Why cosmopolitan war is an ethics of fantasy?

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> *"Above all, war brings it home to the individual that he is not altogether an individual. It is only because they are aware of this that men will die on the field of battle." – George Orwell*

Abstract: This article argues that Fabre's cosmopolitan war is implausible because it ignores the psychological realities of war. Building on J.L. Mackie's notion of an 'ethics of fantasy' – a morality reduced to lip-service and incapable of action-guiding – I argue that a view based on a flawed view of either human agency or the environment in which it is exercised is doomed to practical irrelevance. In rejecting patriotism and advancing a highly individualistic view of war, Fabre relies upon a highly flawed view of human agency, ignoring the psychological mechanism of depersonalisation essential to large-scale cooperation and the practice of war.

In Part I, I offer an initial account of what an 'ethics of fantasy' is and offer one major reason why certain moralities fail as practical guidance. In Part II, I contrast Fabre's moral cosmopolitanism with ancient cosmopolitanism; I focus on her rejection of patriotism and other identity-based forms of partiality. In Part III, I summarise key findings, mostly in social psychology, on how large-scale social cooperation is achieved. I highlight the central role of depersonalisation and its felicity conditions. In Part IV, I argue that Fabre's view faces a dilemma. Either her cosmopolitanism is compatible with identity-based partiality, or it is not. If not, then she does not even have a view of war given that large-scale cooperation requires it. If her view is compatible, then she needs a functional replacement for patriotism. I conclude by showing that the alternatives fail to satisfy the felicity conditions of depersonalisation which war requires.

Keywords:

war cosmopolitanism patriotism partiality social identity ethics of fantasy

Introduction

Implicit in many moral arguments are methodological commitments. How much should one know about the world? Should one's inquiry begin with reviewing findings in the natural and social sciences or should one theorise first and integrate findings to correct or refine one's views later? How much do the realities of practice matter when engaging in moral argument?

These questions are salient in debates about the morality of war. An ongoing part of the argument concerns just how much we need to know about war and why it matters.

To be schematic, the traditionalist tends to emphasise the distinct realities of war and the need to speak to the lived experience of soldiers, while the revisionist is sceptical about the difference the realities of war make in moral theory. Fundamentally, the former believes that intuitions and common sense about war are inadequate; normative theorists must first learn what they can from the humanities or social sciences. The latter doubts that our common-sense views are so inadequate; whatever findings the humanities or social sciences can contribute, they are unlikely to fundamentally alter moral theory which began with intuitions and common sense.

This article argues against Cécile Fabre's cosmopolitan view of war. Specifically, I argue that her revisionist position is fatally flawed because it fails to engage with relevant findings in the social sciences. At the heart of Fabre's cosmopolitanism is a misunderstanding of the psychology of social cooperation. In a way, showing how a failure to adequately engage with the social sciences undoes her view serves as a case study on the limits of moral theory, which presumes that our common-sense view of the world is an adequate point of departure.

In part I, I discuss practical philosophy as a theory meant to guide action and choice. Drawing on remarks by J.L. Mackie, I theorise the notion of an 'ethics of fantasy' – a morality doomed to practical irrelevance. I argue that one reason why certain views amount to fantasies is that they rely on a flawed view of either human agency or of the context in which it is exercised. Part II presents Fabre's view of cosmopolitanism. To help bring out its distinctive features, I contrast her rejection of social identity-based partiality, e.g. patriotism, with the socially embedded cosmopolitanism of ancient Stoicism. In part III, I discuss key findings in the social sciences, particularly, social identity theory in psychology. I show how large-scale social cooperation is dependent upon depersonalisation which is an irreducibly collective form of self-understanding. I then go on to discuss the felicity conditions which allow for robust depersonalisation and the attendant social cooperation, sacrifice, and trust. Finally, in part IV I argue that Fabre's view is an ethics of fantasy. By drawing upon the findings in social psychology, I show that Fabre's rejection of patriotism faces a dilemma. Either one rejects all social identity-based partiality or not. If one does, this amounts to rejecting the depersonalisation essential to large-scale cooperation and one's view is a non-starter. If one does not, then one must show that one has an adequate substitute for patriotism which is also compatible with her moral cosmopolitanism. This avenue is blocked by the fact that the likely replacements all fall afoul of the felicity conditions for depersonalisation identified in the previous section.

Part I – Is practical philosophy practical?

Arguably, the role of practical philosophy is to provide a rational guide for choice and action. Yet, many ethical theories do not seem very practical. This critique has been made before; J. L. Mackie objected that utilitarianism was an impractical view.

> To put forward as a morality in the broad sense something which, even if it were admirable, would be an utterly impossible ideal, is likely to do, and surely has in fact done, more harm than good. It encourages the treatment of moral principles not as guides to action but as a fantasy which accompanies action with which it is quite incompatible. […] To identify morality with something that certainly will not be followed is a

> sure way of bringing it into contempt – practical contempt, which combines all too readily with theoretical respect.[1]

Many practical philosophers seem to understand their work as akin to pure mathematics rather than engineering. Practical concerns are minimised as if normative theory was a linguistic variant of Sudoku, rather than a theoretical project which aims to deliver guidance *hic et nunc*.[2] The morality of war is no exception.[3] In the just war tradition, the goal is to provide a reasoned guide for choice and action in wartime. Its addressees are soldiers and politicians, but also jurists, journalists, and citizens. To produce useful guidance requires familiarity with the practice itself. In recounting how he wrote *Just and Unjust Wars*, Michael Walzer says that he read key philosophical texts but mostly military history: academic or literary accounts, diaries, and journalism. He did so to better understand what war is like; he wanted his arguments to 'ring true' to those for whom war is a personal experience.[4]

