29–30)

Foucault sought to separate, at least theoretically, technologies of power and technologies of the self to assist in the analysis of their workings relative to moral codes and self-subjectivation. In exploring the emergence of the hero and the coward in war over time, genealogy offers the possibility of identity being formed and self-formed with different degrees of emphasis on codes and self-subjectivation. The next section will highlight how individuals have been incited to conduct themselves as particular kinds of subject of war, by conforming to codified morality. In addition, the extent to which individuals have created their own subjectivity in relation to ethical sources that operate somewhat independently from the moral code. For example, the pursuit of some greater good such as the upkeep of morale on the battlefield, self-sacrifice for a colleague under enemy fire, or the rescue of an innocent.

So, for Foucault, an ethic is associated with creative self-subjectivation on the part of the individual, and to help understand the concept in greater detail it will be helpful to clarify here the difference between his use of the terms 'ethical' and 'moral'. In his understanding of the morality of the classical Greeks, the Hellenic Romans and the early Christians, Foucault saw Greek behaviour as oriented towards individualized ethical practice, while later Romans and Christians employed practices that were designed to meet the obligations of a particular moral code: the moral code being the commonly accepted prohibitions, restrictions and interdictions that shape acceptable behaviour within a given culture. That is, *moral* pertains to accepted codes of behaviour, while *ethical* concerns the individual's

choices, conduct and self-subjectivation that may or may not relate to that code. Just war is one example of a codified approach to the conduct of war that has emerged in the West over many centuries (Walzer 2003); a chivalric code would be another (Kaeuper 2016).

The relation to oneself is broken down by Foucault into what he describes as four aspects of subjectivation. In an interview with Rabinow in 1983 Foucault explains these four aspects—the method employed in his subsequently published book *The Use of Pleasure*—as follows:

The relationship to oneself has four major aspects. The first aspect answers the question: Which is the part of myself or my behavior which is concerned with moral conduct? . . . The second aspect is what I call the mode of subjectivation [*mode d'assujettissement*], that is, the way in which people are invited or incited to recognize their moral obligations . . . The third one is: What are the means by which we can change ourselves in order to become ethical subjects? . . . The fourth aspect is: Which is the kind of being to which we aspire when we behave in a moral way? (Foucault 1997a, pp. 263–65)

These questions were originally raised in relation to the desiring subject within Classical Greek, Greco-Roman and early Christian cultures. However, Foucault's priority was not on an understanding of sex itself but in the broader issue of the self as subject. In the same interview he comments: 'I am much more interested in problems about techniques of the self and things like that than sex . . . sex is boring' (Foucault 1997a, p. 253). Applying a version of Foucault's four aspects of the techniques of the self can provide greater insight into the ethical subjectivity of the protagonists of war in this paper.

Foucault's describes his four aspects of the relationship to the self as follows. In his first aspect: 'Which is the part of myself or my behavior which is concerned with moral conduct?' (Foucault 1997a, p. 263), Foucault offers examples such as Kant's idealized insistence on right intentions, a contemporary view (from 1983) that feelings guide our moral conduct, while also identifying a Christian view that desire, or perhaps more accurately the struggle against desire, governs moral behaviour. For Foucault, these aspects of the self are a manifestation of the individual's 'ethical substance' (Foucault 1997a, p. 263). This ontological statement assumes that individuals possess a thing called 'ethical substance'. This paper proposes that this concept can be extended further, not settling for a single ethical substance but recognizing that individuals draw upon a range of ethical potentialities within the broad understanding of ethical substance.

For the second aspect Foucault asks how people are 'invited or incited to recognize their moral obligations', in what he calls the 'mode of subjectivation' that acts upon the ethical subject (Foucault 1997a, p. 264). He cites the example of Nicocles, ruler of Cyprus, whose moral obligation stemmed from his desire to maintain a certain position in society, as opposed to his adoption of a certain (in this case Stoic) set of ideological obligations. A Foucauldian genealogy focuses on the specific and situated—as seen in this example of King Nicocles. The difficulty with, or weakness in, this approach is found in the essence of society and social life itself: it is not a vacuum or controlled setting where the subject is acted upon by only one variable or one mode of subjectivation at a time. This leaves the subject in tension when confronted by multiple modes of subjectivation. Further, these competing modes may be promoted by groups or individuals with asymmetric power bases.

