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Me, My Avatar, and War: The moral relationship between soldiers and civilians

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Author
Dingman, Mary Carollyn

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civilians and soldiers today

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Political Science

by

Mary Carolyn Dingman

2017
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Me, My Avatar, and War:
The moral relationship between civilians and soldiers today

by

Mary Carolyn Dingman

Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science
University of California, Los Angeles, 2017
Professor Brian Douglas Walker, Chair

In *Just and Unjust Wars*, Michael Walzer asserts that rank-and-file civilians are too alienated from government to be held morally responsible for war. Most attempts to refute this rely on unwarranted assumptions that citizens have duties to the state. I propose grounding civilian responsibility in a more general theory of special duties arising from our interpersonal relationships. To this end, I first demonstrate that rank-and-file civilians and soldiers are in a meaningful moral relationship that generates special duties to each other. Because the relationship is founded on the individual and institutional identities of civilians and soldiers respectively, it exists regardless of whether civilians can actually influence their government's military activity or whether they owe anything to the state.
P.F. Strawson’s account of the importance of moral community and the role of participant reactive attitudes when making moral judgments motivated me to look for common moral stances that soldiers and civilians take toward one another and, from that, extrapolate relationship models. I found four historical models for the relationship: 

citizen-soldier, professional-soldier, family member, and warrior-hero.

I next drew on Rawls’ methodology from Justice as Fairness to formulate the fundamental question driving Me, My Avatar, and War: what is the most acceptable political conception of the relationship between soldiers and civilians? Following Rawls, I assume that political conceptions are ideals that can be publically justified. In the case of preferring one relationship model to another, I posit that a model must promote reciprocity and equality between parties in order to satisfy public justifiability. But reciprocity and equality can only be achieved if the civilian-soldier relationship confronts the morally paradoxical nature of war and none of the historical models appear to do this. Therefore, Me, My Avatar, and War presents the principal-avatar model as the best conception of the relationship. Military-avatars, on my account, are real soldiers ideally conceived as embodying certain essential aspects of their civilian-principals. The near-identity relationship between principals and their avatars prompts the civilian-principal to perceive the soldier-avatar as her equal but the hierarchical underpinnings of the model means the principal retains moral custody of her avatar’s actions.
The dissertation of Mary Carolyn Dingman is approved.

Deborah W. Larson

Anthony R. Pagden

Robert Charles Jones

Brian Douglas Walker, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2017
In 1943 my dad, Daniel B. Dingman, began his career in civil disobedience by becoming a conscientious objector during WWII. At the age of nineteen, he unsuccessfully defended himself in federal court on charges of violating the Selective Training and Service Act of 1940 and spent a year and a half in a federal penitentiary. While he was in prison he began corresponding with my mom, Francis nee Coutu, a bright, sensitive beauty who shared his passion for peace and social justice. Their correspondence soon grew into a courtship and their courtship blossomed into a lifetime of trying to make the world a better place and having fun while they did it. This is the legacy they leave to their children.

This work is dedicated to them both.
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My immediate family is very close. Every one of them encouraged and supported me along the way, each according to their own special talents. I should probably say something to them here: to my talented brother, Craig, (and his charming wife, Denise); to my inventive sister, Monna, (and her stellar wife, Anne); to my creative sister Teri (and her devoted husband, Paul); to my “twin” sister, Martha (and her handsome husband, John); and to all your beautiful and charming children and grandchildren, thank you for your patience and support and for helping me to stay grounded.

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And, finally, to my husband, Sam, thank you for taking every crazy scheme I have in stride and treating even the most farfetched of them as if they were solid gold.
M. Carol Dingman began her academic studies at Santa Monica Community College where she earned an AA in liberal arts before matriculating to UCLA to earn her BA in philosophy, graduating summa cum laude. After teaching math for a year at Horace Mann Middle School in South Central, Los Angeles, Carol was awarded her first Master’s degree from UCLA’s philosophy department and began teaching philosophy, ethics, logic and critical thinking at Mt. St. Mary’s College in Los Angeles and at her alma mater Santa Monica College. Following the events of September 11, 2001, Carol joined the Peace Corps and served for two years in Kyrgyzstan “teaching” English to prospective English teachers before returning to the United States to pursue her doctorate in political science. Along the way, Carol earned her MA in political science at UCLA and wrote the book for the unproduced musical, *Star Trek The Broadway Musical.*
Introduction

I. The civilian problematic

How we answer the question of who bears moral responsibility for wars between nations can (and often does) have real and serious consequences for the people of those nations. To many observers of war, and more urgently to many participants, attributing moral responsibility to someone bestows combatant status on her. If she is morally responsible, then she is a justifiable target for attack by the enemy. So, attributions of moral responsibility can have mortal consequences. Additionally, when people see themselves as responsible agents, they are more likely to engage in ethical practices. For example, we are more likely to participate in efforts to support or protest particular wars if we see ourselves as bearing at least some moral responsibility for them. And our moral judgments have intrinsic value as well. It will matter to most people whether or not there are good reasons for believing themselves to be complicit in the wars of their nations, particularly when those wars are deemed unjust, even if there is no material or corporal punishment to fear.

Therefore, the process of ascribing moral blame to individuals requires careful, conscientious deliberation. In western culture, philosophers and political theorists primarily rely on the tenets of just war theory to determine who is properly to blame. These deliberations typically revolve around political and military leaders and the soldiers who carry out their commands. The question motivating the dissertation is whether civilians also share moral responsibility for the wars of their nations; and if so, what is the nature of this responsibility? This question has yet to be fully explored in
military ethics literature, or elsewhere for that matter, and for now there is no clear consensus among ethicists. It is my contention that the current lack of consensus will not be resolved any time soon by traditional means."

Though substantively scant, the question of whether rank-and-file civilians share responsibility for war has not been completely neglected by war ethicists. *Me, My Avatar, and War* begins by presenting the strongest arguments for and against ascribing blame to civilians for war. Contemporary theorists who consider the possibility that rank-and-file civilians may share responsibility for the wars waged by their governments, particularly in western democratic states like the United States, often conclude that many civilians can be ascribed some, usually nominal, responsibility. This follows from the number of ways in which civilians contribute to the wars waged by their countries. Paying taxes that help fund the military, voting for or protesting against war, not voting at all, not protesting enough, enjoying the spoils of war (i.e., enjoying life as a member of a conquering nation), moral destiny, failing to shed one’s ancient martial spirit inherited from our warrior ancestors, and encouraging our political leaders by our own pro-war rhetoric are all reasons that have been given for holding individual members of the general public morally blameworthy, to varying degrees, for the harms that result from their nation’s wars.

But these accounts are incomplete at best, offering little substantive discussion of what it means to be morally responsible, and possibly unjust if arguments that absolve

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*Throughout the dissertation, I will use the word ‘civilian’ to refer to any person who is not a member of the military nor a member of the political elite and who considers the United States to be her “home,” in most cases contingent upon her permanent residence and place of work being located in the US and upon her having no imminent plans of migrating to another country. I don’t believe that my argument need be restricted to only civilians who are also citizens. Also, though I am fairly confident that the fundamental idea of my argument for civilian responsibility in war can be extended to other contemporary western democracies, space constraints preclude a discussion of important differences between countries. Therefore, I restrict my discussion in *Me, My Avatar, and War* to the United States.*
rank-and-file civilians of responsibility are sound. The latter view, of which Michael Walzer is perhaps the most prominent proponent, holds that most people (including rank-and-file soldiers) can be absolved of responsibility and blame for the wars of their nations because most people are so detached from government that their ability to influence political decision-making is virtually nonexistent. The upshot of the debate is that proponents for civilian responsibility are unable to effectively justify civic duties to the state while Walzer and his supporters are unable to effectively shake the intuition that modern democratic civilians surely must bear some responsibility for the consequences of their governments’ military actions.

Adding to the morass is the tendency on the part of theorists to talk about moral responsibility as though it was only an issue of blameworthiness. I discuss this issue in section II and I question the tactics of confining the discussion of morally responsible parties in this debate to just citizens in section III. Underlying the empirical debate of whether contemporary civilians of modern democratic nation-states in fact have the requisite agency for moral responsibility is the lack of consensus regarding the proper scope and nature of civic virtue in the first place. The question has gotten considerably more complicated over the centuries culminating today in the lack of any clear and accepted concept of ideal citizenship. Much of the blame for this state of affairs may be laid at the door of liberal attacks on classical republicanism and I briefly lay out those arguments in section IV before concluding the chapter.

II. **Foundations for a new theory**

Chapter two presents a theoretical framework for the foundational claim that moral relationships give rise to moral responsibilities. P.F. Strawson’s focus on the moral community and his formative concept of *participant reactive attitudes* in conjunction
with Samuel Scheffler’s arguments for special duties that follow from our interpersonal relationships provide the philosophical grounding upon which I build my theory. On the view I am advocating, it is assumed that some moral responsibilities are not necessarily the result of voluntary causal relationships between autonomous agents and events, but rather arise out of our various, contextual, and often involuntary, interpersonal relationships with one another.

Seen from this perspective, the question becomes whether civilians can be said to be in the kind of meaningful interpersonal relationship with soldiers that gives rise to relevant responsibilities or, in Strawson’s terms *socially sanctioned demands*. If soldiers and civilians can be found to have *socially salient reasons* for valuing one another, then civilians will most likely have certain moral obligations to soldiers of a nature that may satisfy those theorists arguing for civilian responsibility in war. Conversely, if civilians and soldiers are more accurately described as *morally autonomous strangers*, then, by definition, they are not in a meaningful moral relationship and thus they incur no special duties with respect to each other. This would not be a decisive blow to the claim that civilians share morally responsibility for war but it would seriously damage efforts to ground such claims.*

**III. The ties that bind**

I had the dubious honor of writing *Me, My Avatar, and War* while the contentious 2016 presidential campaign was in full swing and the media was awash in political rhetoric

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* By the term *soldier*, I refer to anyone enlisted in the United States Armed Forces. Naturally, there are a great variety of particular jobs in the military that require special training and no single soldier is proficient in every aspect of military operations; also, it should be noted that not all soldiers see actual combat. But enlisted men and women are recruited solely for the purposes of waging war, and so regardless of the actual jobs any particular enlistee does (or doesn’t do) during her service, the ultimate purpose of any soldier is to help the military mission succeed.
quoting and analyzing the candidates’ speeches and sound bites. I was once again struck by the frequency with which politicians, regardless of political persuasion, resort to broad statements about who we are as Americans and what we will or won’t stand for. As though there is some clear and uncontroversial definition or defining element of what it means to be an American despite the glut of persuasive evidence that Americans are more divided than ever with respect to values and priorities. It may just be that the people who make these claims mistakenly assume that all Americans share their beliefs and values. However, a closer look at the ways in which military ideals have infiltrated the psychologies of most Americans via school, media, and a variety of other sources suggests that there is, in fact, a common bond between Americans, a point of convergence, intersecting and interacting with the myriad other forces exerting influence on our individual identities.

In chapter three I argue that American rank-and-file soldiers and civilians are more than mere morally autonomous strangers to one another; a meaningful interpersonal relationship exists between them based on at least two, broadly defined, socially salient reasons: (1) soldiers and civilians are connected through issues of identity because on the one hand, the soldier’s image was deliberately crafted to reflect American ideology; while, on the other hand, the current role of the United States as the world’s greatest super power cannot but have a tangible effect on the individual identities of today’s American civilians.; (2) civilians are necessarily implicated in that work that soldiers do as the source of, reason for, and ultimate moral judge of U.S. military action.

In this chapter I draw on Rawls’ methodology in Justice as Fairness: A restatement to formulate the fundamental question driving Me, My Avatar, and War—
what is the most politically acceptable conception of the relationship between soldiers and civilians? From my research I have identified four historical models that attempt to answer this question: *citizen-solder, family member, warrior-hero, and professional soldier*. Following Rawls, I assume that political conceptions are ideals that can be publically justified. In the case of preferring one civil-military relationship model to another, I posit that a model must promote reciprocity and equality between parties in order to satisfy public justifiability requirements. But reciprocity and equality can only be achieved if the civilian-soldier relationship confronts the morally paradoxical nature of war and none of the historical models appear to do this.

**IV. Principals and avatars**

Chapter four presents the case for the central argument in *Me, My Avatar, and War*, namely, that the principal-avatar model is the most appropriate way for civilians to understand their relationship to soldiers. I argue here that principals and their avatars are in a *near identity* relationship but that the principal retains *moral custody* of her avatar. One socially sanctioned demand that follows from moral custody is that the civilian must authentically engage with the realities of war from as close to a first person perspective as possible.

Because the avatar is an ideal extension of the principal—a fully formed “other me”—the relationship connotes equality; and whenever the civilian-principal assumes moral custody in some substantive manner, she reciprocates—to a meaningful degree—the sacrifices made by the soldier-avatar. The historical models, on the other hand, tend to promote asymmetrical relationships that either absolve the civilian of any responsibility for war or conflate soldiers and civilians into one homogenous population.
of citizen-soldiers. Thus, the principal-avatar model promotes both equality and reciprocity to a far greater degree than the historical models.