For just war theorists, the exercise is a puzzle that happens to concern war.[5] The problems of officers and war planners seem subordinated to intricate questions raised by philosophers. Just war theory seems primarily about ethical theory. Consider an example. Jeff McMahan objects to the moral equality of soldiers; he denies that soldiers who obey the laws of war have an equal right to fight independently of their cause. His argument rests upon an analogy between soldiers in battle and police officers using legitimate violence against criminals in peacetime.[6] As the criminal has no right to self-defence (there is no symmetry), we are invited to believe that moral inequality also holds for soldiers.[7] Analysing violence in peacetime is meant to allow us to discover the norms that govern violence in war. McMahan challenges defenders of the moral equality of soldiers to show why the norms applicable in peacetime do not apply in wartime.[8] This argument by analogy presumes that war, after all, is not so different.

Even if one agrees that much theory fails to deliver plausible guidance, one might find the objection underwhelming. It is easy to retort 'impractical'. More compelling is an explanation of why it is so. A convincing critique must theorise what makes a view an 'ethics of fantasy'. The remainder of this section sets out a partial account of what makes an ethical theory unfit to guide action and choice.

To begin, I want to concentrate on what it means for something to be plausible rather than merely possible; we should avoid leaning too heavily on the maxim 'ought implies can'. The fact that something is possible does not entail that it is wise or realistic to recommend or demand it. Monastic lives are possible and yet it seems hopeless to

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[1] Mackie, *Ethics*, (1990):131-132.
[2] This worry does not depend on Mackie's metaethics. We find it in Hare, *Moral Thinking,* (1981).
[3] I am paraphrasing from Michael Walzer's *What is Just War Theory?* (Unpublished manuscript, 2013). This lecture can be viewed; see "What is Just War Theory, Michael Walzer, Feb. 21 2013" Youtube video, 45:49, lecture delivered at Westmont College, posted by WestmontTV, March 7, 2013, https://youtube.com/watch?v=9F4XuOkMCSA.
[4] *Ibid*., p.2
[5] The two most eminent representatives of this trend are probably Jeff McMahan and Cécile Fabre, see McMahan, *Killing in War,* (2009) and Fabre, *Cosmopolitan War*, (2012).
[6] McMahan, *Killing in War*, pp.13-14
[7] McMahan admits that current circumstances make changes to the laws of war unrealistic, see *Killing in War*, pp.192, 234. Yet, if soldiers are trained to primarily follow the law it is unclear how this works. Should soldiers disobey on the basis of their acceptance of a philosophical argument?
[8] McMahan, *Killing in War*, p.35

recommend them for all if we expect real compliance. To grasp the importance of preferring the plausible to the merely possible, consider the following. There are cases of people surviving falls from extraordinary heights: Vesna Vulović fell just over 10000 metres without a parachute and survived.[9] The anecdote teaches us that a functional parachute *is not a necessary condition* to survive such a fall. Furthermore, if we reflect on the importance of weather conditions for paratrooper landings, we realise that a functional parachute *is not sufficient* either. Surprisingly, it appears that a parachute is neither necessary nor sufficient to survive and yet in practice doing without one is synonymous with death. The rare exceptions are no reason to choose or act differently.

Consider a distinctively moral case. To defend the absolute prohibition on lying, St Augustine tells the story of Firmus of Thagasta. The bishop was hiding a man. Questioned by Roman soldiers, he would neither lie nor betray the man. Impressed by Firmus' refusal to yield to torture, the Emperor pardoned the wanted man.[10] Like the previous case, this one is exceptional. Focusing on such cases fails to do justice to what normally occurs. When faced with moral dilemmas, we need better guidance than suggesting that there is no need to choose.

If hard cases make bad law, contrived scenarios make for bad moral theory. If we seek to offer advice and hold each other accountable, then we need some understanding of what can be generally expected. The underlying idea is that a morality is useful if it can guide human choice and action *en masse*. To avoid the practical contempt which Mackie mentioned, our practical advice and demands must be such that a normal individual can, with reasonable effort and under normal circumstances, regularly succeed. Conversely, for moral criticism is to matter failure must not be ubiquitous.

Unrepresentative cases are unhelpful because they create a flawed view of *either human agency or the context in which it is exercised*. In the case of Vesna Vulović, the circumstances are miraculous and tell us nothing about what it is normally like to fall 10000 metres. The case of Firmus presents us with a highly irregular picture of political power or the use of torture.[11]

There are limits to what philosophy can tell us about agency or the context in which it is exercised. Thought experiments are not a reliable means of establishing correlations between various phenomena or to determine whether one's beliefs are representative or idiosyncratic. It is because key facts about the world are not self-evident that philosophers must read outside of philosophy. Just as a lawyer's legal expertise does not dispense him from consulting other experts to understand natural or social phenomena, so it should be for practical philosophers.

Before proceeding, I consider a few objections. First, one might reply that I am not demanding enough. Morality is not meant to be easy; the right thing is proverbially hard and even costly. Second, one might worry about our ability to distinguish between what is merely demanding and what is outlandish and improbable.