It is not possible to isolate aspects of the individual's relationship to herself or himself from the societal power dynamics to which she or he is constantly exposed. At the extreme, if the asymmetric power relation reaches a point of absolute domination, the subject cannot be called heroic—or even ethical—since there is no creative freedom to choose that mode of being. For example, in 2008, two suicide bombers in Iraq were reported to be 'Down's syndrome women', and that their bombs had been set off by remote control (Howard 2008). In this instance, potentially at least, any lack of understanding of the nature or consequences of the actions they were about to undertake, or inability to refuse, would render the women as ethically neutral. They could not be either heroic, cowardly or martyrs: they were used in a relationship of domination for the ends of the individual or group that is morally responsible for the act and its commission. Foucault insists: 'Freedom is the ontological condition of

ethics' (Foucault 1997d, p. 284). With no freedom of choice, these particular suicide bombers could act neither ethically nor unethically.

Thirdly, Foucault asks: 'What are the means by which we can change ourselves in order to become ethical subjects (Foucault 1997a, p. 265)? This, for him, is 'asceticism in a very broad sense' (Foucault 1997a, p. 265). This concerns an individual's choice of actions as she or he constitutes herself or himself as heroic though some form of ethical behaviour. Such an action goes beyond conforming to a certain law and the corresponding moral code of which it is a part; it is a deliberate choice of action intended to produce behaviour that the individual sees as ethical. For example, if a soldier wishes to form herself or himself as an ethical subject in time of war she or he may opt to comply with the Geneva Conventions and the military Rules of Engagement set out for that particular theatre of operations. However, in the course of a particular military engagement that soldier may be presented with a situation where in order to save the life of a wounded colleague or civilian noncombatant, she or he must risk her or his own life—opening the possibility of heroism or cowardice, depending on the actions undertaken. This, in turn, might be prompted by some religious experience, or by a response to the familial bonds that are frequently alluded to in close fighting units, or as a means of demonstrating goodness in a domain of death and destruction.

Finally, the fourth aspect asks: 'Which is the kind of being to which we aspire when we behave in a moral way?' (Foucault 1997a, p. 265). He expands on this question, offering examples such as a desire to 'become pure, or immortal, or free, or masters of ourselves, and so on . . . that's what I call the *telos* [*téléologie*]' (Foucault 1997a, p. 265). Foucault elaborates little on this aspirational aspect of self-constitution as an ethical subject. It may even be a principle that is not accessible to every subject, since some may be constrained by power relations at work, while others may be limited by personal circumstance and actual, or perceived, limitations on choice. To continue the example from the previous paragraph, for the soldier who risks death to save a colleague, the ultimate *telos* of that individual may be to live up to some military code of honour, or to know that when faced with death she or he was able to conquer fear in an act of self-mastery, or with the intention of winning a medal.

Consider the following variations of Foucault's questions as they relate to the four aspects of creative self-forming as an ethical subject of war on the part of the hero or coward. First, which part of myself or my behaviour in the domain of war or political violence is concerned with moral conduct? Personal moral motivations could include: pacifist, non-violent belief; religious piety; a moral upbringing; or self-preservation. Second, how are individuals incited or invited to recognize particular moral obligations in war? For example, what was said to soldiers in a trench on the Western Front in World War One to prompt them to walk forward into near-certain death? What are suicide bombers taught before they self-destruct in the presence of innocent passers-by? The third aspect asks: how should a person behave in order to become ethical? Walking into a hail of bullets; detonating a suicide vest in a market place or a concert hall full of children; confronting a killer? Fourth, what is the ultimate goal of the ethical subject? A peaceful world; a place in heaven or Paradise; a safe society?

To conduct a genealogy of the hero or coward as ethical subject of war, these questions must be asked, repeatedly, about actors at different points in time and across cultures and continents. The answers—such as they might be—lie in the available discourses that have survived: writings, artefacts, pictures, and other fragments from the past. While the parameters of such a genealogy can be specified, and the outline briefly sketched out in this paper, the span of a comprehensive analysis will necessarily be much more extensive than can be achieved here. In order to explore the Foucauldian-based four aspects of subjectivity set out above in relation to the hero or coward, sample relevant texts can be interrogated as follows. First, what are the sources that the various writers draw upon in writing about war and constructing the subject of war in discourse? Why have these sources been chosen in the cultural and social contexts in which the authors are writing? Second, how do the different writers constitute their specific codes around war—especially the moral dimension? Within the moral codes, why would the heroic or cowardly subject choose to act ethically? That is, given the range of behaviours available to the subject, what motivates the individual to make particular moral,

heroic or cowardly, choices in relation to war? Third, what are the consequences or rewards for the individual when she or he chooses to act, or not act, heroically in relation to war? Finally, what kind of subject does the individual hope to be in acting in a particular way regarding the conduct of war?