V. The soldier and the civilian

In the final chapter of *Me, My Avatar, and War*, I further distinguish between soldiers and other public servants by arguing that the relationship between civilians and soldiers is truly unique. I also offer a brief summary of the debate regarding whether it is ever permissible to target civilians in military combat. There I argue that the principal-avatar model is the only model that appears to comply with the modern ethical mandates of just war theory.

VI. Conclusion

The primary task of the dissertation is to show that different tactics than those currently used may have more success justifying civilian moral responsibility for war. Though the nature of civilian responsibility that I put forth in *Me, My Avatar, and War* is significantly different than what most theorists conceive of in this debate (for example, I am concerned with horizontal relationships between soldiers and civilians whereas traditional theories imply a concern with vertical relationships between civilians and the state) there are good reasons to believe that the ultimate consequences of accepting an alternative theory based on relationships would serve the same essential purpose intended by traditional arguments for civilian responsibility, and possibly to greater effect. That is, an underlying assumption of the dissertation is that theorists who claim civilians share moral responsibility for the unjust wars of their nations do so because they believe that a sincere acceptance of one’s duty in this regard would instigate a decrease in military conflicts, particularly unjust conflicts. This is precisely the result I
believe could be better achieved by a change of theoretical perspective that focuses on the duties we owe to each other.

Admittedly soldiers are not the only group with whom civilians can be said to be in a moral relationship with respect to war; two main candidates for relevant moral relationships suggest themselves as possible alternatives: the civilian and the government (i.e., members of the government, especially the president); and, the civilian and the larger civilian population (i.e., anyone who stands in a similar position as oneself to the wars waged by one’s nation). An analysis of either of these relationships would likely yield interesting and important information, however, due to the scope and depth such analysis requires, it is prudent to select the relationship with the best chance of grounding civilian responsibility for war. The relationship between civilians and soldiers has several good reasons for preferring it to the others not least of which is the abundance of reactive attitudes on both sides that are easily identified such as pride, shame, resentment, indignation, praise, etc. These attitudes are well documented in movies, television and literature, both fictional and nonfictional. There is also a relatively large academic literature dedicated to the more formal analysis of civil-military relations. In recent years, that literature has been largely focused on the growing rift between the two groups underscoring the need for more oversight of the relationship.

The final reason for investigating the relationship between civilians and soldiers constitutes the basis for one of the main arguments of *Me, My Avatar, and War*: civilians and soldiers are in morally meaningful interpersonal relationships with each other, the stakes of which are higher than the other relationships we have as civilians. The heightened importance of this relationship stems from the morally paradoxical and
relatively random nature of soldiering as well as from the essential and pervasive role of professional militaries, with their need for vast human resources in forging and maintaining the modern nation states inhabited by today’s civilians. For these reasons I argue that the contemporary civilian has a moral responsibility to substantively acknowledge her unique relationship to the soldier. Acknowledging one’s relationship with rank-and-file military members does not necessarily mean offering unreflective admiration or eternally cheerful support, as I argue in chapter five, acknowledgement primarily concerns an authentic engagement with the realities of war.
CHAPTER ONE

The Civilian Problematic

I. Contemporary theories

In this chapter, I confine my analysis of contemporary conventional theorists to just three—Michael Walzer, Neta Crawford, and Igor Primoratz—whose arguments for either implicating or absolving citizens of moral responsibility, I believe, best represent the spectrum of positions that have recently been put forth by scholars. Ultimately, however, I argue that traditional theories throughout the spectrum are unnecessarily limited in their scope due to overly narrow conceptions of both moral responsibility and morally responsible parties, as a result none are able to adequately ground a theory of civilian responsibility for war.

Political theorists, like most people, tend to assume that humans are, as a rule, meaningfully and relevantly free (enough) to merit attributions of moral praise and blame and the punishments and rewards that may follow from such attributions. Nevertheless, the fact that even essentially free people can be externally prevented from acting according to their own free will means that the question of meaningful, contextual freedom is still pertinent. Furthermore, while freedom to do otherwise appears to be a necessary condition for democratic theories of moral responsibility, it is not always sufficient. Some philosophers, most notably Michael Walzer, argue that extenuating circumstances may absolve an individual of moral responsibility for an act even in cases where that individual was, at least theoretically, free to do otherwise.
Walzer’s seminal text on war ethics, *Just and Unjust Wars*, represents perhaps the most comprehensive attempt in recent history to argue for a theory of moral responsibility from consistent, democratic principles.¹ As a result, contemporary debate in war ethics is often couched as replies to, commentary on, or critiques of Walzer’s arguments on these issues. Therefore, it is appropriate to begin here where the ethic of war, though clearly grounded in just war theory, is conceived in “practical” terms. In the preface of the most recent edition of *Just and Unjust Wars* Walzer writes,

> I want to account for the ways in which men and women who are not lawyers but simply citizens (and sometimes soldiers) argue about war, and to expound the terms we commonly use. I am concerned precisely with the present structure of the moral world. My starting point is the fact that we do argue, often to different purposes, to be sure, but in a mutually comprehensible fashion ... We justify our conduct; we judge the conduct of others. ... these justifications and judgments ... are ... a legitimate subject of study. Upon examination they reveal, I believe, a comprehensive view of war as a human activity and a more or less systematic moral doctrine, which sometimes, but not always, overlaps with established legal doctrine.²

Walzer asserts that his work is about “practical morality” based on a doctrine that assigns life and liberty “something like absolute values.”³ This view of practical ethics is Walzer’s attempt to draw out the common principles underlying the moral claims we attest to in our public discourse and arrange them so that they produce reliably consistent and commonsensical conclusions.

For Walzer, as for many war ethicists, issues of moral responsibility are most salient when the question of culpability arises. Who are we justified in blaming for unjust wars and who can rightly be said to be responsible for aggressive wars and war crimes? Certainly, the political and military leaders who instigate, craft, and order

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2. Ibid., xxi.
3. Ibid., xxiii.
aggressive wars are guilty; there is little debate about that. However, this is essentially where Walzer draws the line. While individual soldiers are to be held responsible for their own deeds in battle and for violations of *jus in bello* (the moral duty to fight fairly and according to agreed upon conventions) and though they are legitimate targets of attack from the enemy, Walzer argues that they cannot be blamed simply for participating in an unjust war if ordered to by their governments.

The reason he offers is based on what he terms “the moral equality of soldiers,” and it is one of the more contentious conclusions he draws. This putative moral equality refers to the relative innocence of soldiers on both sides of a conflict regardless of whether one is fighting for a just cause or an unjust cause. Walzer underscores the obstacles soldiers face in challenging their superiors, including incomplete knowledge of the facts surrounding the call to war. According to him, soldiers are not fighting wars of their own making, so the wars they fight in are not their own; therefore they cannot be held responsible for the *jus ad bellum* (the just cause requirement of just war theory).

Given Walzer’s sympathy for soldiers’ lack of agency with respect to *jus ad bellum*, it is not surprising that he also absolves most civilians of responsibility as well. In his analysis, the Vietnam War stands as a paradigm case of an unjust war of aggression that many Americans supported initially. Their reasons for the support (or lack of protest) ranged from trusting their leaders to do what was right, to not having enough information to make a personal judgment, to the belief that nothing they could do would make a difference anyhow. According to Walzer, “These are not immoral arguments, though they reflect badly on the society within which they are made.”

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4. Ibid., 301.
only infraction for which Walzer finds them blameworthy is “bad faith as citizens”; and even this he considers “a hard charge to make, for citizenship plays such a small part in their everyday lives.” He continues,

Perhaps it should also be said that the “communal sphere” doesn’t exist, for it is only the day-by-day assumption of responsibility that creates that sphere and gives it meaning. Even patriotic excitement, war fever, among such people is probably best understood as a reflex of distance, a desperate identification, stimulated, it may be, by a false account of what is going on. One might say of them what one says of soldiers in combat, that they are not to blame for the war, since it is not their war.⁵

Therefore, on Walzer’s account most people can be absolved of responsibility and blame for the wars of their nations because most people are significantly disenfranchised enough that their ability to influence political decision-making is virtually nonexistent.

Walzer’s view is a remnant of the past in many ways. In the early days, from Augustine to Aquinas to Vitoria and Grotius, just war theorists have tended to impute only those directly responsible for planning and waging unjust wars. A common conclusion in the just war tradition was that only sovereign leaders were morally culpable for all but the most blatant breaches of *jus in bello* by individual soldiers. The masses of commoners, whether they already lived under the invader’s rule or lived in the land that was newly under siege, often did not fight in the wars being waged and were commonly referred to as *innocent noncombatants*.

By some accounts the broadening scope of moral culpability is a logical consequence of the French Revolution.⁶ France’s turbulent transition from monarchy to

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⁵ Ibid., 302. Curiously, Walzer acknowledges (in a footnote to the above quote) an important charge made by Anne Frank in *The Diary of a Young Girl* that the “little man is just as keen on” wars of aggression as are “governments and capitalists,” but his response is far from compelling. He states merely that there is a crucial difference between governments and common citizens; government leaders who wage aggressive wars are legitimately considered war criminals whereas members of the ineffective public are not.

⁶ See, e.g., Green, “War, Innocence, and Theories of Sovereignty,” 43.
republic marked a radical change in the nature of warfare such that justifications for exempting rank-and-file soldiers and citizens from responsibility no longer seemed to apply. Prior to the Revolution, most western wars were justified according to a “hierarchical conception of legitimacy” in which God ordained the leader to serve as his representative. The people had no influence on the ruler’s deliberations and decisions about waging wars, thus in a far less controversial sense than Walzer’s claim above, the king’s war was not their war, and therefore they were not responsible for it. By taking up arms against the aristocracy, however, French commoners essentially asserted their own moral autonomy. They fought willingly for their own sakes rather than being forced to fight for a sovereign, and they benefitted personally from victory. The leaders of the French Revolution implemented a strategy of total war, calling on every member of the population to join the fight in whatever capacity they could. Even women, children and the elderly found ways to help the cause. It is not unreasonable to believe that without the single-minded dedication of the masses to the war effort the French Revolution might not have succeeded. Michael Green argues that theorists who overlook this “paradigm shift” in which the nature of war changed from being hierarchically legitimized to one of total war have based their theories on models that do not apply in every case anymore.7

And yet, the Revolution not withstanding, most modern wars are far from constituting anything like a “total war.” Today, for example, the United States Military is culled from a narrowing pool of voluntary applicants. Most American civilians have no real interaction with members of their military and thus are relatively ignorant about the kinds of lives and jobs military personnel experience; moreover, American civilians

7. Ibid., 56.
do not generally perceive the wars of the past few decades to be fought on their behalf. That is partly why Walzer's arguments are difficult to dismiss. But then, so too are the arguments for civilian responsibility within relatively functioning democracies like the United States. On the one hand, democratic citizens appear to have the power necessary to effect the changes they want by choosing their leaders freely and frequently, because, ostensibly, candidates must listen to their constituents if they want to be reelected. On the other hand, much of the wrangling and decision-making that occurs behind closed doors involve matters (including and especially military matters) of the utmost importance and secrecy to which citizens are rarely made privy.

Walzer assumes that civilians lack any relevant choices with respect to whether or not the government wages war and in this way their liberty is constrained by factors beyond their individual control. On this view, regardless of whether a citizen is free to vote or not vote, for example, that action (or failure to act) will not effect the government’s deliberations regarding prospective or ongoing war plans. Thus, for Walzer, “citizenship plays such a small part” in the lives of rank-and-file soldiers and civilians that it would be unjust to ascribe blame to them for something they could have no control over.\(^8\)

Certainly, the fates of serfs and soldiers in the Middle Ages appear to have had little to do with autonomy and alternatives and it is perhaps easiest to see how they might have been exempt from moral responsibility in the way that Walzer describes. The contemporary case, however, is more complicated as evidenced by a relatively recent trend in academia toward pointing the finger more squarely at civilians. In fact, today

\(^8\) Walzer does hold a small subset of civilians morally blameworthy but they are the intellectual “elite,” whom I discuss in more detail below (Just and Unjust Wars, 302).
scholars are more likely than not to challenge Walzer, and other apologists for civilian exemption, on a number of grounds. For example, Igor Primoratz has argued forcefully that, “... Walzer is too lenient on both [soldiers and civilians] ... there are good reasons for adopting a more demanding view.” He challenges Walzer’s absolution for soldiers and civilians while emphasizing the pre-Revolution, hierarchical conception of war on which he claims Walzer’s argument relies.

Without suggesting that today’s wars are anything like the people’s war of the French Revolution, Primoratz, nevertheless, insists on far more autonomy for modern civilians than Walzer acknowledges. Furthermore, he assumes a relationship between citizens and the modern democratic state such that the state’s legitimacy is grounded in the consent of the people. This in turn places a moral burden on citizens to participate in the political process. For example, civilians have a moral responsibility in times of war, at the very least, to be politically informed and actively involved in either supporting their nation’s just wars or opposing their unjust wars: “sitting on the fence ... is tantamount to passive support of the government and the military.”