There are a few replies to the first objection. I am not suggesting that ethics must make modest demands. Rather, I want to point out that we are torn between the thought that what is right or virtuous is hard and the belief that there is some (reasonable) limit to the demands of morality. There is a whole literature on demandingness, and I cannot settle the issue here. I will limit myself to a few short remarks.

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[9] For a telling of the story, see https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-38427411.

[10] Saint Augustine, *Treaties on Various Subjects*, (1952).

[11] On torture see Stockdale, *Courage under Fire*, (1993).

Notwithstanding academic disagreement, the supererogatory, i.e. what is praiseworthy but not morally required, is part of everyday morality. The phrase 'beyond the call of duty' is a clear expression of it. To reject the supererogatory effectively requires what most of us consider heroism or saintliness and this seems to doom one's view to practical irrelevance. Moreover, we should not confuse the notion that there are limits to what morality can demand with the less credible idea of some invariant limit. What we find excessive or fanatical depends upon multiple factors: context, roles, stakes, etc. A stranger who runs into a burning building to save one of several children will be praised. If he declines to return, it is unlikely that we blame him whereas a parent of the children who did the same would be treated very differently. Exploring which factors affect what we consider 'enough' goes beyond the scope of this article. I simply note that our practices of praise and blame seem to operate according to varying limits.

In response to the second worry, our ability to determine if something is likely or unlikely depends upon our knowledge of the world. Again, reading philosophy tells us little about the most recent findings in archaeology or physics. To judge if practical advice is plausible or not, we need to know something about the world it is intended for. This raises a further issue: is this view overly pessimistic about social change? Is history not replete with disproved claims about what is implausible, e.g. the abolition of slavery or the enfranchisement of women?

The proper response is two-fold. First, there is a strong asymmetry between the contemporary world and the past. We have better research methods and far more knowledge. Besides, past predictions about reform were more often based on received wisdom than on the best available evidence. In short, we are in a far better epistemic position than our predecessors. Second, it is hard to see what is pessimistic about taking current findings seriously. Undoubtedly, discoveries can upend our certitudes. However, this possibility does not warrant dismissiveness towards our current findings because we are all hostage to the best available evidence.

I began with the idea that the primary function of an ethical theory is to guide choice and action: a good theory must provide guidance that is within reach of the many rather than the few, under normal rather than abnormal circumstances, given reasonable rather than heroic efforts. Rightful conduct should not be the preserve of heroes and saints but within the reach of ordinary men and women.

An 'ethics of fantasy' is a theory whose prescriptions or prohibitions will go largely if not entirely ignored. One reason why this occurs is that the view relies on either a flawed view of human agency or the context in which it is exercised. The task now is to show that Cécile Fabre's cosmopolitan view of war is an 'ethics of fantasy'. Principally, I object that it fails to seriously engage with human psychology and the constraints of large-scale cooperation required by war.

Part II – Whose cosmopolitanism?

For many, cosmopolitanism refers to a view held by various Stoic philosophers, yet it is important to appreciate in which ways Fabre's view is distinctive. Best-known perhaps is the 'two communities' view of Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius.[12] For them, humans belong to two cities: a greater and a lesser one. The greater city encompasses all

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[12] Long, "The Concept", (2008):50-58.

mankind. Despite the absence of a world-state, humans share a kind of citizenship because of unwritten laws. These laws are simply the commands of reason which are common to all rational creatures. To share the same rationality means that we are all subject to the same rules. If so, then it is *as if* we are subject to common laws as fellow citizens. The other city is an actual state. Here, citizenship is an institutional reality that organises political and social life. Hierocles, another Stoic, offered an innovative way to model our obligations.[13] Everyone stands at the centre of many concentric circles. The closest represents immediate family; the next more distant family; then one's tribe, city, nation, until one reaches the final circle for mankind. The order is descriptive and normative: those closest are also those to which we owe the most while those furthest are those to whom we owe the least. *Pace* Diogenes, cosmopolitans neither rejected nor devalued identity-based partiality.[14] For Hierocles and Aurelius, cosmopolitanism is compatible with partiality to in-group members. The former recommends that we treat humans as if they were one circle closer; he *never* advises reversing the order or behaving as if there were a single circle.[15] The innovation in cosmopolitanism appears to be the notion that all humans have moral standing.

Cécile Fabre declares that "[c]osmopolitanism is the view that human beings are the fundamental and primary *loci* for moral concern and respect and have equal moral worth".[16] This seems consistent with ancient views. A key difference is that Fabre denies that groups matter *per se* or that social identities can ground special duties. She writes that "political borders are arbitrary from a moral point of view […]".[17] However, it is not as if she rejects borders while recognising the value of social identities such as nationality. She adds that

> there is no principled reason (other than flowing from the imperative to bring about global justice or from a general permission to privilege one's interest in leading a minimally decent life) for duty-bearers to confer priority on compatriots or fellow residents when faced with a conflict between rights.[18]

In addition, she writes "moral cosmopolitanism […] takes the view that the fate of distant strangers […] matters to her as much as the fate of her compatriots morally speaking".[19] Finally, on the ethical irrelevance of nationality, she adds that

> […] we have a shared, personal, intimate history with our family members or other close associates such as friends, and it is that which generates special permissions or even obligations. But our relationship to compatriots qua compatriots is very different – so different, in fact, that it is hard to see how it could generate such special permissions and duties. [s]ome would say, [that you may or] must […] save your compatriot, simply in virtue of the fact that he is, precisely, a compatriot. But that claim strikes me as utterly indefensible – as