In the section to follow, a brief genealogical sketch of the emergent ethical aspect of the subjectivity of the combatant over time, will illustrate how they can only be meaningfully spoken of as heroes or cowards today by accepting certain continuities and discontinuities with the past. This, however, is only the beginnings of a genealogy, which would take an entire volume—or volumes—to fully explore.

4. Forming and Self-Forming the Subject of War

To better understand the hero as ethical subject of war in the present, Foucauldian genealogy explores the emergence of the hero through multiple histories over time. The ‘morals, ideals and metaphysical concepts’ (Foucault 1977, p. 152) of the hero are sought out, drawing on Foucault’s four aspects of subjectivity—initially in the original context of the historical analysis. Then, the emergence of the hero, as subject, is compared and contrasted over time and different contexts to identify continuities and discontinuities of understanding, of the ontological basis of heroism. Subsequently, continuities and discontinuities between past and present heroes as subjects of war provide greater, more nuanced understandings of what is meant—and not meant—when heroes are spoken of today. Consider, briefly, the emergence of the ethical subject of war in the writings of Homer and Augustine, the genealogical aspects of which include identifying both the basis of their approaches and the relationship between them as they inform the present.

4.1. Honour and Ethical Conduct in Homer’s *Iliad*

Among scholars of Homer’s *Iliad*, Adkins is strongly associated with placing ‘honour’ at the heart of the values that underpin both the poem and the heroic characters and society it constitutes (Adkins 1971, 1982). In his characterization of Achilles’ heroism in the *Iliad*, Zanker sees cooperation between warriors as a locus of heroic behaviour. Zanker extends his argument further by introducing a ‘justice-based’ element of behaviour, ‘whereby a hero may feel constrained by a sense of fair play, however defined,’ and where ‘an emotion like pity feeds into and conditions a degree of altruism’ (Zanker 1996, p. 2). So we find that heroism, in the context of the *Iliad*, can survive a lack of pity, and a lack of altruism. When Achilles hears of the death of his beloved Patroclus at the hand of Hector the Trojan, his sense of vengeance can even be regarded as heroic. Before his final showdown with Achilles, Hector briefly considers approaching Achilles unarmed. However, he does not do so because ‘if he approaches Achilles unarmed, Achilles will not pity or respect him but will kill him “like a woman”’ (Adkins 1982, p. 314). So Achilles’ apparent willingness to kill an unarmed man was still not considered sufficiently ignoble to cost him his hero status.

After killing Hector, ‘High o’er the slain [Hector] the great Achilles stands’ (Homer 2006, p. 658), again, Achilles does not choose a noble path. Achilles drags Hector’s dead body behind a horse, denying him the honour of the glorious dead. Yet the status of ‘hero’ even survives Achilles degradation of Hector’s corpse. The physical bravery and skill at arms somehow outweigh Achilles’ character flaw that causes him to mutilate and degrade his vanquished enemy—actions that would be considered both unethical and a violation of the Geneva Conventions (International Committee of the Red Cross 1949) in modern war. The *telos* of the Homeric hero is not simply the acquisition of *honour*; the hero is entitled to booty or gifts from the vanquished. However, as Adkins observes, the promise or expectations of material benefits—gifts—does not motivate Achilles (Adkins 1982, p. 303). There is one other ‘divine’ consideration: Achilles’ conduct towards Hector’s corpse is offending the gods. So the gods—most notably, Zeus himself—send Achilles’ mother, Thetis, to the great warrior to tell him to ransom Hector’s body and allow it to be returned to Priam, Hector’s father:

“Lo! Jove [Zeus] himself (for Jove’s command I bear)
 Forbids to tempt the wrath of heaven too far.
 No longer then (his fury if thou dread)
 Detain the relics of great Hector dead;
 Nor vent on senseless earth thy vengeance vain,
 But yield to ransom, and restore the slain.” (Homer 2006, p. 714)