Accordingly, all soldiers who participate in unjust wars and all citizens who actively support unjust wars can be considered morally blameworthy for the injustices and harms caused by the war. Primoratz writes,

The responsibility of a citizen of a democratic state for the unjust war the state is waging can only be based on what the citizen herself does or fails to do about it. If she actively supports the government and the war—if she votes for the ruling party, gives allegiance to the government that is pursuing the war, expresses her

10. Ibid., 240.
11. Ibid., 237.
12. Ibid.
support for the war effort on appropriate occasions—then she is fully responsible for the war. She is therefore a legitimate target of military attack.\textsuperscript{13}

Passive supporters are responsible too, but since their culpability is not “of the same type and degree,” Primoratz concludes that only their property may be targeted—a fate “they richly deserve” along with “the inconveniences and hardships brought about by attacks on their country’s infrastructure.”\textsuperscript{14} Picking through various complications, Primoratz allows that in many cases such retaliation may still be prohibited by just war theory strictures that generally protect civilians from becoming collateral damage on the premise that it would be unfair to target the guilty in such a way that a disproportionate amount of (truly) innocent people suffer as well. However, Primoratz also reminds the reader that given a sufficiently large enough number of civilian collaborators and supporters, this protection may be rescinded.\textsuperscript{15}

Neta Crawford includes civilians as one of several institutional causes of “systemic atrocity,” a term she introduces to cover those “foreseeable, if unintentional, result[s] of a military or political choice that was out of the hands of the individual ‘perpetrator.’”\textsuperscript{16} Crawford highlights an important aspect of international conflicts which is that even in cases of wars waged over just causes “systemic atrocities” still occur for which someone ought to take responsibility. In attempting to determine who is appropriately to blame, Crawford identifies three levels of “collective moral responsibility: ... organizational, state and public.” She writes,

... The cause of systemic atrocity is structural to the extent that collectives constrain individual choice and action, as well as psychological/cultural in the

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 236.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 238.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 240.
\textsuperscript{16} Crawford, 192.
sense that individuals possess attitudes of indifference or contempt that are widely shared and that make it difficult to see systemic atrocity even as it is being produced.17

Crawford argues that there is a tendency in today’s wars to single out individuals for blame when innocent civilians are killed (or other systemic atrocities occur), but that this tendency is often mistaken. On Crawford’s account, “in modern (bureaucratic) states individuals rarely decide or act alone and with full autonomy.”18 And she reminds us not only that, in liberal democracies, soldiers must act within the context of a hierarchical military structure that valorizes obedience but also that they do so with the implicit understanding that the government has ordered the operation and the public has sanctioned it.

For Crawford, the military represents the organizational forces acting on each soldier’s decision making, but the military does not act alone. “The military has gone to war on the assumption that the war is legitimate, in other words, that the political leadership has attended to the moral questions of whether the war is just. Therefore the state may be held responsible for atrocities when the state has begun an unjust war.” Furthermore, the state materially enables the military. Since it is able to effectively prevent the military from functioning it might also be responsible for failing to “halt or change military practices that cause systemic atrocity.”19

Civilian citizens represent the public level of collective responsibility in Crawford’s schema. She notes that in “procedurally democratic states” citizens play a

17. Ibid., 189.
18. Ibid., 190.
key role in sustaining both state and military institutions; as a result, they share responsibility for systemic atrocities too:

At the political or public level, collective moral responsibility depends on the public having certain roles and obligations in democratic states. At this level, the citizens who pay taxes and otherwise consent to or perhaps even demand war are morally responsible for atrocities because it is their role in a democracy to prevent those atrocities, or at least try to halt them.\(^{20}\)

However, unlike Primoratz, she adamantly denies that such responsibility makes them appropriate targets of attack by the enemy. Civilians are only responsible in an *indirect* way:

By consenting and materially supporting the policies that led to systemic atrocity they are responsible to some degree; they have made the space for the commission of the atrocities by individuals and organizations or they have neglected to halt policies that lead to atrocity.\(^{21}\)

Apparently, for Crawford, only those individuals who can be said to be *directly* responsible for an atrocity can be viewed as justifiable targets for military attack. The onus for civilians, on the other hand, appears to be the duty “to affect the state’s policies so that those policies do not result in the commission of atrocities.”\(^{22}\)

In sum, Walzer and Primoratz represent the extreme ends of the spectrum with Walzer absolving nearly all rank-and-file individuals, citizen or soldier, of responsibility on the one side and Primoratz holding almost everyone accountable to some degree (and many accountable to the highest degree) on the other side. Crawford falls somewhere in the middle: though she appears more comfortable assigning blame to civilians than Walzer, she is also quick to absolve particular individuals (focusing more

\(^{20}\) Ibid., 203.

\(^{21}\) Ibid.

\(^{22}\) Ibid., 205.
on organizations and associations of people) and she does not accept Primoratz’s claim that some civilians are legitimate military targets.

Throughout the entire spectrum, however, theories of civilian moral responsibility share two broad features, which I believe significantly limit the scope of their claims and seriously undercut the chances of realizing the ultimate goal of reducing the harms of war. First, their discussion of moral responsibility rarely goes beyond moral blameworthiness as it pertains to either unjust wars or unjust acts committed during war. Second, they share an unwarranted assumption that the scope of civic responsibility is limited to the question of what individual civilians may (or may not) owe the state as relevantly free citizens living in a relatively functioning democratic state. However, moral responsibility is a far richer concept than traditional war ethicists appear to appreciate and a deeper understanding of all that it encompasses holds the key to an alternative theory of civilian responsibility that I begin to introduce in the next chapter. But first I devote the rest of this chapter to expanding on the charges just made against traditional theories.

II.  **Moral responsibility and blameworthiness**

A common feature found in conventional theories of moral responsibility is a fixation on the ability to be blamed for one’s actions. In the ethics of war, moral responsibility is typically addressed when the question regards who is to be blamed for the injustices of war. In fact, in the case of war, discussions of moral responsibility are usually confined to instances of unjust wars or war crimes. So, in claiming that civilians can be held morally responsible for war, for example, we are usually thought to be claiming that it is justifiable to blame civilians for the wars of aggression their country wages, where wars of aggression are by definition unjust. Notably, some war ethicists such as Crawford
argue for moral responsibility even in cases of just war (assuming such cases are possible) on the understanding that, even in just wars, atrocities occur for which someone ought to take responsibility. But the main concern is still one of determining who is blameworthy for the harms that inevitably occur in war.

In this section, I argue that the sole focus on moral culpability with respect to unjust wars or systemic atrocities has dubious value in the real world and may actually be counterproductive. In their book *Responsibility and Control: A Theory of Moral Responsibility*, Fischer and Ravizza present a comprehensive analysis and defense of P.F. Strawson’s arguments against incompatibilism. I rely heavily on Strawson’s ideas as the theoretical framework for my proposal to resolve the civilian problematic, and so I present his argument more thoroughly in the following chapter. For now, I call upon Fischer and Ravizza’s own insights into the nature of moral responsibility. The authors remind readers that our common conceptions speak to a far richer notion than traditional theorists acknowledge. The authors write,

> ... moral responsibility need not only involve “bad” reactions (such as indignation and resentment, or various kinds of blame or censure); additionally, it involves a range of “positive” reactions such as respect, praise, and love. Some philosophers unduly restrict the scope of moral responsibility to encompass solely the negative, but we wish to take a broader view of responsibility.\(^{23}\)

While the question of blame is certainly important, the virtually complete lack of consequences for American citizens on any conscious level effectively precludes the possibility of affecting a change in civic behavior solely through attributions of blame. A deeper investigation into the civilian problematic reveals that, for the majority of modern wars being waged, American citizens have no rational motivation to change their civic behavior nor do they seem to be aware of being called upon to do so. The

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political reality today is that few Americans see any substantive connection between themselves and the wars the United States is engaged in and, crucially, since the United States tends to wage war far from North America, Americans at home generally do not have to fear for their physical safety.

Regarding the most severe of consequences for the morally culpable, few scholars beyond Primoratz are willing to sanction targeting active (but noncombative) civilian supporters of an aggressive war; and even Primoratz acknowledges that in most cases concern for the welfare of innocents will (or should) override even just targeting of guilty parties. Other scholars, including Crawford, argue against the legitimacy of civilian military targets primarily on the grounds that “[n]ot everyone in the state has the political power to act or to organize. Powerless individuals—the weak, the young, the poorly educated and the politically disenfranchised poor—can hardly be held morally responsible for the acts of state that cause atrocities to be committed.”24 In many ways this is the same argument that Walzer makes (except Walzer does not assume that individual citizens have a duty to create alliances that can affect government.) Both Crawford and Walzer appear to rely on the intuitively plausible principle that the more diffuse the relationship between citizens and their nation’s policies concerning war, the less responsibility that should be attributed to them.

On Walzer’s account, this principle implicates only a small core of civilians who are bound to the political and military leadership more tightly than the average citizen. These “foreign policy elites, who are not so radically distanced from the national leadership” and their associates, are more likely to have the requisite information and influence to make them “at least potentially blameworthy if that war is aggressive and

24. Crawford, 205. I go into more detail regarding the issue of civilian immunity in the final chapter.
unless they join the opposition.”\textsuperscript{25} Crawford also singles out a small group of individuals with less attenuated relationships to the state leadership than rank-and-file citizens. She argues that these individuals, through their roles in the “public sphere—such as members of the political press or intellectuals—are more directly responsible,” and therefore deserving of more blame. But both Crawford and Walzer remain committed to the position that even these “more directly responsible” people are not legitimate military targets, though for different reasons. Crawford is careful to emphasize that even active supporters of an unjust war are still only indirectly able to influence decisions regarding war; and Walzer relies on a principle of inherent immunity for all noncombatants. He writes,

the theoretical problem is not to describe how immunity is gained, but how it is lost. We are all immune to start with; our right not to be attacked is a feature of normal human relationships. That right is lost by those who bear arms “effectively” because they pose a danger to other people. It is retained by those don’t bear arms at all.”\textsuperscript{26}

Walzer stands out from many contemporary theorists because for him the relationship between the average citizen and the governing authority is so attenuated as to be virtually nonexistent. Nevertheless, he does accept that despite the average citizen’s lack of moral responsibility, she may still be justifiably asked to bear the material cost of the injustice, for example in the form of reparations. According to Walzer, “... if men and women must accept this destiny, they can sometimes do so with a good conscience, for the acceptance says nothing about their individual responsibility. The distribution of costs is not the distribution of guilt.”\textsuperscript{27} Thus, even if reparations are

\textsuperscript{25} Walzer, Just and Unjust Wars, 302.

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 145fn.

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 297.
mandated in the aftermath of an unjust war, as some theorists would no doubt advocate, the democratic public need not infer, necessarily, that one’s individual behavior is to blame.

In reality, however, the public is not likely to infer anything at all because they are not likely to be cognizant of the fact that reparations are being paid by their state in the first place, as evidenced by the rhetoric surrounding reparations for the United State’s involvement in Vietnam. Politicians and patriots have become increasingly adept at deflecting blame away from the nation as a whole; and civilian lives are typically so far removed from the political machinations of their leaders that they are often easily distracted from unpleasant events. Additionally, rather than passively accept blame, a vast number of citizens are more likely to reflexively support their political leaders and denounce any accusations of blame made by the international community. Of course, as Walzer notes, “Even patriotic excitement, war fever, among such people is probably best understood as a reflex of distance, a desperate identification, stimulated, it may be, by a false account of what is going on.”28 Be that as it may, the point remains that the chances of a modern democratic citizenry being materially discomfited by any reparations their country may be required to make are low.29

Other strategies to encourage civic virtue, though potentially theoretically viable, are also practical nonstarters. Consider practices such as shaming and shunning in which the larger community as a unit communicates their disapproval to the accused

28. Ibid., 302.
29. Some theorists do argue for justifiable material consequences in terms of targeting a political community’s infrastructure, but usually only as a military tactic that helps end the war and rarely as retaliation. However, the reality of a legitimate military attack (i.e., a clearly justifiable material threat that should and possibly would motivate civilians to change their behavior in order to prevent it from happening to their communities) on the infrastructure of a modern democratic state is in all probability also quite low.
party. Such practices may be effective in some areas of life or within relatively small
groups of people. For example, after the United States invaded Iraq against the wishes of
the international community and of many of its own citizens, many Americans evinced
some discomfort at the thought of exposing themselves to their foreign counterparts.
The worry was often one of being treated poorly or shunned during their travels. During
that time, a not uncommon joke among liberals circulated in which American citizens
contemplated pretending to be Canadian when traveling abroad. But, the fact that they
still traveled abroad underscores my point: with respect to the United States at least,
shaming tactics by the international community are unlikely to motivate Americans to
admit guilt or to change their behavior by increasing their participation in government
(though they might change their behavior by sewing a maple leaf onto their backpacks).

For many of the same and related reasons, Americans seldom publically
contemplate whether or to what degree they may have played a part in the harm
inflicted upon others during American military operations abroad. In order to accept
responsibility for one’s part in a particular government-backed war, one must have the
necessary information and the cognitive capacity to adequately contemplate one’s
choices. But, in addition to a reflexive tendency to deflect blame, there is a serious
question anymore about how the average civilian even comes to know that her
government is contemplating war in the first place. Despite Primoratz’s declaration that,
“[w]hen one’s country goes to war, the times are no longer normal,” a common, though
relatively new, complaint from members of the military is just how normal civilian life
remains during war. On the other hand, the United States has been involved in military
combat for most of its relatively short lifetime, so perhaps it is fair to say that war has
become normal. The American government has certainly become quite adept at fighting
wars without disrupting civilian life at home. In her 2012 best selling book, *Drift: The unmooring of American military power*, Rachel Maddow, argues that the state of modern warfare has become so secretive, and the military so isolated from the civilian sphere, that standard practice now includes, “insulating the public from not only the cost of war but sometimes even the knowledge that it’s happening—war making has become almost an autonomous function of the American state. It never stops.”