[13] *Ibid*., pp.56-57
[14] *Ibid*., pp.54-55
[15] *Ibid*., pp.56-57
[16] Fabre, *Cosmopolitan War*, p.16
[17] *Ibid*., p.33
[18] *Ibid*., p.31
[19] *Ibidem*

> indefensible, in fact, as the claim that one may save someone of one's skin colour to the detriment of someone of another skin colour. [If you must either save a foreigner or a compatriot] the only fair, just procedure is to use a lottery, since it would give each of them an equal chance of being saved.[20]

Clearly, Fabre rejects that membership in a certain kind of community can ground special duties. She assumes that only the features of intimate personal relationships could ground special permissions or duties. This explains why she asserts that relations among compatriots could not possibly ground any special permissions and duties because these are *too different* from friendships or family which do have such intimate shared histories. She adds that national partiality is not only unjustified, but it is also akin to something heinous: racism.[21]

This rejection of social identities as the source of special obligations is not only alien to classical cosmopolitanism, but also to the cosmopolitanism in Christianity. For Aquinas, piety extended to God, to one's parents, and to *one's country*.[22] It is this devaluation of social identities and their role in organising social life that makes Fabre's account of war so implausible. Still, to press this objection we need to momentarily turn our attention from philosophy to social psychology.

Part III: Who is doing what for whom?

How does large-scale cooperation work? Talk of cooperation might seem paradoxical since war is a bloody intergroup struggle, but it also requires intense intragroup cooperation. Thus, it is important to understand the preconditions of effective and sustained social cooperation.

One might begin with individuals. Personal interactions establish bonds of trust and encourage cooperation. This model is extended to increasingly distant relations: social life resembles a broad web of interactions between individuals. In fact, social cooperation does not differ in kind from cooperation among intimates although it would involve far less closeness. Talk of social friendship or *fraternité*, from Aristotle to the Jacobins, would express this idea that societies are networks of overlapping interpersonal relations of varying closeness.[23] One might extend this view to combat. Soldiers regularly claim to act in battle for the sake of the man beside them. Hence the use of expressions such as 'brothers in arms' or 'band of brothers'.

Nevertheless, there are good reasons to reject this model. Human societies might have no natural limit, but our abilities do. Our cognitive capacities cannot sustain large-scale cooperation. Anthropologist Robin Dunbar has credibly argued that there is a limit to the number of stable social relations one can maintain. His initial work studied the link between brain size and group size among primates.[24] According to him, the upper-limit

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[20] *Ibid*., p.38
[21] Fabre does not engage with the defenders of patriotism. For moderate defenses, see Hurka, "The Justification", (1997); Scheffler, "Morality and Reasonable Partiality", (2010). For a robust defense see, MacIntyre, "Is Patriotism a Virtue?", (1984).
[22] Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica*, (2014).
[23] Haidt, *The Righteous Mind,* (2012).
[24] Dunbar, "Neocortex size", (1992).

for humans would be about 150 stable social relations based on direct interaction.[25] This finding is known as *Dunbar's number*.

Dunbar's work gives us an initial sense of the limits of modelling large-scale social cooperation on personal relations. To understand the cooperation and trust inherent in war we need another model. To do so, we turn to work in social psychology and more specifically *social identity theory*. A key finding is that human identity is not limited to the individual who possesses a series of attributes: Élise is a woman, a geography teacher, a tennis player, etc. Instead, human identity divides into two distinct forms of self-understanding: the *personalised* and the *depersonalised* self.

Personalisation is identity as it often appears: the self as a unique person. In formal terms, the self is *numerically and qualitatively distinct*. This is the first-person singular of 'I am Élise, pleased to meet you'. It is the individual sense of identity to which we add attributes: woman, teacher, etc. Whereas depersonalisation is less obvious. In the words of psychologist John Turner, it entails "a shift towards the perception of self as an interchangeable exemplar of some social category and away from the perception of the self as a unique person".[26] It requires understanding oneself as *numerically distinct and qualitatively indistinct*. This is how we understand ourselves when we think of ourselves primarily as group members: I am a Jew or a Catholic, an Armenian or a Turk.

Consider a case that is difficult to explain without depersonalisation: the aftermath of the attacks of September 11th, 2001. Americans crossed the country to help. They were not acting because of personal history or relations in New York, not all or even most of them. The nation was under attack and as Americans they reacted. Their sentiment was shared almost universally: Americans volunteered as rescuers, donated, fundraised, and so on. Years later, these events remain a prominent part of the shared American imagination whether one was in New York or not.

To be more precise, depersonalisation means that we perceive the group's fate as a personal outcome.[27] This explains why group members will feel personally concerned by collective outcomes and are willing to suffer for them. It bears repeating that if human identity were only personalised this would seem mysterious. Consider another example: mass displays of emotions during competitions like the World Cup. Here nationals identify with the fate of their champions despite neither personally participating in the event nor knowing any of the players. It is *qua* nationals that we weep with joy or sorrow.

Thus, depersonalisation is the phenomenon that allows people who do not personally know each other to understand themselves as something more than individuals with personal interests and preferences. It is what enables large-scale *esprit de corps*.

To avoid misunderstanding, social identity theory does not claim that objective membership is sufficient. A social identity refers to both membership in a group *and* a sense of attachment to the group.[28] Although there are alienated and non-identifying members, it remains the case that voluntary cooperation depends upon common identity.