Having heard the message sent by the gods, Achilles has a change of heart and agrees to ransom Hector’s corpse so that the body can be returned to Priam: with honour preserved on all sides, thereby also maintaining the codes that frame how dead bodies should be treated. Recognizing that these are the merest glimpses into the complexity of the ethical dimension of the hero in Homer’s *Iliad*, consider how the questions based on Foucault’s four aspects of creative self-subjectivation can contribute to a genealogical analysis of this ‘hero’. To recall, the questions ask: 1. Which part of myself or my behaviour in the domain of war or political violence is concerned with moral conduct? 2. How are individuals incited or invited to recognize particular moral obligations? 3. How should a person behave in order to become ethical? 4. What is the ultimate goal of the ethical subject?

The part of Achilles’ character or behavior—the ‘ethical substance’ (Foucault 1997a, p. 263)—that is concerned with moral conduct, identifies with the code that the warrior should adhere to, as well as a commitment and duty to the gods. While he was prepared to breach the code by violating Hector’s corpse, he was incited—instructed—to act ethically and allow the body of his defeated enemy to be returned to the latter’s father. In this instance, Achilles’ own mother was the messenger of the gods. Achilles, in turn, constitutes himself as ethical in two ways here: first, by obeying the gods and, second, through that obedience he once again conformed to the warrior code. Finally, in this ethical self-forming, the hero can once more be seen in the pursuit of honour and the acceptance of ransom—as is his due.

These brief insights can and should be expanded and critiqued further in an extended genealogy but, for the purposes of this paper, they offer a means of recognizing different aspects of the ethical subjectivity of the ‘hero’ at that time. They also reveal both continuities and discontinuities with ethical subjectivity found in current ‘hero’ discourses. For example, the idea of dangerous, close-up, hand-to-hand combat with an enemy is still regarded as heroic. In 2012, Corporal Sean Jones was awarded the Military Cross for leading a 2011 bayonet charge against Taliban fighters in Afghanistan. His medal citation stated that he displayed ‘unflinching courage and extraordinary leadership in the face of extreme and tangible danger’ (The Telegraph 2012). In contrast, when two US Marines violated the corpses of dead Taliban fighters—by urinating on them—and were subsequently prosecuted for their actions, it is inconceivable that they could maintain any semblance of hero status in the way that Achilles did (Gabbatt 2012).

4.2. Augustine, Ethics and Just War in the Early Christian Era

Over the following centuries in Europe, the Homeric heroism of the warrior in the Classical Greek period gave way to a more structured, and disciplined and collective form of war in the army of the Roman Empire. By the later centuries of the Roman Empire, the Greek gods and Roman gods had been eclipsed by the Christian God, with Christianity recognized as the official religion of the Empire in the fourth century AD. Foucault analyzed practices from both the Hellenistic and Imperial periods whose purpose was to promote the care of the self (Foucault 1997c, pp. 231–32). From the Stoic injunction to ‘retire into the self and stay there’, to Pliny’s advice to a friend to ‘set aside a few moments a day . . . for a retreat into himself’, there are traces of self-forming subjectivity (Foucault 1997c, pp. 231–32). The self was an object to creatively reflect upon, master and take care of: a pattern that ‘was well established and deeply rooted when Augustine wrote his *Confessions*’ (Foucault 1997c, pp. 231–32; Augustine 2000). Augustine took these self-examining, confessional practices and applied them to

Christian ethics, including the ethical conduct of the soldier in what would become known as the just war tradition. He identified transgressions of purity in thought, word and deed, as needing divine forgiveness and purification (Augustine 2000).

In *The Augustinian Imperative*, Connolly investigates the possibility of a theme of intrinsic moral order that precedes and succeeds Augustine and which, in Augustine, finds its ultimate expression (Connolly 2002, p. 34). Connolly identifies two aspects of moral order or code: order as verb (to order) and order as noun (structure or design) (Connolly 2002, p. 35). For Connolly, Augustine is a carrier of the former, passing on the active order that emanates from God, or some other authority such as the law of nature; it is an ultimate, unquestioned and unchallengeable authority. He does not argue that a singular static, unchanging moral order exists, only that this theme or assumption of moral order can be found at every point in history. Connolly does not seek to endorse or refute this intrinsic moral order but to explore the discursive terrain between that position and its ontological adversary: ethical sensibility. Further, moral and ethical perspectives impact on the 'relational character of identity' when it comes to the subject of war, and subjectivity itself becomes a domain of contestation and analysis (Connolly 2002, pp. 143–44). Separately, Taylor places great emphasis on the role of Augustine in establishing the roots of modern subjectivity, stressing the importance of inwardness and self-reflexivity in the formation of political identity (Taylor 1989, p. 131). Consequently, Augustine's broader Christian ethic informed the means by which a soldier could form himself as ethical.