For most Americans, the peaceful integration of a perpetual state of war into everyday life and the relocation of discussions of war to the periphery of civic affairs removes the opportunity and motivation for serious introspection about one’s role in what the military is doing overseas. And this gets at the heart of the matter—most civilians of modern democracies are as blithely unaware of events taking place beyond their own borders as they are of the charges being leveled against them by theorists like Primoratz and Crawford. In order for theories promoting civilian culpability to have any impact, theorists must confront the contingent problems that arise due to a lack of both visibility and consequences. The alternative theory of moral responsibility I defend in the following chapters is grounded in the logic of our interpersonal relationships and is guided by the understanding that the moral element of responsibility signals the presence of something more comprehensive and commanding than merely liability.

### III. Moral responsibility and citizenship

As noted above, both Primoratz and Crawford ascribe responsibility to civilian citizens of democracies on the basis of a putative civic duty that all citizens have to participate in politics just so their nations won’t wage unjust wars and their soldiers aren’t put in

situations where they must commit unjust acts.\textsuperscript{31} This reasoning is found in most arguments for civilian responsibility, but while there is a clear logic that allows the inference from a duty to participate to a responsibility for the outcomes of that participation (or lack of participation), war ethicists typically fail to adequately substantiate the claim that citizenship entails a duty to participate in shaping the military policies of one’s nation.\textsuperscript{32} For example, in his critique of Walzer, Primoratz states that, “in a democracy ... everyone is required to contribute to the war effort,”\textsuperscript{33} but he offers little by way of justification. He writes that it would be a mistake to rely on appeals to extreme patriotism and political obligation as these are both “open issues in moral and political philosophy,” and he characterizes his position as being grounded in the tenets of just war theory and “basic, universal moral considerations,”\textsuperscript{34} but fails to actually make an argument to support his position. It may be that there are strong universal reasons for citizens of democracies to participate in the political process during war times, but Primoratz does not elaborate on this point nor is such an argument self-evident.

On Crawford’s account, because war is “a social activity,” moral blameworthiness for the atrocities committed during war should be attributed collectively. In this sense, moral responsibility is conceived as a social construction. She holds that, “organized collectives have certain responsibilities that derive from their roles. These role

\textsuperscript{31} Walzer also makes this connection between participation and responsibility but since most citizens don’t participate (ostensibly through no fault of their own) only those who do are held responsible.

\textsuperscript{32} There is also an implicit, and as far as I can see warranted, assumption that a duty to participate in politics is predicated upon the justified true belief that one’s participation is meaningful.

\textsuperscript{33} Primoratz, 233.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 227.
responsibilities include the obligations to approve or authorize actions and to prevent actions that are wrong or likely to result in wrong."\textsuperscript{35} For example,

At the political or public level, collective moral responsibility depends on the public having certain roles and obligations in democratic states. At this level, the citizens who pay taxes and \textit{otherwise consent} to or perhaps even demand war are morally responsible for atrocities because it is their role in a democracy to prevent those atrocities or at least try to halt them.\textsuperscript{36}

Crawford allows for various degrees of culpability such that presumably someone who pays her taxes but does not agitate for war is at least slightly less responsible for the war than is the person who “demands” it. Nevertheless, by virtue of fulfilling some element of citizenship, e.g., paying taxes, one incurs responsibility for other aspects—for example, preventing systemic atrocities during war. Thus, for Crawford, citizenship includes a duty to participate in the foreign affairs of one’s country in order to prevent systemic atrocities from occurring.

But, even if a person pays her taxes, it does not follow \textit{necessarily} that she has a duty to participate in government. For one thing, her willingness to comply with the law might have nothing to do with implicitly consenting to being governed or tacitly supporting the authorities, as Crawford seems to imply. A timely taxpayer might simply wish to avoid unpleasant encounters with the local law enforcement. This is a logical point that I want to press. Consider, for example, the implications of Walzer’s conclusion when it is brought to bear on the major premise of arguments for a civic duty to participate. As I have been claiming in this section, arguments attributing moral responsibility to citizens for the unjust outcomes of war tend to assume the conditional statement: If citizens have a duty to participate politically (at least in times of war), then

\textsuperscript{35} Crawford, 197.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 203, emphasis added.
they are morally responsible for the outcomes of that participation (or failure to participate.) This statement is not problematic in and of itself; most ethicists, including Walzer, would likely accept the inference. But, accepting Walzer’s conclusion that rank-and-file citizens are absolved of responsibility for war means denying the consequent of that conditional. As a result, the antecedent is also necessarily denied; that is, if Walzer’s conclusion is true, and citizens are not responsible, then neither do they have a duty to participate in the political process during wartime.37

I do not mean to imply by this critique that I support the conclusions drawn by Walzer. In fact, the dissertation’s overarching argument reaffirms the intuition to attribute to civilians some meaningful degree of moral responsibility for the outcomes of war. My point here is simply that contemporary war ethicists tend to fallaciously assume the premise upon which their argument rests, and in doing so, they leave their arguments open to logical objections as well as more vulnerable to compelling critiques from modern liberal theory as I will show in the following section.

**IV. The liberal critique**

The belief that citizens of democracies have a moral obligation to participate in their nation’s political functions is inherited from the Enlightenment Era’s interpretation of ancient republicanism and civic virtue. In ancient Greece, and on the classical republican model in general, service to one’s country was the mainstay of good citizenship and serving in the military was the highest service one could offer. The prevailing thought, prior to the advent of professional standing armies, was that military

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37. I am, as is no doubt obvious to many, employing the logical rule of *modus tollens*, viz.: 1.) If P then Q. (2.) Not Q. Therefore, Not P. In the example above P = democratic citizens have a duty to participate and Q = democratic citizens bear moral responsibility for the harms of their nation’s wars. Thus, the only logical way to consistently maintain that citizens do have a duty to participate despite failing to be morally responsible for that participation is to deny the conditional inference in the first premise, but since there are no theorists that I am aware of who do this, there is little to be gained by chasing this tangent.
service was necessary for one to fully experience true citizenship and the martial virtues were the means by which man’s higher and nobler faculties were exercised and developed.

During the Enlightenment Era, classical republicanism, or civic humanism as it was also called, attempted to modernize the notion of civic virtue. According to Athanasios Moulakis,

Civic humanism is ... a conception of politics in which government is in principle the common business of the citizens. The “city” provides the environment — a public space — for human fulfillment. ... the republic requires widespread civic virtue, i.e., the active participation of citizens united by a concern for the common good. The virtues of citizenship are in turn developed and enhanced by being exercised in upholding republican political and legal institutions and making them work by being involved in their operation. ... Republican freedom depends on constant civic activity, ... The purpose of the commonwealth is not so much peace and ensuring the rights of individuals, as the realization of human potentiality, encouraging the flowering of all forms of creativity and ingenuity insofar as they contribute to public welfare. The republic is the necessary medium of self-realization, not merely the condition of possibility of private endeavors. ... There is a link furthermore between the freedom of the citizen and the independence of the republic. Citizen armies and the right to bear arms are therefore common postulates of republican theory.38

However, over time, as small republican city-states morphed into large and inclusive democratic nations, civic humanist ideals were largely supplanted by theories promoting capitalism, individualism, liberalism, market principles and the division of labor. David Held traces the “demise of the active citizen, one whose very being is affirmed in and through political action” back to a Renaissance republican ideal based on the belief that “the freedom of citizens consists above all in their unhindered pursuit of their self-

chosen ends.” Held cites James Madison and Jeremy Bentham as offering “[t]wo classic statements of the new position.” According to Held,

The central concern of Madison’s argument is not the rightful place of the active citizen in the life of the political community but, instead, the legitimate pursuit by individuals of their interests and government as a means for the enhancement of these interests. ... [Madison’s] position signals a clear shift from the classical ideals of civic virtue and the public realm to liberal preoccupations.... He conceived of the representative states as the chief mechanism to aggregate individuals’ interests and to protect their rights.40

Along similar lines, Bentham held that representative democracy “has for its characteristic object and effect ... securing its members against oppression and depredation at the hands of those functionaries which it employs for its defence...” The representative state thus becomes an umpire or referee while individuals pursue their own interests in civil society according to the rules of economic competition and free exchange. The free vote and the free market are both essential, for a key presupposition is that the collective good can be properly realized in most domains of life only if individuals interact in competitive exchanges, pursuing their utility with minimal state interference.41

These reformulations of the nature of citizenship and the correct role of government went hand in hand with the professionalization of standing armies for any nation-state that hoped to survive. While the state poured money into military institutions, inculcating its members with classical republican virtues intended to foster obedience and self-sacrifice, civilians were encouraged to make their own way in the free

40. Ibid.
41. Ibid., 10.
market of opportunity for wealth and success. In terms of a division of labor, the civilian’s part was simply to pursue her own rationally self-interested ends.

Admittedly vestiges of civic republicanism continued to exert pressure on American civilians well into the twentieth century, as evidenced by propaganda for the war effort, especially World War II, and classes on civic virtue that were popular into the middle of the twentieth century. But as the positive state gave way to the “new public management” style of politics, and liberal arguments for non-interference grew stronger, state-sponsored visions of the good life were deemed too controversial for public education and inculcation. Civilian “duties” were paired down to the bare minimum, and today even a requirement to vote and obey the laws of the land are thought by some liberals to be too onerous. Given the low voter turnout in most modern elections, many rank-and-file citizens would seem to agree that even being required to vote is asking too much. Thus, while the republican model attempts to imbue civilians with moral responsibility and civic virtue, full access to the rights of citizenship on the liberal model requires relatively little effort for most people.42

Additionally, the “new” model of citizenship could be seen as normatively requiring civilians to mind their own business. That is, under some interpretations of liberalism, the civilian does her moral duty by pursuing her rational self-interests in the free market and trusting her political representatives, and by extension the military, to do what they do best—which is presumably also protecting her interests. But if liberal principles in some sense can be said to require or cause a lack of participation and oversight by civilians, then ethicists who argue that civilians have the responsibility to

42. I am aware that attaining legal citizenship is still quite difficult for many immigrants but I don’t believe that affects the argument I am making here.
prevent or protest the waging of unjust wars have a more difficult case to make. To whom does the civilian owe this duty and on what basis? What is the content of her responsibility and how is that determined (and by whom)? Why doesn’t the state promote this duty more clearly? Is the duty merely one among many that the civilian must weigh before deciding what she ought to do? Is it possible that her duty to pursue her own ends outweighs the responsibility to monitor the government, or vice versa? And if she does bear any responsibility how is she to know? From where is the message supposed to originate or is she supposed to figure this out for herself? Clearly, as things stand now, the average civilian is not aware of any such duty, though this may be through no fault of her own.

**V. Broadening the scope of moral responsibility**

In addition to the liberal critique, theorists who focus solely on a citizen’s obligation to the state also undermine their own goals by unnecessarily limiting the possibilities for civilian engagement in military affairs. On the one hand, this perspective fails to see opportunities for civil-military interactions outside the traditional political sphere; on the other hand, there are many noncitizen civilians whose lives are also deeply affected by their host-country’s foreign policies and who are effectively left out of a strictly political conversation. Ideally, a theory of moral responsibility for war would speak to all parties who are implicated in military operations and it would do so in a way that seeks to understand the actual motivations and day-to-day reality of those individuals.

In their book, *A New Engagement? Political Participation, Civic Life, and the Changing American Citizen*, Zukin et al. distinguish between “traditional electoral politics” (such as “voting and campaigning”) and “civic activities such as volunteering and community
problem solving with others.” Their research demonstrates that Americans (especially young adults) are increasingly more likely to engage in the public sphere through activities that are not overtly political. Though the authors are careful to emphasize the inherent and irreplaceable importance of traditional political participation, they also maintain that, “the ‘gold standard’ for a democratic citizen would be someone who is facile in both types of engagement.” A New Engagement informs us that the growing popularity of new trends in civic and social interaction over conventional politics, especially for young adults, is the signature of a new generational cohort. Thus, the authors conclude: “We believe the volume of citizen engagement has ... spread to a wider variety of channels. And this may require different listening skills among political and social analysts to ... fully understand the messages being sent.”

War ethicists rarely specify the ways in which, or the degree to which, citizens must participate in the public sphere in order to avoid being blameworthy for the injustices of war, but they tend to imply that the type of participation required by citizens is strictly and traditionally political. Admittedly, Crawford’s appeal to civilian organizations and associations suggests something more like the kinds of civic engagement just described but she is not clear on the specifics and gives very little indication of what counts as morally valid participation and what does not. She does, however, specify the duties of voting and paying taxes and she absolves “the weak, the young, the poorly educated and the politically disenfranchised poor” of supporting

43. Zukin, et al. 4-5. Specifically, the authors “define political engagement as ‘activity that has the intent or effect of influencing government action—either directly by affecting the making or implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make those policies’... ,” (Ibid., 6).