Note a few more findings. Not only does human identity split into the personalised and the depersonalised self, but so does self-esteem. Our sense of worth operates on two separate tracks: one responds to personal achievements or events and

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[25] Dunbar, *Grooming,* (1998): 77.
[26] Turner et al., *Rediscovering the social group,* (1987):50.
[27] Hirt *et al.,* "Cost and benefits", (1992).
[28] Conover, "The influence of group", (1984):761.

another to collective ones. Importantly, the two tracks operate independently.[29]This issue allows us to highlight a further difference. The successes and failures that count towards one's collective self-esteem are not limited to events that occur during one's lifetime. For example, Greeks who cherish the invention of democracy or ancient tragedy understand themselves as part of an *intergenerational narrative*. Depersonalisation transcends individual lifespans and connects generations.[30]

Furthermore, it is well-established that subjective identification dominates objective membership.[31] One's identification with a group matters far more, in terms of motivation, than one's objective classification. To their dismay, Marxists discovered that workers identified far more with flags and homelands than socio-economic status. Naturally, this leads us to wonder what kind of social identities inspire greater identification. Given the intensity and duration of the cooperation, sacrifice, and trust demanded by war, this is no small question. For whom do we do or die?

Here, I rely on an influential view developed by Marilynn B. Brewer, the optimal distinctiveness model.[32] Fundamentally, the strength of a social identity depends upon its ability to satisfy two basic needs: differentiation and inclusion. While a sense of isolation elicits a desire for inclusion, it is not the case that any membership will do. Inclusion in a group which is *excessively large or ill-defined* will, in turn, elicit a need for differentiation. Between two identities, the more differentiating will dominate. To rephrase the idea, the more differentiated an identity the stronger identification it elicits.

An upshot of the model is its ability to explain the weakness of 'universal' identities. While being able-bodied is perceived as banal, being disabled is differentiating and elicits far stronger identification. Similarly, internationalism has time and again failed to overtake more particular identities, namely national ones. Faced with German invasion, the Soviet Union rediscovered the force of traditional patriotism; it is easier to inspire self-sacrifice for a distinct nation like Russia than for a vague Proletariat.[33]

One might retort that humanitarian aid and intervention are counterexamples, but I demur. First, it is awfully hard to motivate people to care about out-group members for *sustained periods of time*. Mass media coverage of the death of Aylan Kurdi – the young boy who drowned in the Mediterranean and washed up on the Turkish shore in 2015 – had an impact of five to six weeks. After, donations and actions in favour of refugees returned to prior levels.[34] The spike in concern was short and never repeated. Second, foreign interventions are poor examples. When the goals of the United Nations and national orders conflict, the latter trump the former.[35] Moreover, humanitarian interventions, when compared with wars waged by groups for their own sake, show that there is little appetite to spend blood and treasure for cosmopolitan ideals.

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[29] Spinner-Halev and Theiss-Morse, "National Identity", (2003).
[30] It should be clear that the 'imagined communities' described by Anderson is relies on a powerful and shared social identity and the process of depersonalisation. The unknown soldier powerfully illustrates a shared symbol of a group's social identity: he was one of us where 'us' is understood in terms of shared nationality. Depersonalisation and social identities are key elements to phenomena like nationalism. See Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, (2006).
[31] Huddy, "Group Identity", (2003):512.
[32] Brewer, "The Social Self", (1991).
[33] Orwell, "Wells, Hitler", (1968).
[34] Slovic *et al.,* "Iconic photographs", (2017).
[35] Findlay, *The Use of Force*, (2002)

Furthermore, there is a large and growing body of evidence that shows that cooperation, sacrifice, and trust are significantly encouraged when a population is homogeneous.[36] Homogeneity can affect the willingness to pay for public services, civic volunteering, the degree of corruption, and the size of black markets. Ideally, a social identity should be bounded, differentiated, and more homogeneous than heterogeneous.[37] Although we lack a precise algorithm, converging findings indicate that some social identities outperform others. As war requires sustained social cooperation, it is essential to determine why certain identities elicit weak or powerful identification.

Part IV: Cosmopolitanism as an ethics of fantasy

We can now show in which sense Fabre's view of cosmopolitan war is an ethics of fantasy: it relies on an implausible psychology. More precisely, it requires that we organise largescale cooperation, sacrifice, and trust without the aid of powerful identity-based loyalties such as patriotism.

First, let us address a secondary yet significant weakness in Fabre's view. Her cosmopolitanism depends upon a rejection of patriotism, yet she fails to convincingly argue that patriotism is indefensible. She presumes that there is no feature or quality in the relationships between fellow nationals, or members of other large social groups, that could ground partiality. Remember, she claims that such relations are simply too different from friendships or familial relations for them to provide grounds for either special permissions or duties towards fellow members. When we consider the importance patriotism plays in mobilising and sustaining effort, her willingness to dismiss it and compare it to racism is striking.[38]

Fabre's view seems at odds with the findings in psychology cited above.[39] The limits of the personalised self and the necessity of the depersonalised self are never mentioned. We recall that she claims that while relations with friends and family involve shared intimate histories, our relations with compatriots do not. From this she concludes that the former relations can ground special permissions and duties, while the latter cannot. This reasoning is flawed. First, Fabre never establishes that shared intimate histories are the *only* grounds upon which special permissions or duties can be grounded. Showing that co-nationals lack such histories is only decisive if we believe that such histories are a necessary condition to justify partiality. If special permissions and duties can be established on *any other grounds*, then demonstrating that compatriots lack a shared intimate history does not prove that the relations between fellow nationals are unable to justify special permissions and duties. In a word, Fabre does not provide a convincing argument. At best, she has told us that it is difficult to justify patriotism in the same way that one justifies more intimate forms of partiality. Yet, in the absence of any reason to believe that intimate shared histories are a necessary condition to justify all