Augustine set out a key basis for ethical subjectivity when he stated: 'I classify the human race into two branches: the one consists of those who live by human standards, the other of those who live according to God's will' (Augustine 2003, p. 595). 'God's will'—in terms of moral order and direct guidance, in Connolly's reading—is a crucial part of the ethical substance, or basis, of ethical conduct (Connolly 2002, p. 35). Augustine proposed a hierarchy of moral responsibility which extended into the domain of war, within which the ethical subject of war emerged:

when a soldier kills a man in obedience to the legitimate authority under which he served, he is not chargeable with murder by the laws of his country; in fact he is chargeable with insubordination and mutiny if he refuses. But if he did it of his own accord, on his own authority, he would be liable to a charge of homicide. Thus he is punished if he did it without orders for the same reason that he will be punished if he refuses when orderedIf that is the case when a general gives the order, how much more when the command comes from the Creator! (Augustine 2003, p. 37)

The hierarchy of moral authority created by Augustine with regard to war takes the following form, in increasing order of importance: soldier, general, legitimate [political] authority, the Creator [Augustine's God]. Note, here, that the highest moral authority to which the ethical soldier must conform is divine. Such a compulsory ethical requirement would be alien—offensive even—in many Western, liberal, secular societies today. The authority under which a soldier took life shaped whether or not the actions were classed as 'killing' or 'murder': a difference that was embedded in Western just war reasoning 1600 years ago and still exists. That ethical difference rests on the legitimacy of the authority—within Augustine's moral order—of the one giving the order to kill, not on the status of the soldier or the person being killed.

Moving beyond *City of God*, the 'good' subject of war emerges elsewhere in Augustine's writings as an instrument of divine punishment in the shape of the legitimate ruler who obeys and reinforces God's chastising commands:

The desire for harming, the cruelty of revenge, the restless and implacable mind, the savageness of revolting, the lust for dominating, and similar things—these are what are justly blamed in wars. Often, so that such things might also be justly punished, certain wars that must be waged against the violence of those resisting are commanded by God or some other legitimate ruler and are undertaken by the good. (Augustine 1994, pp. 221–22)

Augustine describes those who can legitimately be opposed—or rightly punished—in a just war. The subjectivity of those to be punished is formed from unethical conduct such as cruelty, vengefulness and savagery. Such subjects emerge as unethical by opposing Augustine's—and therefore God's—moral code.

More specific to the ethical subjectivity of the individual soldier who fights wars is guidance found in Augustine's *Letter 189 to Boniface*. Boniface was a Roman military commander who 'rebelled against the imperial authorities' in 427AD (Augustine 2001c, p. xxv): 'When you are arming yourself for battle, then, consider this first of all, that your courage, even your physical courage, is a gift from God . . . When one makes a promise, one must keep faith, even with an enemy against whom one is waging a war' (Augustine 2001a, p. 217). Augustine is not advising on the tactics of war but on the character of the soldier—on 'keeping faith'. Note that 'courage' comes first for Augustine, though perhaps *moral* courage would be the better expression, because it is considered here to be greater than 'physical courage'. But, even courage in itself is not enough to make someone a 'good' soldier. He is also told that, in relation to both Augustine's words and holy scripture, if there is 'anything you still lack for a life of goodness, then make urgent efforts in prayers and action to acquire it . . . God [is] the source of the goodness you have and [] every good deed that you do' (Augustine 2001a, p. 218). Consequently, we see here that the ethical substance—to use Foucault's term—of the Christian Roman soldier is rooted primarily in the relationship with the divine. While a full genealogical investigation of the ethical significance of the relationship between the Roman soldier and his Christian God is beyond the scope of this paper, it is already clear that the soldier is required to conduct a work of the self on the self in pursuit of 'goodness'.