44. Ibid., 10.

45. Ibid., 3.
systemic atrocities on the grounds that they lack the necessary “political power to act or to organize.” Yet, the empirical evidence detailed in *A New Engagement* suggests that broadening the parameters for legitimate forms of participation beyond the traditionally political may allow even “powerless” citizens access to influence.

New civic norms may also widen the scope of responsible parties by allowing noncitizen civilians opportunities to participate in the public sphere and add their voices to discussions about whether or not to wage war. Immigration policy analyst William A. Kandel notes that The United States is home to over twenty million noncitizens, both documented and undocumented. Although this is just over twelve percent of the United States’ total population, according to congressional research data, almost eighty five percent of all male noncitizens participate in the United State’s workforce (nearly fourteen percent more than native born males) and over half of noncitizen women work. Kandel states, “the foreign born are growing faster than the native-born population generally and specifically among young people and the civilian labor force.”

Given that noncitizens are more vulnerable in wartimes (particularly when the noncitizen’s native country is also involved in the war), they are likely to be disproportionately harmed by decisions of their host countries to go to war and therefore they may be more likely than even many citizens to heed a call to action.

46. Crawford, 205.
47. Kandel, 9.
48. Ibid., 22.
49. Ibid., 1.
VI. Conclusions

It is reasonable to suppose that traditional theorists in favor of attributing moral responsibility to civilians are assuming an outpouring of civic virtue by a large number of civilian citizens would result in fewer unjust wars as well as fewer injustices of war. Traditional theorists also appear to assume that civilian responsibility in a democracy—if there is any—is confined to the citizen’s obligation to the state (or to the Constitution) to be conscientious voters who participate in politics in traditional ways. Accordingly, acceptance of one’s civic responsibility should result in civilians who understand the link between the individuals in office and whether or not one’s nation goes to war. This in turn should lead to an electorate who pays enough attention to foreign affairs that they are able to discern when a war is unjust and should be protested against just as they are able to identify and elect conscientious leaders who are less likely to wage unjust wars.

However, Walzerian observations about the alienated state of actual rank-and-file civilians and libertarian critiques of republicanism generate serious doubts about the validity of Primoratz’s and Crawford’s conclusions. And, although the conventional debate regarding civilian responsibility may be best described as at an impasse, with strong arguments both for and against attributing moral responsibility to civilians for war, the firmly entrenched status quo in the U.S. lends itself best to Walzer’s position. The ostensible fact of civilian apathy and alienation with respect to the state that is at the heart of Walzer’s argument to absolve civilians of responsibility for war suggests that while there are good reasons to suppose large numbers of conscientious and politically active citizens could have a pacific effect on their government’s foreign affairs, there are not—at present—good reasons to believe that a large enough number of citizens will be motivated by a sense of civic responsibility to voluntarily become politically active.
enough to make a difference (and some, like Walzer, might even argue that neither is it fair to ask them to).

Nevertheless, there are good reasons to believe that if civilians fully understood the realities of war and their own singular role in the ultimate consequences of the job soldiers do for them—whether civilians want them to do those jobs or not—and if civilians (and soldiers) understood the extent of moral injury (to themselves and others) caused by being aggressors (both directly and indirectly) in war, they would be more concerned with finding ways to limit the opportunities for those injuries to occur. Therefore, rather than relying on arguments that posit a relationship between the citizen and the state, in which democratic citizens are morally bound to legitimate the state through their political participation, the alternative theory I propose in the following chapters is grounded in a morally meaningful relationship that I argue exists between soldiers and civilians. In this way, regardless of whether democratic citizens have a duty to participate in politics, civilians can still be shown to bear some meaningful moral responsibility for military affairs. In the next chapter, I present the framework for a new theory of civilian responsibility founded on the interpersonal relationships and reactive attitudes that P.F. Strawson has shown to be essential elements of our moral life.
CHAPTER TWO

Foundations For A New Theory

I. Introduction

As should be clear by now, a robust theory of civilian responsibility for war is sadly lacking and yet urgently needed. Conventional theories ascribing moral responsibility to civilians are vulnerable to liberal objections that reject assumptions positing a civilian duty to the state or to the Constitution. They are also susceptible to Walzerian criticisms regarding the general disenfranchisement of the mass public. Both liberal arguments and Walzer’s position absolving civilians of any responsibility for war, on the other hand, are wholly unsatisfying for reasons discussed more fully in the previous chapter.

The alternative theory of civilian responsibility for war that I am proposing is based on a more general theory of special duties arising from our interpersonal relationships. Regardless of whether civilians can actively influence their government’s military activity and regardless of whether they owe anything to the state or to the Constitution, I hold that rank-and-file soldiers and civilians in the United States are inescapably linked to one another in such a way as to incur certain moral responsibilities to each other.

It is intuitively quite plausible that a meaningful moral relationship exists between soldiers and civilians; in fact, it seems as though most people (both academics and nonacademics) simply assume that this relationship does exist. Moral relationships, in turn, are generally considered to generate special responsibilities for each member of the relationship to the other member (though there is some debate about the way in which this works.) Therefore, if the intuition about the relationship between soldiers
and civilians is justified, it likely follows that civilians incur special duties to soldiers as a direct result of that relationship.

Of course, the above argument is overly simple. First, the intuitively plausible key premise positing a meaningful relationship between soldiers and civilians is not, in fact, self-evident and requires closer examination and stronger support than mere intuitions and assumptions can provide. The greater challenge, however, is that the precise nature of the putative relationship, and thus of any duties that might follow from such a relationship, are far from clear, to anyone it would seem, and yet greater clarity on this is crucial to successfully and substantively resolving the civilian problematic. The goal of this chapter, therefore, is to provide for the relationship claim a strong theoretical foundation—one that clearly articulates and justifies the assumptions underlying our relationships that give rise to special duties. I present the precise grounds on which a meaningful moral relationship can be said to exist between civilians and soldiers in the following chapter and in chapter four I argue that the most politically acceptable conception of the relationship between civilians and soldiers is modeled on principals and avatars.

II. Morally meaningful relationships
That a moral relationship exists between soldiers and civilians may seem obvious at first glance. Most people would no doubt agree that there exists a meaningful moral relationship between American civilians and members of the United States Military. Americans commonly claim that they respect their soldiers and owe them a debt of gratitude for their service and sacrifice. And, although theorists writing about moral responsibility for war largely neglect a discussion of this purported relationship, the field of civil-military relations, as the name implies, is devoted solely to it.
The study of civil-military relations has a long history in the United States but it gained prominence primarily through the Cold War debate between Huntington and Janowitz over how best to interpret the military doctrine of civilian control. At the heart of the issue was how to protect civilians from threats both external (foreign invasion) and internal (military coup). For Huntington and Janowitz, the question came down to how much influence civilian leaders should be allowed over military affairs. Huntington advocated *objective civilian control* by which he meant that the governing civilian authority should exert as little influence as possible over the military; and Janowitz argued the opposite—that civilian oversight in all aspects of military life should increase as much as possible. Although both theories still maintain significant relevance and influence in the field, dramatic changes in the political landscape over time have underscored weaknesses in the theories and opened up the field to broader discussions with respect to civil-military relations. For example, civil-military theorists in the new millennium have focused on trying to determine the specific mechanisms of civilian control beyond the appeal to professionalism on which Huntington and Janowitz relied. Along that field of inquiry, a common point of contention in contemporary debates is with respect to the empirically verifiable gap dividing military and civilian spheres. Regardless of one’s position on these issues, participation in civil-military relations debates clearly requires the assumption that soldiers and civilians are legitimately bound to one another by the constitutionally enshrined doctrine of civilian control of the military.

And yet, while it is tempting to insist that a moral relationship between soldiers and civilians is self-evident because it is so widely assumed and because the doctrine of civilian control is safeguarded by the Constitution, further reflection suggests
foreseeable and reasonable objections. Relying on duties to uphold the ideals of the Constitution runs into many of the same problems that undermine traditional theories of civilian responsibility for war discussed in chapter two. Recall that Walzer believes most civilians should be absolved of moral responsibility for war because they don’t have the requisite political agency to influence the decisions of government and military leaders. Lack of political agency means that rank-and-file civilians do not, in reality, control the military, therefore they cannot, in reality, be considered to have any special relationship to the military and, therefore, they should not (and, in reality, rarely do) incur any responsibility for military outcomes.

As if tacitly accepting Walzer’s conclusions, political scientists tend to concentrate their analyses of the doctrine of civilian control on the civilian political leadership and its influence (or lack of) on military policy and culture; or they debate whether the military leadership could ever come to reject civilian authority with its concomitant constraints and obligations. Though rank-and-file soldiers and civilians are occasionally referenced in the literature, there is little substantive discussion of their roles in contributing to the quality of the relationship between the two groups and sometimes it is not clear whether they are even being considered as members of the groups under discussion.

Lack of clarity about the role of rank-and-file civilians in the larger civil-military problematic may help to explain why a recent body of research on the presumed relationship between military and civilian populations offers relatively little understanding of “how the relationship is functioning and ought to function on a day-
to-day basis.”50 This was the conclusion from political scientists Paul Gronke and Peter Feaver after analyzing recent empirical studies on the topic. In order to better understand the dynamics at play between the civil sphere and the military sphere, and in particular, to determine conclusively specific drivers of the growing divide between the two, the Triangle Institute Security Studies (TISS), a 24-page survey with 81 questions was administered to six groups: military leaders, active reserve leaders, civilian veteran leaders, civilian non-veteran leaders, general public veterans, and 1,001 randomly-selected non-veteran members of the general public. According to Gronke and Feaver, “... the results suggest that there is, at a minimum, something of a crisis in understanding about civilian control even if there is not a crisis in civilian control as such.”51 To put it another way, though we don’t have to worry about a military coup in the United States anytime soon, the mechanisms in place for maintaining this state of affairs are mysterious to most of us and therefore vulnerable to neglect and misuse.

Of course, lack of substantive understanding of a relationship is no more an argument against the existence of the relationship than intuition and assumption are arguments for it. A more helpful tactic may be to ask whether the proposition is falsifiable. Is it possible to make sense of the counter claim that, contrary to the assumptions of many soldiers, civilians, and political theorists, there is no morally meaningful relationship between the two groups? Arguably, there is a general sense in which it could be said that every individual is in a morally meaningful relationship with every other person (and, by some accounts, every other living thing) since most moral theories require that we treat even strangers in certain morally acceptable ways. But the

50. Gronke and Feaver, “Uncertain Confidence”, 159.
51. Ibid., 156 (italics in original).
kind of moral relationship necessary for binding two analytically distinct groups of people in ways that would likely require individuals from one or both groups to significantly alter their behavior must itself be qualitatively different from those ordinary moral relationships. In the case of soldiers and civilians, the kind of relationship necessary to ground a theory of civilian responsibility for war must be one that gives rise to special duties in much the same way as do most romantic, familial, and close platonic relationships; and it is this kind of bond to which I refer when I say a relationship is “morally meaningful” or “interpersonal.”

Understanding morally meaningful relationships in this way makes the idea of a counter thesis more tenable: without some clearly special binding factor in a relationship—such as a biological, social or romantic bond—two people might be said to be *morally autonomous strangers* to one another. In this way, the man next to me in line at the grocery store and the woman in the car behind me on the freeway are both morally autonomous strangers to me just as I am a morally autonomous stranger to them. Presumably, the only moral obligations I have to them (or they to me) are those generated by virtue of our shared humanity (or our shared membership in a larger moral community such as the United States). Relationships between two distinct *groups* may also be characterized in this way. For example, fraternities and sororities are commonly assumed to generate special duties for each member to each other member (fraternity brothers to brothers and sorority sisters to sisters), but certain fraternities and sororities might also be closely linked to one another for a variety of reasons, thereby creating special duties for those fraternity brothers toward their sorority sisters and vice versa. In that case, a particular fraternity can be said to have a morally meaningful relationship with another particular sorority (and vice versa) but not
necessarily with any other sorority. Almost by default, however, most groups can be considered as morally autonomous strangers to most other groups since they likely lack the kinds of bonds necessary to confer special duties to the other groups, hence the existence of so many diverse groups in the first place.

Thus, members of The Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks do not have special duties to Boy Scouts (and vice versa) just because they happen to be members of those particular groups. Of course, any particular Elk might have a morally meaningful relationship with any particular Scout, if for example, the two individuals also happen to be siblings; but no duties are generated by virtue of either person’s membership in either of those groups. It is not because one joins The Elks that one incurs special duties to all Scouts. And though it may be argued that Scouts do incur special duties to all Elks by virtue of a Scout’s membership in an institution that encourages assisting others, Scouts are not so obligated because a person is an Elk, but rather because of the Elk’s membership in some larger group (presumably all Americans at the least). Therefore, The Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks and The Boy Scouts of America are morally autonomous strangers to each other.