[36] For a seminal article that both summarizes key findings and adds to the literature, see Putnam, (2007).
[37] A constructivist might take issue with this way of proceeding. Yet, I do not see how a constructivist reply is open to Fabre or those who think like her. Responding to constructivist doubts who therefore take us too far afield.
[38] For work by a leading specialist of the First World War on the importance of patriotism, see Audoin-Rouzeau, "L'enfer", (1992).
[39] I cannot find one study on group psychology or social cooperation in her bibliography.

forms of partiality, this proves little.[40] All that we have learned is that an argument by analogy is likely to fail.

Second, even if Fabre did argue that shared intimate histories were necessary to justify partiality, the psychological findings discussed above suggest another blind spot in her reasoning. Shared intimate histories are characteristic of personalised relations, but why should we presume that their absence signals a flaw in depersonalised relations? Again, if human identity had a single form of self-understanding, if we were purely personalised, then it would be far more plausible to assert that partiality could only be justified when a relationship included some feature or quality characteristic of personalised relations. All meaningful things connected to the self would necessarily relate to the personalised self. However, human identity is not unidimensional. We have seen that phenomena like narrative self-understanding and self-esteem fragment into a personalised and a depersonalised component. Essentially, Fabre is judging one dimension of human identity (depersonalisation) by the standards of another (personalisation) without ever explaining why the former should serve as the norm by which the latter must be judged.

Still, the problem with Fabre's view goes far deeper. It would be one thing if her cosmopolitanism limited itself to guiding individual choice and action in the way that Diogenes the Cynic might suggest. Rejecting social identities as the basis for partiality is of little consequence if one is trying to abandon the habits and practices of social life. If one does not intend to pursue projects that require large-scale cooperation or self-sacrificing behaviour, then it is not obvious why a rejection of social identities and their attendant partiality is costly. However, cosmopolitanism as a guide to individual life on the margins *à la* Diogenes is not Fabre's ambition.

Instead, her cosmopolitanism is part of a just war theory which means to replace the just war tradition. To be clear, the traditional view is not an ethics of fantasy. Its principal tenets are part of the Law of Armed Conflict; its central distinctions are taught in military academies the world over. So far as I can tell, Fabre never claims that her ideas are intended solely for classroom discussion. Consequently, we must assess the plausibility of Fabre's cosmopolitanism as a theory to guide choice and action in war. Again, my objection is that her failure to engage with the psychological literature leads her to develop an unsound view of social cooperation and a far-fetched view of war.

We can formulate the problem as a dilemma. Either Fabre's cosmopolitanism is incompatible with some form of identity-based partiality or it is not. If it is, then Fabre's position is a non-starter. Armies cannot be sustained without a strong social identity capable of underwriting depersonalisation. If her view is compatible with identity-based partiality, then we need to know what kind of depersonalisation will replace patriotism. And if Fabre accepts that her view requires identity-based partiality, then she must tell us which social identity is compatible with her moral cosmopolitanism and capable of motivating the cooperation and sacrifice needed in war.

The first horn of the dilemma follows from the fact that war requires what Fabre rejects. To establish social cooperation, sacrifice, and trust, one must provide people who are unacquainted and whose personal interests will clash with a powerful motivation to act together even when it is costly. In war, personal interests are normally subordinated to

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[40] Fabre's view implies that only intimate shared histories matter. However, Thomas Hurka has argued that shared histories with truly little intimacy can justify partiality. Thomas Hurka, "The Justification of National Partiality", *op cit*. (1997).

collective ones: the individual must be willing to accept injury or death for the in-group, whether the beneficiaries are personally known or not. Depersonalisation must be robust if group members are going to accept such costs. Indeed, this is a good reminder of the importance of social identities that elicit powerful identification for they are what enable individuals to understand themselves as interchangeable exemplars, and to subordinate their personal interests to collective ones.

To claim that individuals will enlist and endure the hardships of war for fellow humans rather than members of more bounded groups is naive. Social cooperation requires social identities, preferably differentiated and homogeneous ones. To be perfectly clear, not only is there no evidence that war without depersonalisation is possible or even plausible, but research on social cooperation seems to rule it out. War is not like mass consumer activity; it is not a fortuitous meeting of individual projects and selves, but a conscious and concerted effort where collective identity is essential.

This brings us to the second horn of the dilemma. Fabre has ruled out patriotism. She claims that we cannot favour our compatriots simply because they are our compatriots; that would be analogous to racial partiality.[41] Once we have ruled out national partiality, we must ask: which social identity is both morally defensible and highly mobilising? If soldiering requires a social identity, which one?

One suggestion would be that the cosmopolitan view requires soldiers to fight and think *qua* humans. Mankind rather the nation would provide the relevant group identity: soldiers ought to think of themselves as interchangeable members of the human species and they should consequently perceive its fate as a personal outcome. This kind of in-group partiality would not seem to require anything that could be reasonably described as arbitrary discrimination. Appealing to our shared humanity or human rights does not appear to be objectionable as would be appealing to shared nationality or skin colour.