4.3. Genealogical Continuities and Discontinuities

A Foucauldian genealogy of the ethical subject of war—hero or coward—seeks out the continuities and discontinuities between not only the past and the present, but also between key moments in the past, the combination of which all contribute to making present ethical understandings of heroism and cowardice possible. Compare one aspect of the ethical subjectivity of the 'hero' of the Classical Greek period and the ethical subjectivity of the fifth-century Christian soldier in the later days of the Roman Empire: the continuities and discontinuities in their respective engagement with the earthly and the divine.

The gods of Olympus communicated their displeasure to Achilles through his demi-god mother, so prompting the warrior to change his behaviour in order to restore his honour and regain favour in their eyes. Later, in Augustine's treatise to Boniface, the Christian military commander is advised to seek a life of goodness through prayer and good actions that extended to the domain of war: keeping faith with enemies. There are apparent similarities of ethical substance between Achilles and Boniface. Each somehow engages with, and responds to, their respective gods. However, the primary motivations and actions of these two individuals show significant discontinuities as well. Achilles *telos*—ultimate aim—was to acquire earthly honour through individual combat which, in turn, would constitute him as a hero and honour the gods. But that honour would remain earthbound: it would never entitle Achilles to join his gods on Mount Olympus in an afterlife. Boniface was later guided by Augustine towards submission and obedience to the commands of the Christian God which would lead to a life of goodness and, ultimately, a place in heaven with his God.

The primary *telos* of the early Christian soldier, therefore, was neither heroism nor honour—though these can be acquired. The *telos* was godliness, which would lead to an eternal place with the Christian God, in heaven, in the next life. And that *telos* was achieved through the soldier recognizing his (it would have been men at that time) need to conduct himself ethically on and off the battlefield, and taking steps to ensure that he did so. Augustine showed several connections between the different aspects of the soldier's ethical subjectivity when he stated: 'Greatness and their own glory belong to warriors who are both very brave and very faithful (that is the source of their *truer praise*), to those who struggle and face danger in order, with the help of God who gives protection

and assistance, to bring defeat on an untamed enemy' (Augustine 2001b, pp. 225–26, *italics added*). Faithfulness to God was deemed, here, to be more important than physical bravery, and it was God's help that led to the enemy's defeat.

These very brief historical insights only begin to demonstrate how genealogy can provide an understanding of the emergence of the ethical aspects of the modern subject of war. Homer and Augustine are early contributors to Western thinking on just war ethics and military conduct. A comprehensive genealogy of the modern, Western ethical subject of war would consider multiple contributors to the just war tradition. A genealogy of the jihadist as ethical subject of war would require a similar re-reading of discourses in the Islamic war tradition. Focusing solely on Western just war in the space available here highlights both the potential and vast scope of such a study. Throughout Western history, 'just war' has not been so much a linear, 'homogenous entity in a conceptual march of progress' in ethical thought; instead, it is a tradition characterised by 'continuities, paradigmatic breaks, discontinuities and incommensurabilities' (Lee 2010, p. 12). Between Augustine in the fifth century and today, just a few of the key contributors to just war thinking include: Gratian (twelfth century); Aquinas (thirteenth century); Luther and Vitoria (sixteenth century); Suarez and Grotius (seventeenth century); and de Vattel (eighteenth century) (Reichberg et al. 2006). Over that period, the just war tradition shifted from being rooted in divine will and divine revelation to a basis in human reason and law. Tadashi reinforces this point when he writes of Grotius' seventeenth century contribution to the ontological basis of just war: '[Grotius] does not rely on the just-war doctrine of European medieval theologians, but re-examines the just war doctrine from the viewpoint of natural law based solely on reason' (Tadashi 1993, p. 32).

In attempting to understand the emergence of the subject of war over millennia—and therefore to speak meaningfully of the hero or coward today—the continuities and discontinuities over time are many and significant. For example, it is almost unthinkable in a Western context, for political or military leaders to constitute the subjectivity or actions of a modern-day soldier or other combatant in terms of God's will or divine judgement. The secularizing of the just war tradition over recent centuries has ensured as much. Elshtain observes that American soldiers are trained—like the training of allied soldiers from the UK and across NATO—to avoid both intentional and unintentional killing of the innocent: 'No one is encouraged, or even allowed, to call the killing of civilians "God's will" or, even worse, an act carried out in God's name' (Elshtain 2004, p. 21). She then contrasts that secular Western approach with appeals to divine authority in the training materials of 'Islamist radicals', quoting: 'You have to kill in the name of Allah until you are killed . . . Our enemies are fighting in the name of Satan. You are fighting in the name of God' (Elshtain 2004, pp. 21–22). The terrorist fighting today in the name of Allah is thereby constituted as the radical, violent Other, opposed by Elshtain's ethical subject who creatively self-constitutes by exercising restraint in seeking to protect civilians in war.