Given that groups are more often than not morally autonomous strangers to other groups, it is at least logically possible that soldiers and civilians comprise two distinct groups that could also be considered strangers in this way. If it could be shown that soldiers and civilians are not in morally meaningful relationships with each other, then as morally autonomous strangers, civilians would not incur any special duties to soldiers qua soldiers and civilians; and theorists would have little hope of grounding civic responsibility for military outcomes.
III. *Morally autonomous strangers*

Liberal arguments focusing on the rights of the individual versus the state bolster claims to moral and political autonomy between soldiers and civilians. In fact, it is precisely this autonomy that liberalism seeks to protect at all costs. Accordingly, if one chooses to enlist in the military, then she is welcome to but she must take responsibility for her own choices and not foist them on others. She shares moral responsibility for the wars in which she fights because she chose to become involved in a very real way. Civilians who choose not to enlist, thus, are not morally responsible because they had no voluntary involvement in the fight—*they chose to not be morally involved*.

When soldiers complain about civilians who seem unconcerned with promoting the common good (as many reportedly do), a response from the morally autonomous stranger perspective might be that the soldier’s “sacrifice” is her own personal choice and not required of her, morally or otherwise. For staunch supporters of liberalism, a moral requirement of selfless service might sound oxymoronic—suspiciously similar to mandatory volunteering. Volunteering, one might insist, connotes choice: an all-volunteer military force is one in which every member *chooses*—independently and of her own free will—to enlist. However, this doesn’t mean that soldiers aren’t duly compensated for the jobs they do; they are not volunteers in this sense, only in the sense that no one is forcing them to enlist. Consequently, soldiers and civilians should be considered morally autonomous strangers to one another because the civilian has no *morally* relevant reason to treat the soldier any differently than she does her local police officer, fire fighter, or grocery store clerk; any efforts to solicit special treatment on behalf of soldiers, therefore, should be viewed as merely another appeal from a special interest group.
Additional support for this view is more likely to come from reading between the lines than from studying the empirical data directly. Researchers generally receive a positive assessment of the military from most civilians they question directly, and by some accounts the United States Military is considered the most respected public institution in America, but underlying attitudes of both groups reveal a more complex picture. According to military historian, Russell Weigley, relations between the civilian and military leadership have rarely been harmonious since the inception of the military sphere as a distinct political entity (World War II being a notable exception). Ironically, Weigley cites the early military policies of Jefferson and Madison—in which a preference for citizen soldiers and a national distrust of powerful militaries and standing armies vied for representation with the practical military and political concerns of the day—as the genesis of the military sphere in the United States. The eventual compromise between these competing concerns wound up creating constitutional provisions that have allowed for the United States Military to become the behemoth that it is today. By the time West Point military professionals were able to rise to the Army command, Weigley writes,

Professional military interests, attitudes and values became both well enough defined and influential enough within the military to create the beginnings of the modern issue of civil-military control, which entails assuring that the military will not be able to use its bureaucratic influence and its claim to special expertise to bend larger national policy to the service of military institutional desires.

While a deeply embedded commitment to the institution of civilian control took root over time within military culture itself, Weigley argues that there was often tangible

52. See Gronke and Feaver, “Uncertain Confidence,” 129-130.
53. Weigley, 221-223.
54. Ibid. 225.
tension and always an underlying distrust on both sides. More to the point for the morally autonomous stranger position, the distinct values and interests of the military sphere coupled with the constant tension between civil and military leaders created a community that became increasingly separate from the larger society it was designed to serve. After the debacle of the Vietnam War, both the military and political leadership came under fire from the public; and though each side blamed the other, they also both had a vested interest in regaining the public’s trust and support for future military maneuvers.\textsuperscript{55} However, the eventual mechanisms for doing this succeeded in part by creating yet even more distance between the two groups. The end of the draft and the rise of more diffuse and complex conflicts has resulted in further limiting opportunities for soldiers and civilians to interact with one another. Not surprisingly, as the number of common reference points between the two groups continues to decline, the process of segregation continues to grow. If values and norms diverge sharply between two groups there is little motivation for them to interact and correspondingly fewer opportunities for learning about each other’s cultures. Sadly, with lack of understanding often comes antipathy and condescension, an attitude for which much anecdotal (and some empirical) evidence suggests is fairly prevalent on both sides.

The vast differences that now exist between the hierarchical non-democratic nature of military life and the pluralistic egalitarian nature of civil life in America underscore the key claim for morally autonomous strangers and suggest another line of support for the position. Without something extra-ordinary binding two people or two groups, there is no basis for positing a meaningful moral relationship. Military protocol continues to view value training as essential to success, while civilian institutions such

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\textsuperscript{55} See Weigley, 238-246; see also Maddow, 14-19.
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as public schools, the civil service and political offices, have been moving in a markedly different direction. Rather than emphasizing the martial virtues of selfless service, courage and obedience, civic leaders increasingly insist on Weberian rationalism and marketplace principles. It may be that soldiers and civilians have drifted so far apart that developing a meaningful interpersonal relationship with each other is simply not possible.

It may also be that this state of affairs does not actually constitute a problem. When the day-to-day lives of soldiers and civilians are juxtaposed, at first glance their differences may appear daunting, particularly in conjunction with the assumption that a growing distance between soldiers and civilians is necessarily a bad thing. But, although most scholars agree that a gap does exist, there is some debate about both the nature of the gap and whether it constitutes an actual problem. For example, some military leaders and scholars have argued that a civil-military gap is both inevitable and necessary due to the essential natures of the two groups. The hierarchical and authoritarian nature of the military is informed by its distinct purpose, viz. to defend society and wage armed conflict on society’s behalf. The inculcation of republican values ensures the obedience of soldiers, and the norms and values they are taught to inhabit give them the fortitude required to endure the physical and mental brutalities of combat. Conversely, freedom, equality and individualism may be said to constitute the essential nature of civilian society. Military and government authoritarianism is anathema to most modern Americans who often relish the opportunity to disagree with elected leaders.

For many observers, this bifurcation of society is preferable to the alternative. Attempts to close the gap would either mean that the military should operate more like
civil society or civil society should conform more to military standards. Defenders of the gap consider both options ill conceived. It is commonly held that the military would not be able to function as a democratic institution and the idea that ordinary citizens should somehow follow the military’s lead runs counter to the very foundations of liberalism.

As military historian Richard Kohn reminds us,

> If society were to be governed by the personal ideals or institutional perspectives of the military, developed over centuries to support service to the state and sacrifice in war, then each individual citizen and the national purpose would become subservient to national security, to the exclusion, or at least the devaluation, of other needs and concerns.\(^56\)

This line of thought evokes the Weberian notion of different value spheres for different life-fields. According to Weber, “... each one of these fields may be rationalized in terms of very different ultimate values and ends, and what is rational from one point of view may well be irrational from another.”\(^57\) Simply put: what works for the military won’t work for civil society and vice versa. Separating civilians and soldiers may just be a good example of how the division of labor is supposed to work in society to increase efficiency and overall prosperity. And, if this is the case, then civilians who ignore the military in favor of liberal pastimes and preoccupations are thereby actually doing their part and honoring their obligations.

Unfortunately, even successful rebuttals to the arguments above would not, by themselves, guarantee absolute defeat of the general counter thesis that there is no meaningful relationship between soldiers and civilians. It is always possible that there are other, stronger, arguments that have been overlooked. If arguments for a moral relationship between soldiers and civilians are to withstand criticism, they must be

\(^{56}\) Kohn, “Civilian Control.”

grounded in conceptually clear, noncontroversial terms explaining the precise nature of the ostensible bond. In the following two sections, I set the groundwork for the civil-military bond I am claiming exists despite the current segregated state of affairs. Chapters four and five extrapolate from these foundational claims to flesh out the particular nature of the civil-military relationship and in doing so, as I will argue, effectively refute the counter thesis.

IV. Reactive attitudes and the foundations of moral reasoning

P.F. Strawson’s work on reactive attitudes and moral communities offers a compelling strategy for defeating objections from the morally autonomous stranger perspective. In the broader philosophical debate with which Strawson was concerned, the question of whether people can ever be said to be morally responsible about anything hinges on the question of free will and tends to divide into three camps: libertarian, compatibilist (or soft determinist), and determinist (or hard determinist).58 Moral responsibility is commonly thought to require meaningful freedom, what most people perceive as a free will or the ability to do otherwise. Philosophical libertarians believe that humans are meaningfully free (i.e., that they have free will) and therefore are able to be praised or blamed for those actions they intentionally bring about. Hard determinists (also known as incompatibilists) argue that because the truth of determinism means that all events are caused by prior events such that it is impossible for anyone to do other than what they actually do (i.e., there is no such thing as “the ability to do otherwise”), people can not be said to bear true moral responsibility for their actions.

58. The following account is a loose, and overly simplified interpretation of the complex philosophical debate regarding moral responsibility. For a more detailed accounting, see Strawson, Galen. 1994. The impossibility of moral responsibility. Philosophical Studies. Springer Netherlands. 1:24-75. Also, I quote extensively from Strawson’s own work because he explains his position with extreme clarity and efficiency such that I’m afraid any effort on my part to rephrase his words would only serve to further complicate the issues being discussed here.
Soft determinists, or compatibilists, accept the premise that determinism is true, but deny that this implies a rejection of moral responsibility. Their argument rests on defining freedom as “the identification of the will with the act;” that is, as long as freedom just means that the agent who acts intends her action or decides to act, then it is not incompatible with determinism. Because freedom and determinism are compatible, they argue, moral responsibility and determinism are also compatible. However, according to Strawson, an impasse occurs at this point because the compatibilist cannot give the hard determinist a satisfactory answer to the question: On what grounds are our moral judgments justified when freedom is defined so that determinism is true? If we are not able to do other than what we do, how can we be said to be deserving of praise and blame?59

Granted, political theorists writing on war ethics generally assume humans have, in at least some cases, the relevant sense of freedom or ability to do otherwise such that they can be said to be morally responsible in at least those cases. In other words, political theorists tend to take the human capacity for moral responsibility as a given—we are able to be morally responsible as long as contingent external conditions allowing for individual agency are met. This is in stark contrast to the metaphysical debate about moral responsibility in which individual capacity is precisely what is at issue. In the broader philosophical debate the question of whether people can ever be said to be morally responsible about anything hinges on the question of free will. Despite this (admittedly significant) difference, both political ethicists and moral philosophers typically premise ascriptions of, or exemptions from, praise and blame on the degree of

59. It is also important to bear in mind that, upon its introduction to a larger audience, this broader philosophical debate had tangible effects on public policy—particularly efforts at penal reform—just as it continues to impact those efforts today.
meaningful agency individuals have in a given situation, so that the two problematics essentially share the same concern: justifying our moral judgments when questions of agency remain unresolved. More broadly even, both debates—whether in traditional philosophy or political science—center on the role of, and necessary conditions for, meaningful freedom and agency in moral responsibility.

Strawson is generally credited with moving the philosophical debate forward by changing the focus from autonomy and alternate possibilities to our relations with one another. He accomplishes this by highlighting the role participant reactive attitudes play in justifying our expressions of, and practices associated with, moral praise and blame, even if determinism is true. Reactive attitudes include “such things as gratitude, resentment, forgiveness, love, and hurt feelings,” which is to say, those emotions and attitudes that we have by virtue of our interpersonal relationships.\(^60\) Strawson asks us to reflect on the myriad relationships we each are able to have with others. He argues, “In general, we demand some degree of goodwill or regard on the part of those who stand in these relationships to us, though the forms we require it to take vary widely in different connections.”\(^61\)

To better understand the role of reactive attitudes in grounding moral responsibility, Strawson first considers the conditions under which some reactive attitudes, he focuses on resentment, are reflexively regarded as appropriate or fair; he next asks “what sorts of special considerations might be expected to modify or mollify this feeling [of resentment] or remove it all together?” He suggests that the circumstances under which previously justified resentment may abate, or disappear

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61. Ibid., 63-64.
completely, break down into two general categories. As will be seen, Strawson’s juxtaposition of the two categories draws attention to the role moral community plays in making moral judgments.

In the first category are revelations of the sort that the object of our resentment doesn’t actually deserve or merit that particular reaction. Consider a very mundane example: if I resent a friend for standing me up at the movies after I purchased her a ticket, most people would consider my reaction appropriate or at least justifiable. But if it becomes known that my friend was a no show because she was carjacked or because she had to rush a family member to the hospital, or if we missed each other because she was waiting at a different theater with a similar name, then arguably my resentment toward her is no longer warranted (though I may still feel inconvenienced or annoyed or any other number of relevant reactive attitudes). Usually in cases like these, when we find out that a person was coerced, or otherwise compelled to act contrary to expectations, by unexpected circumstances beyond her control, our resentment towards her abates. Note, however, that even when my resentment is warranted due to my friend’s thoughtlessness or lack of concern for my wellbeing, her standing as a legitimate member of the moral community is never in question. In fact, the very act of acknowledging and justifying resentment toward my friend, as well as my later willingness to exonerate her after coming to believe that the slight was unintentional, imply a general understanding that both she and I belong to the same class of morally responsible human beings.