Unfortunately, this suggestion is incredible. Recall that social identities must be bounded, differentiated, and relatively homogenous if they are to prove motivationally effective. In fairness, a cosmopolitan identity would be bounded in the sense that the in-group would include all humans and the out-group would include all non-humans. However, a cosmopolitan social identity would fail to (strongly) satisfy the other two constraints. In any world like ours, ‘human’ is not a strongly differentiated identity. Our drive for differentiation means that a more differentiated identity will dominate the cosmopolitan social identity. This is a substantial problem as war requires an extraordinarily strong form of depersonalisation. If one going to risk life and limb for mankind, then one must subjectively identify more with mankind than the other social identities which might pull in the other direction. The motivational weakness of poorly differentiated identities is plain to see. The able-bodied are legion and yet it is hard to see how parochial boundaries are dissolved or dominated by the shared quality of being able-bodied. Consider how a stranger in a strange land is moved by hearing his native language and identifies with the speaker(s) and yet this same person does not feel any bond for other people with two legs or two arms.

At this point, I want to dispel a possible misunderstanding and flag an issue. I am not claiming that the only social identity capable of robust mobilisation is national identity. There would be many issues with such a claim: nationalism is often understood as a modern phenomenon which leaves unclear how mass mobilisation occurred in the

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[41] Fabre, *Cosmopolitan War*, p.38.

pre-modern era, conflict erupts within nations on the basis of ethnic, linguistic or religious differences, and finally at times nations explicitly claim to be fighting for some variant of internationalism such as during the Cold War.

Even though I find criticisms of the modernist paradigm more persuasive than their defences, my criticism of Fabre does not hinge on it. Regardless of whether one thinks that nationalism is new or old, it is not up for debate that bounded and differentiated identities – Spartan or Athenian, Roman or Carthaginian, Persian, Hebrew, and Egyptian, etc. – have been crucial to mobilisation in the pre-modern world. What we today call 'patriotism' might be deeply influenced by 19th century nationalism, but this hardly shows that loyalty to a distinct in-group is new. Moreover, at the heart of these universal claims – religious or secular – there often lies a form of patriotism or nationalism. Americans may have claimed to fight for freedom everywhere, but this oddly coincided with national interest and a sense of national destiny. Similarly, it is wise to ask if Soviet internationalism was a truly altruistic project between equal brother republics or primarily a new form of Russian imperialism.

To be clear, I am not denying that ideology, language, race, and religion do play an important role in mobilisation. Civil wars are often painful illustrations of their power. Instead, I am insisting that behind the international or universal identities there is invariably some form of particularism. As Anthony Smith noted, religions that claim to be universal have a strong propensity towards the myth of election: we are all brothers, but we have been chosen to fulfil this great mission.[42]

This false universalism leads me to the project of dispensing with the bounded identities in favour of purely universal ones. Politically, the last century provided repeated attempts by various internationalists to appeal to some form of cosmopolitan identity. These attempts failed. As mentioned previously, George Orwell pointed out that when faced with German invasion, Communist Russia rediscovered that dying for Holy Russia was far more motivating than dying for the Proletariat. Maoist China experienced similar problems when they attempted to eliminate traditional patriotism.[43] Totalitarian regimes recognised no principled limit to their refashioning of identity and devoted substantial resources to it, and still they could not succeed.

To be clear, the problem with a cosmopolitan identity is not only that it is minimally differentiated – any subset of humanity is more differentiated – but that it also involves embracing a social identity that is *maximally heterogeneous*. As referenced in the previous section, there is a large and growing body of research on the detrimental effect of heterogeneity on social cooperation and trust. If one is suggesting that we ought to cooperate *qua* humans, then we are proposing that those who fight in the name of humanity shoulder the additional burden of a less effective social identity. In fact, the problem with the motivational power of a cosmopolitan social identity is two-fold. On the one hand, we want to know whether the identity can sustain effective depersonalisation *tout court*. Can it work? On the other hand, the worry is whether a cosmopolitan identity is a serious comparative disadvantage against a more bounded, differentiated, and homogenous identity. As there is no reason to believe that Fabre's view would be universally adopted, the cosmopolitan soldiers would not only face the difficulties inherent to organising cooperation, sacrifice, and trust among themselves, but they would face the challenge of fighting groups motivated by far more differentiated and

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[42] Smith, *National Identity*, (1991).
[43] *Ibid*., p. 144.

homogenous social identities. We want to know if a cosmopolitan social identity can sustain intense cooperation, but how will it fare when competing against groups whose identities are more differentiated and homogenous.

Another way to view the challenge is to recall that one of the conditions of *jus ad bellum*, as Fabre notes, is a *reasonable chance of success*.[44] Waging war is difficult: powerful armies are defeated, brilliant leaders fail, and the outcome of any engagement is uncertain. It is uncontroversial that an important factor is the ability to mobilise and motivate one's group. It is no small thing to add any uncertainty or difficulty to this task. If soldiers and civilians are meant to forgo the benefits of a powerful social identity, such as a national identity, and instead rely upon a far less motivationally effective one than it appears that one is advancing an ethics of fantasy. A failure to consider how human psychology plays a crucial role in sustaining social cooperation leads to an improbable view of how armies and societies function.

Still, Fabre might reply in one of several ways. She might point to certain historic cases to challenge the impotence of a cosmopolitan social identity. The fact that national identities are powerful does not mean that there are no broader identities that are comparably strong. She might also claim that a form of patriotism is permissible, not because the relations of fellow nationals warrant it, but because it serves cosmopolitanism. Here we find an instrumental justification that claims that we ought to act like patriots not because the lives of our compatriots matter more or that our relations justify it, but rather because it is the most effective way to achieve cosmopolitan justice.