In Foucauldian genealogical terms, the discontinuity between the different divinely-mandated actions of Homer's Achilles or Augustine's Boniface, and the Western secular combatant of today is clear. In contrast, while the gods of Achilles and Augustine are not the same as the god of the Al-Qaeda fighter or the Islamic State jihadist, there is at least some continuity in the notion of military activity being commanded by a divine being. A comprehensive genealogy would have to consider how the jihadist has emerged over time and contexts in different non-Western, non-Christian, Islamic discourses. The Introduction referred to the Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani in 2017, when he spoke of the 'cowardly' suicide bomber who killed 90 people in Kabul (BBC 2017). The simple—perhaps simplistic—interpretation is to point to the killing of civilian noncombatants as a violation of the ethics of war, and it is certainly a violation, and constituting the perpetrator as cowardly.

A richer, more provocative re-reading—from a Western perspective and perhaps from a more conventional Islamic perspective—is to try and understand if or how the suicide-bomber jihadist seeks to form himself or herself as ethical. Atran asks an uncomfortable question after observing a '[m]oral commitment to sacrifice for their group without regard for their own material reward. As long as jihadis show such moral commitment, as martyrdom missions attest to, then even overwhelming

material efforts to destroy the jihadi movement may not be enough. But what gets group commitment going in the first place' (Atran 2010, p. 298)? Genealogy offers the possibility of a much more nuanced understanding of the ethical subjectivity of fighters, like jihadists, in unconventional modern wars: the moral basis of their actions; their justifications for killing noncombatants; and the relationship between violence, religion and a divine *telos* which is alien to much of Western society.

In similar physical domains of political violence like Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq, genealogy offers the prospect of a deeper understanding of the subjectivity of the drone operator who conducts lethal operations. While Monbiot sees America's use of drones as cowardly (Monbiot 2012), Pittman goes further in constituting the subjectivity of the drone operator: 'He is a drone "pilot". He and his kind have redefined the words "coward", "terrorist", and "sociopath". He is the new face of American warfare' (Pittman 2013). Rejecting such characterisations, drone operators have described the importance of discriminating between combatants and noncombatants when using lethal force, and the ways in which advanced technology improve upon previous air power practices (Lee 2014, pp. 42–43). The criticism of drone operators by Monbiot and Pittman is partially based on physical separation from the modern battlefield as they remotely fly their Predator and Reaper aircraft from several thousand miles away. No physical courage is required. Yet in terms of ethical subjectivity, they still exhibit some continuity with the (moral) 'courage' of Augustine's ethical subject of war identified above. Despite Pittman's accusation of sociopathy and enthusiasm for killing among drone operators, Grossman's study, *On Killing*, tells of the difficulty many combatants have in overcoming 'their innate resistance to killing their fellow human beings' (Grossman 2009, p. 13). The ethical subjectivity of the drone operator, like other modern combatants, is much richer and subtle than crude stereotyping will permit, though it remains difficult to see how they can be considered 'heroic' in the classical sense.

5. Conclusions

This paper has only just begun to scratch the surface of the insights that can be gleaned from a Foucauldian genealogy of the ethical subject in the domain of war. It is beyond the scope of this paper to conduct such a genealogy here, but a potential framework has been proposed and the workings of such a genealogy have been explored. For Foucault, genealogy is 'a form of history that can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of objects, and so on, without having to make reference to a subject that is either transcendental in relation to the field of events or runs its empty sameness throughout the course of history' (Foucault 2002, p. 115). The ethical subject of war—the hero, the coward, and many more—is not transcendental but culturally, socially, politically and historically situated. Foucault distinguished between code-oriented moralities and subjective, ethics-oriented moralities in his own genealogy of the ethical desiring subject (Foucault 1992, p. 28ff.). Such a distinction can never be absolute; code-oriented and ethics-oriented moralities are mutually constituting and do not operate independently upon the subject. However, despite the limitations involved, when applied genealogically these concepts offer an effective (though admittedly imperfect) means of untangling the layers of meaning that are inscribed onto those subjects who occupy the domain of war in these opening decades of the twenty-first century.

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