The second category of reasons for reassessing our reactive attitudes towards some people is, very generally speaking, reserved for those people who are morally or psychologically dysfunctional, and possibly young children. According to Strawson,
“When we see someone in such a light as this, all our reactive attitudes tend to be profoundly modified.” Since these kinds of people rarely act according to socially acceptable expectations, we often, or at least we often try to, refrain from engaging with them in ways that provoke our critical reactive attitudes. People who fall into this category are generally thought to lack moral autonomy and for this reason they are often absolved of moral (and in some cases even legal) responsibility. They are also typically not considered to be true members of the moral community since their behavior is clearly not governed by the same (if any) ethical rules.

It appears, then, that reactive attitudes and the moral judgments that follow from them both posit and delimit the moral community. In general, members of the moral community merit participant reactive attitudes while nonmembers do not. In order to restrain our reactive attitudes toward nonmembers, and for a variety of other reasons, Strawson claims that we often adopt, or attempt to adopt, the “objective attitude.” The objective attitude is that stance we use for people who are “seen as excluded from ordinary adult human relationships by deep-rooted psychological abnormality—or simply by being a child.” Although the two are not mutually exclusive, the objective attitude should be understood as “profoundly” opposed to our reactive attitudes in that it cannot include the range of reactive feelings and attitudes which belong to involvement or participation with others in inter-personal human relationships; it cannot, for example, include resentment, gratitude, forgiveness, anger, or the sort of love which two adults can sometimes be said to feel reciprocally, for each other. While acknowledging the usefulness of the objective attitude in many instances, such as erecting or maintaining boundaries in certain relationships like those suggested above, or crafting public policy, humans are incapable of consistently maintaining this stance.
for very long. The objective attitude is not a natural state for us; eventually we lapse back into our normal reactive attitudes. We do this as a matter of course—as a natural and necessary consequence of tending to our interpersonal human relationships.

Despite its partly alien character (or perhaps due to it), the objective attitude is also intimately associated with traditional notions of moral reasoning. According to Strawson, the nature and content of our moral judgments are a function of “the sympathetic or vicarious or impersonal or disinterested or generalized analogues of the reactive attitude.... They are reactions to the qualities of others’ wills, not towards ourselves, but towards others.” They are appropriately considered moral judgments because they can be objectively assessed on another's behalf:

The generalized or vicarious analogues of the personal reactive attitudes rest on, and reflect, exactly the same expectation or demand in a generalized form; ... that is the demand for the manifestation of a reasonable degree of goodwill or regard, on the part of others, not simply towards oneself, but towards all those on whose behalf moral indignation may be felt, i.e., as we now think, towards all men.\(^\text{62}\)

Thus, Strawson conceives of moral judgments as resulting from an essentially objective enterprise, undertaken by, and directed toward, appropriately reactive beings interacting with one another within the larger moral community of which they are a part. On this view, while we may attempt to interact with nonmembers of the moral community by adopting a purely objective attitude that allows us to conserve our emotional resources, the permanent disassociation from reactive attitudes implies a disassociation from assigning moral praise and blame as well. We reserve our moral judgments for those individuals who we deem to be part of the moral community and only members of the moral community are able to truly feel their force. Though we may formalize the collective judging process such that we attempt to approach questions of

\(^{62}\) Ibid., 71.
blame and praise from an objective, impersonal perspective, this perspective can only be temporary as long as we are all part of the same moral community. For, to judge someone morally culpable is just to assert that certain reactive attitudes toward that person, e.g., indignation, are justifiable.

Strawson’s requirement that we see moral responsibility in terms of our interpersonal relationships is part of his strategy to defeat the incompatibilist’s argument that the truth of determinism means traditional practices of praise and blame are inherently unjust. Strawson describes the processes we go through when making and receiving moral judgments in this way:

The concepts we are concerned with are those of responsibility and guilt, qualified as ‘moral’, on the one hand—together with that of membership of a moral community; of demand, indignation, disapprobation and condemnation, qualified as ‘moral’, on the other hand—together with that of punishment. Indignation, disapprobation, like resentment, tend to inhibit or at least to limit our goodwill towards the object of these attitudes, tend to promote an at least partial and temporary withdrawal of goodwill; they do so in proportion as they are strong; and their strength is in general proportioned to what is felt to be the magnitude of the injury to the degree to which the agent’s will is identified with, or indifferent to it. (These, of course, are not contingent connections.) But these attitudes of disapprobation and indignation are precisely the correlates of the moral demand in the case where the demand is felt to be disregarded. The making of the demand is the proneness to such attitudes.63

His description of the nature of moral responsibility is grounded in the importance such attitudes and beliefs hold for us. His theory rests on “how much it matters to us, whether the actions of other people—and particularly of some other people—reflect attitudes towards us of goodwill, affection, or esteem on the one hand or contempt, indifference, or malevolence on the other.” Reactive attitudes and their objective analogues, he argues, are such an essential part of our human experience that it would

63. Ibid., 77.
be irrational for us to renounce them even if we were able to (which most likely we are not).

For Strawson, a serious problem arises when incompatibilists argue that the truth of determinism means we should cease our ordinary practices of expressing moral responsibility in terms of praise and blame and adopt instead a purely objective attitude much like the one we reserve for nonmembers of our moral community. Part of the problem is that the incompatibilist approach fails to appreciate “that our actual practices of moral praise and blame ... serve to express a variety of feelings and attitudes, such as gratitude, resentment, and indignation, liability to which is essential to participation in most of the types of human relationship that we value most deeply.” Moreover, Strawson argues that we are not able to pick and choose which reactive attitudes we will allow and which we will reject. Rather, we either have to deny our expressive natures altogether or accept that we are emotionally reactive beings who are able to circumscribe, but not completely eliminate, our expressions of praise and blame. If one accepts the latter position, Strawson concludes, then the truth of determinism is irrelevant to the question of moral responsibility because moral responsibility on this view does not require any such metaphysical grounding. Strawson’s approach requires only that we “try to keep before our minds something that is easy to forget when we are engaged in philosophy ... viz. what it is actually like to be involved in ordinary interpersonal relationships ... .”64

64. Ibid., 64.
V. Socially sanctioned demands and the moral community

Strawson’s focus on the nature of meaningful human relationships as a means to justify our moral judgments in general is helpful to the civilian problematic because it offers a similar opportunity for political scientists to move beyond questions of individual freedom and political agency when debating whether civilians should bear moral responsibility for their country’s wars. Membership in a moral community connotes duty-generating bonds that often have little to do with one’s own choosing, the most notable example being the nuclear family; of course, as Strawson points out in his article “Social Morality and Individual Ideal,” “we can regard ourselves as members of many different social groups or communities, some of which fall within others.”

Strawson’s theory of social morality tries to accommodate the myriad groups we belong to and the, sometimes conflicting, socially sanctioned demands that are made on us without sacrificing the sanctity of the individual. Whether we like it or not, according to Strawson, we are constrained by our need for a “community of rule,” “in which certain expectations of behaviour on the part of its members should be pretty regularly fulfilled: that some duties, one might say, should be performed, some obligations acknowledged, some rules observed.” He asserts, “everyone on whom some form of socially sanctioned demand is made has an interest in the existence of some system of socially sanctioned demands” particularly in conjunction with mediating between conflicting “ideal images” and attempting to realize our own individual “ideal image,” by which I believe is meant something like our own (or adopted) ethical worldview.


66. Ibid., 5.
Thus, Strawson locates the ‘moral community’ at the intersection of Ethics and Morality:

The region of the *ethical* ... is a region of diverse, certainly incompatible and possibly conflicting ideal images or pictures of a human life, or of human life; and it is a region in which many such incompatible pictures may secure at least the imaginative, though doubtless not often the practical, allegiance of a single person. ... Any diminution in this variety would impoverish the human scene.

The moral sphere, on the other hand, refers to

... the idea of rules or principles governing human behaviour which apply *universally* within a community or class. The class may be variously thought of as a definite social group or the human species as a whole or even the entire class of rational beings. 67

Respect for the individual is included in the concept of moral responsibility within a community by stipulating the necessity for those upon whom socially sanctioned demands are made to be meaningfully included in the decision-making process:

That is to say, if I have no foothold at all in the sanctioning part of society and if no interest of mine is safeguarded by the system of demands to which I am subject, then in fulfilling a demand made upon me, I may indeed, in one sense, be doing what I am obliged to do; but scarcely what I am *morally* obliged to do. 68

These considerations yield an analysis of universal human interests that are so fundamental and so general as to be required by any community: “Here at least we have types of moral behaviour which are demanded of men as men because demanded for and by men as men.” 69 Therefore, even with concern for individual interests as paramount,

> It remains true that the recognition of certain general virtues and obligations will be a logically or humanly necessary feature of almost any conceivable moral system: these will include the abstract virtue of justice, some form of obligation to mutual aid and to mutual abstention from injury and, in some form and in some degree, the virtue of honesty. 70

67. Ibid., 4, emphasis mine.

68. Ibid., 9, emphasis in original.

69. Ibid., 11, emphasis in original.
With the proper respect for the individual secured, morality can be defined in the context of community:

The fundamental idea is that of a socially sanctioned demand made on an individual in virtue merely of his membership of the society in question, or in virtue of a particular position which he occupies within it or a particular relation in which he stands to other members of it.\(^71\)

Understanding morality in this way

... makes it relatively easy to understand such notions as those of conscientiousness, duty and obligation in a concrete and realistic way. These notions have been treated almost entirely abstractly in moral philosophy in the recent past, with the result that they have come to some our contemporaries to seem to be meaninglessness survivals of discarded ideas about the government of the universe. But as most ordinarily employed I do not think they are that at all. There is nothing in the least mysterious or metaphysical in the fact that duties and obligations go with offices, positions and relationships to others. The demands to be made on somebody in virtue of his occupation of a certain position may indeed be, and often are, quite explicitly listed in considerable detail. And when we call someone conscientious or say that he has a strong sense of his obligations or of duty, we do not ordinarily mean that he is haunted by the ghost of the idea of supernatural ordinances; we mean rather such things as this, that he can be counted on for sustained effort to do what is required of him in definite capacities, to fulfill the demand made on him as student or teacher or parent or soldier or whatever may be.\(^72\)

Strawson’s project to wrestle the concept of moral responsibility back down to earth from the lofty metaphysical heights in which it had become entangled succeeds due to the clarity of his conceptions and his appeal to our everyday understanding of the connection between relationships and responsibility. On Strawson’s account all Americans can be considered as members of one large moral community because we share a common homeland with common laws and customs with which we are all, more or less, familiar. We also share numerous culturally and historically significant influences on our individual lives that we don’t share with people from other countries.

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70. Ibid., 12.
71. Ibid., 6-7 (sic).
72. Ibid., 7.
All these communal elements of our lives create understandable expectations for each one of us to be guided by (in varying degrees) principles of Justice, Reciprocity, and Honesty toward each other. I believe this is roughly what Strawson means by socially sanctioned demands. Strawson reminds us that, “‘Sanction’ is related to ‘permission’ and ‘approval’; and also to ‘power’ and to ‘penalty’. [Therefore, a] socially sanctioned demand is ... a demand made with the permission and approval of a society; and backed, in some form and degree, with its power.”73

This is not to say that socially sanctioned demands and special duties can be reduced to whatever is covered by the law, though many duties and laws overlap. Particularly with respect to the relationship between morally autonomous strangers, expectations will tend to be reserved for fairly generic interactions whose more serious infractions are dealt with through the legal system. These are the kinds of stark moral obligations that are necessary for a society to survive, such as obeying particular traffic laws and abiding by legal contracts, in that sense they form the skeletal framework of the moral universe. If the only ties that bind two people (or two groups of people) are those that describe the larger moral universe they share, then they can be considered morally autonomous strangers in the sense I mean to equate with the counter-thesis introduced in section II of this chapter.74

But, of course, the moral responsibilities that accompany our interpersonal relationships are often supported and sustained by the larger community without any recourse to the legal system. In terms of the metaphor above that the general duties morally autonomous strangers have toward one another constitute the skeletal

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74. Chapter 3, sections II and III, in this chapter.
framework a moral universe needs to merely survive, interpersonal relationships can be seen as the flesh and blood—or due to the inherent messiness of most relationships, a more accurate description may be as the guts—necessary for a society to thrive and to have meaning. Bonds such as marriage, co-parenting or co-conceiving a child, being part of a family, working together, etc. create interpersonal relationships that generate special duties from one’s self to one or a few others (and vice versa) apart from the larger society. Nevertheless, even members of the larger moral community will judge those interpersonal relationships according to standards elemental to the skeletal framework and by judging, help to sustain them or to tear them down.

No doubt, the easier it is to identify particular aspects of a relationship, such as biology or the ideal of marital fidelity, that constitute or create morally meaningful bonds familiar to the larger community, the easier it will be to clarify and justify the special duties that accompany our interpersonal relationships—and the more likely it is that the larger community will want to weigh in on the moral culpability of those people who fail to honor their obligations. In chapter four, I propose that the principal-avatar model justifies certain socially sanctioned demands of the civilian such as authentically engaging with military matters. Before moving on, however, to complete the framework for an alternative theory of civilian responsibility, I want to incorporate into it a checklist of sorts found in Samuel Scheffler’s Strawsonian assessment of “relationships that one has reason to value.”