A likely argumentative strategy would be to point towards multinational empires that possessed successful militaries such as the British. If such multinational empires could succeed, why must a cosmopolitan identity fail? Similarly, one might point to ventures like the International Brigades in Spain. If men from all nations could unite against fascism, could they not do so for human rights?

Setting aside the desirability or otherwise of imperialism, this reply fails. The history of multinational empires is one of embedding parochial identities within the imperial identity.[45] In other words, empires used rather than rejected patriotism. Think of Sikh or Highland units in the British army, or Polish lancers serving Napoléon's *Grande armée*. National or ethnic identities were used to create cohesive and effective units. Imperial identity did not operate alone. Naturally, one might ask if the imperial identities grew strong enough to either compete with or supplant these more local identities. So far as I can tell, this is doubtful. Imperial authorities consistently treated local identity as the stronger one. When responding to popular uprisings, the troops sent to repress them were almost always drawn from elsewhere. Imperial rulers seemed reluctant to wager that imperial identity would dominate parochial identities.

The example of the International Brigades fails for the same reason. Assuming that their effective and numbers were not exaggerated, they too relied on parochial identities.[46] Even if the International Brigades were as effective as some claim, *these too* depended upon prior ethnocultural identities: the units were organised on national or

[44] Fabre, *Cosmopolitan War*, p.5.
[45] Gat, *Nations*, (2013).
[46] Hugh, *The Spanish Civil War*, (2003):941-945.

linguistic lines. Just as with empires, we find parochial identities embedded within more universal ones, but we do not find the latter without the former.[47]

In response to the idea that patriotism should be exploited, we are simply faced with a variant of manipulation theory. This presumes that we can socialise people to act and think patriotically while using them for non-patriotic causes. This is either an incredible exercise in self-deception or it is a gigantic exercise in elite manipulation of the masses. Either way, once spelled out the flaws are clear to see.

Cécile Fabre's cosmopolitan view of war presumes that eliminating patriotism presents no substantial problem. We are led to believe that we can replace a collectivist view of war with an individualistic one; individuals and their rights can replace groups as the primary locus of value. However, we are faced with a mystery. Given what social psychology tells us about social cooperation, we need to know which social identity will make cosmopolitan armies rise and fight. Here, Fabre only says that patriotism is bad. Her cosmopolitanism is very much unlike that of the ancients. By rejecting social identity-based partiality, Fabre deprives herself of the necessary engine for social cooperation, sacrifice, and trust which war requires. To show that this is so, we turned to empirical research: we focused on the role of depersonalisation in social cooperation.

In short, Fabre's cosmopolitan view of war view is an ethics of fantasy because it purports to tell us how to engage in war without paying sufficient attention to the psychological underpinnings of war as a practice. The cosmopolitan view of war not only does away with a collectivist view of war; it also manages to propound a theory that dissolves the reality of war.

To conclude, I would like to say a few words about the lessons to be drawn. A narrower point is that we should be deeply sceptical of philosophers who claim to reinvent the wheel. There is no shortage of thinkers who claim that we can escape, transcend, or evolve out of our parochialism and become universal. The history of such projects is primarily a list of failures, often bloody.

If one wants to reject the collectivist underpinnings in the just war tradition, one would do well to begin by asking why the model has been so successful and why serious alternatives are lacking. If one wants to reform the practice of war, one should first try to grasp as well as one can why war is organised as it is. So far as I can tell, there is no complete and serious alternative to the established model of war waged between bounded human communities through the instruments of (quasi)statehood.

Do I think that a serious review of relevant scholarship will favour the traditionalist view over the revisionist one? I do not. Yet whatever that likelihood, we cannot presume to know what the various findings in the specialised sciences will tell us. For instance, many have thought that the Milgram experiments on authority provided good reasons to doubt our ability to challenge orders. In turn, one could have thought that this helped demonstrate the problem with insisting on individual responsibility in war. Nevertheless, there is growing evidence that this famous and massively influential experiment was irremediably flawed.[48] Perhaps we are prone to obedience and perhaps not, but Milgram's work is unlikely to tell us.

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[47] One can also raise a worry inspired by Carl Schmitt's thought. If we truly could fight for humankind, then our enemies are not only opposed to our national interest, but to the good of humankind itself. Thus, Fabre's cosmopolitanism risks generating a very bitter struggle where the 'other' is made into a universal threat and evil – the enemy of all mankind. See Schmitt, *Nomos of the Earth*, (2006).

[48] Perry *et al.,* "Credibility and Incredulity", (2019).

Prudence, to borrow a Grotian theme, should lead us to assume little and to avoid hasty conclusions. When traditionalists and revisionists disagree, they should ask which key claims could be validated or invalidated by specialised scholarship and then look for it. It may be that there are few or no findings, or that the findings are conflicting and inconclusive, or that the issue is settled. We cannot know until we look. If indeed decisions about war are as grave as some authors are wont to remind us, then perhaps it is reasonable to ask those writing about the morality of war to read more about the practice of war and its participants and to focus less on the best trolley case[49] published in *Philosophy and Public Affairs* or *Ethics*.

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[49] 'Trolley cases' refers to thought experiments, of varying realism and sophistication, used in normative theory to test our commitment to certain views or principles.

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