VI. **Socially salient reasons for valuing relationships**

In his article “Relationships and Responsibility,” political theorist Samuel Scheffler argues from a Strawsonian perspective for a “nonreductionist” account of special responsibilities arising from our morally meaningful relationships. Scheffler’s argument
appeals to our human nature as “social creatures, and creatures with values” from which fact he concludes “insofar as we have good reasons to value our interpersonal relations, we have good reasons to see ourselves as having special responsibilities.”

Responding to a voluntarist objection “that it would be unfair if [special] responsibilities could be ascribed to individuals who had done nothing voluntary to incur them,” Scheffler points out that we already incur general moral responsibilities “without our having voluntarily incurred them.” Most ethical theories posit any number of moral duties that we incur just in virtue of being human, such as the duty to always treat others as ends in themselves or the duty to maximize the greatest amount of good for the greatest number of people. Along these lines, Scheffler states,

I regard the person with whom I have the relationship as capable of making additional claims on me, beyond those that people in general can make. For to attach noninstrumental value to my relationship with a particular person just is in part ... to be disposed, in contexts which vary depending on the nature of the relationship, to see that person’s needs, interests, and desires as, in themselves, providing me with presumptively decisive reasons for actions, reasons that I would not have had in the absence of the relationship.75

Of course, this does not mean that merely believing one has a relationship to another person is enough to generate special duties. For Scheffler, only “socially salient reasons” can sanction the kind of relationships that necessarily give rise to special duties.76

Unfortunately for the purposes of the civilian problematic, Scheffler’s concept of socially salient reasons is purposefully vague. A defense of nonreductionism as a theory of special duties, much like Strawson’s socially sanctioned demands, requires flexibility with respect to the particulars in order to accommodate the many distinct interpersonal relationships that exist; as a result, he is not here able to adjudicate particular

76. Ibid., 197.
relationship claims. Interpersonal relationships existing within the larger moral universe are fluid by nature: people constantly come together by plan and by chance; many of these unions then separate—some after a short time together, others after decades; and many who have separated will reunite, though often the new relationship is changed somehow—and sometimes almost imperceptibly—by any number of compelling contingencies. Thus, “the conception of the conditions under which people may be said to have reasons to value their relationships to others” and the reasons themselves are subject to change over time and circumstances.

What stays constant in Scheffler’s theory, however, is the participation of the larger moral community, both in determining what reasons count as socially salient as well as in specifying and enforcing the particular duties that are generated by those relationships. Echoing Strawson’s claim that we can be morally responsible to others even when we are not always free to determine whom those others are, nonreductionism holds that “the moral import of our relationships to other people does not derive solely from our own decisions.” 77 As a result, it is possible for two people to be morally bound to one another and yet one or both parties fail to recognize or accept the responsibility. Nevertheless, regardless of whether people actually value the relationships they have reason to value, special responsibilities may still arise from those relationships. For example, in most cases, parents who abandon their children are still considered responsible for them. Conversely, it is possible for people to believe they have moral responsibilities to others that in fact they don’t actually have, as in the case of stalkers or religious proselytizers.

77. Ibid., 205.
Although Scheffler refrains from putting “forward a conception of the conditions under which people may be said to have reasons to value their relation to others,” it is important to note that his account does insist on *some* conception of reasons, and, more specifically, on a conception of the conditions under which people may be said to have reasons to value their relations to others. ... nonreductionism does not itself put forward a conception of reasons. It’s claim, rather, is that many judgments of special responsibility are dependent on the ascription to people of reasons for valuing their relationship to others, so that any substantive conception of such responsibilities is hostage to some conception of reasons.\(^{78}\)

From which I take it to follow that the individual herself must *be able* to accept the reasons behind any socially sanctioned demand before she can be considered obligated. If the reasons that are given fail to resonate with her most profound interests on some level, her obligation to comply with the larger society’s expectations is doubtful, and her willingness to comply is even less likely. For Scheffler, it essential to remember that both the self and others are referenced in the concept of socially salient reasons: reasons that are important to the larger moral universe of which each individual is a contributing member. He is adamant that, despite a lack of complete freedom in choosing one’s relationships, “[n]o claims at all arise from relations that are degrading or demeaning, or which serve to undermine rather than to enhance human flourishing.”\(^{79}\)

Additionally, on Scheffler’s theory, relationship claims should appeal to *noninstrumental net reason*. Net reason refers to the final outcome one gets after weighing all the arguments, both for and against any particular relationship claim: if there are more reasons not to value a relationship than there are to value it, then that particular relationship does not generate special duties. And moral relationships must be noninstrumental, such that if one person treats another human being as a mere

\(^{78}\) Ibid., 200.

\(^{79}\) Ibid., 205.
thing, or a means to an end, rather than also always as an end in herself, then no special duties arise from that relationship either—it is not a morally meaningful relationship in the sense intended here.  

There are two more points of clarification that may prove helpful in supporting the relationship claim between soldiers and civilians put forth in the next chapter. First, Scheffler stipulates, “valuing my relationships with another person, in the sense that matters for nonreductionism, means valuing the relation of each of us to the other.” If I understand correctly, this means interpersonal relationships must be reciprocal, i.e., there should be socially salient reasons for each to value the other. For practical purposes, my focus in the dissertation is exclusively with the reasons civilians have to value soldiers and I take it as given that U. S. soldiers have socially salient reasons to value U. S. civilians. Nevertheless, I believe much of the argument in chapter four also supports socially salient reasons for soldiers to value civilians.

Scheffler’s second point of clarification is his claim that responsibilities generated by special relationships are not absolute, allowing for the possibility of being overridden by even more pressing moral duties. With respect to the civilian problematic, it is advisable to consider the relative importance of duties that may follow from a moral relationship between soldiers and civilians compared with other moral duties the civilian may incur as a result of her nonmilitary relations. In the next chapters, I contend that the relationship between soldiers and civilians has the potential to generate duties with which only a few intimate relationships can compete.

80. Ibid., 199. I will speak more about noninstrumental reasons in chapter four.

81. Ibid., 199-200. Scheffler also states that having reason to value a relationship is a sufficient but not necessary condition for special duties so that it is possible for special duties to arise from other sources as well as from our interpersonal relationships (he cites promises as one prominent example).
VII. Conclusions

While Scheffler restricts his discussion of special duties to “the abstract structure of a nonreductionist position rather than with a detailed accounting of the specific responsibilities that such a position would assign people,” his analysis, coupled with Strawson’s more general framework, proves most helpful in both grounding the relationship claim as well as in fleshing out the nature of obligations that might accompany such a relationship. In the following chapter, I argue that socially salient reasons having to do with identity and implication are sufficient to constitute a morally meaningful relationship between civilians and soldiers and in chapter four I present the case for the principal-avatar model.
I. Setting the stage

I have been arguing that recent attempts to hold American civilians morally responsible for the actions of the United States Military are too weak to be effective in the real world. In chapter one, I presented the civilian problematic as the impasse reached by contemporary theorists who believe civilians do share the responsibility for war and those who argue persuasively against this idea. In that chapter, I relied upon the arguments of Michael Walzer, Igor Primoratz and Neta Crawford to show the spectrum of positions regarding civilian culpability. To briefly recapitulate their debate, Walzer points to the less than ideal democratic circumstances in which we actually live as reason to absolve all civilians (as well as rank-and-file soldiers) save for a small cadre of intellectual elites; conversely, Crawford and Primoratz both argue for civilian responsibility with respect to war, though Primoratz targets a wider population than Crawford and advocates more stringent consequences for civilians who support or fail to protest against unjust wars.

I also showed in chapter one that Primoratz and Crawford both rely on the unwarranted assumption that civilians of modern democracies have a duty to the state to participate politically, and that failure to participate means they are morally blameworthy for injustices brought about by their nation’s wars. In addition to the damage done by mass alienation and disenfranchisement in the modern world, traditional ascriptions of civic obligation to the state are further undermined by the...
claims and critiques of classical liberalism. Liberalism insists that the state’s overarching purpose is to protect individual freedoms, which, in the real world, generally translates into support for market principles, individual rights, and personal liberty. The strength and popularity of these views are evidenced by their increasing prioritization in our day-to-day lives over putative obligations to abstract ideals such as the state or the Constitution.

And yet, there is something deeply unsatisfying about the idea of acquiescing to Walzer’s position, or to the liberal critique, on this matter. Thus, the dissertation was conceived from a desire to vindicate the common intuition that American civilians share some degree of responsibility for U.S. backed wars. After commenting on the overly narrow conceptions of responsibility and of morally responsible parties adopted on both sides of the debate, I concluded the chapter by suggesting that an alternative theory of moral responsibility based on the nature of our interpersonal relationships may be better suited to the task of justifying civilian responsibility for war.

The alternative theory I am proposing relies on two fairly uncontroversial premises and I began chapter two by presenting them in a simple syllogism:

1. Morally meaningful relationships give rise to special duties that each member of the relationship owes to every other member of the relationship.

2. Soldiers and civilians share a meaningful moral relationship with one another.

Therefore, civilians have certain special responsibilities vis-à-vis their relationship with soldiers. 83

83. Of course, as with most healthy relationships, the onus of obligation works both ways. Soldiers naturally have duties to civilians, protecting them from enemy invaders, for example; but this aspect of the relationship between soldiers and civilians is arguably self-evident and, at any rate, does not, I believe, bear on the argument I am presenting here.
Despite the intuitive appeal of the premises and the apparent soundness of the logic, the conclusion ought to be of some concern to us. Moral responsibility is prior to political responsibility but easily becomes political when efforts are made to institutionalize or otherwise coerce it. That is why any proposal promoting civilian responsibility for the military must appeal to relatively broad, and crystal clear, interpretations of morality, moral responsibility and the moral community. And it must not substitute intuition and popular appeal for careful analysis and solid evidence. Which is just to say that both premises require stronger theoretical support and the conclusion must be fleshed out far more substantively if it is to carry any weight in the real world.

Since the minor premise positing an interpersonal relationship between soldiers and civilians is so widely assumed and yet apparently has never been tested, I developed a viable counter-thesis to ensure that the premise was falsifiable in the first place; namely, that soldiers and civilians are morally autonomous strangers to one another. As morally autonomous strangers, they are still members of the same moral universal in the broader context, that is, in terms of being Americans (as well as in the even broader context of belonging to the human race) and as such they have certain moral obligations to treat each other with at least a minimal amount of ethical concern, but there is no special obligation weighing on civilians to prioritize the interests of soldiers, qua members of the state’s military, over their own.84

This position, I believe, is supported by liberal arguments defending individual freedom and autonomy. Moreover, the growing civil-military divide may be evidence that civilians actually do see their relationship with soldiers as one between morally autonomous strangers—no different than the civilian’s relationship with police officers,

84. Chapter 2, section III.
lawyers, or the pizza delivery girl. But if the counter-thesis is correct, and soldiers and civilians are merely morally autonomous strangers to one another, then the syllogism fails and the civilian problematic remains unresolved.

After offering what I consider to be the strongest possible defense for the counter thesis, I next laid the groundwork to defeat it beginning with the introduction of P.F. Strawson’s seminal work on justifying moral judgments in the face of devastating attacks on free will. Chapter two offers a more detailed account of the environment in which Strawson was working and the way in which he was able to make progress in a seemingly intractable debate; suffice it to say here that he succeeded in his quest by looking more closely at the mechanics—and importance—of our real world relationships. For Strawson, the individual’s relationship with the larger community is at the center of her moral reasoning; and the primacy of our “participant reactive attitudes,” like praise and blame, in identifying and justifying our moral judgments is proof that our capacity and tendency to morally judge one another is essential to who we are as a species and as individuals.

Strawson reminds us of the importance we place on our interactions with others, but he also states plainly something most of us tend to forget, namely that the individual is not the sole arbiter of what and whom she should value, even in her own “private” life. The socially sanctioned demands and special duties that obligate us to consider interests other than our own come from a place that, while not wholly outside ourselves, is far from self-contained. The larger community, in various tacit and informal ways (of course, in many explicit and formal ways as well), ultimately sanctions the particular interpersonal relationships within it; therefore, reasons to value one another in a particular relationship must resonate with the larger community as well. So, if soldiers
and civilians can be said to be in interpersonal relationships with one another, this means there are reasons for each member of the relationship to value the other; and it means that those reasons to value one another cohere not only with the individual ethical worldviews of both civilians and soldiers but also with the broader ethical parameters of American society as a whole.

In the last section of chapter two, I introduced Samuel Scheffler, a Strawsonian influenced political theorist, who provides a compelling defense for the major premise of the syllogism above and thereby completes the theoretical framework for an alternative solution to the civilian problematic. In addition to outlining Scheffler’s defense for a “nonreductionist” theory of special duties, chapter two highlights his insights for distinguishing between interpersonal relationships and, what amounts to essentially non-relationships—or, in chapter two terms, between morally meaningful relationships and morally autonomous strangers—that I will have recourse to below. To summarize the points most pertinent to this paper, Scheffler claims that only noninstrumental, socially salient net reasons count as reasons to value a relationship, which also means that it is possible for people to have morally meaningful relationships that they are unaware of just as it is possible to falsely believe one has a relationship where one does not. Furthermore, responsibilities generated by special relationships are prima facie, which is to say that it is possible that one’s duty to a person with whom they are involved in some morally meaningful way could still be preempted by some other, weightier, moral responsibility (or combination of other responsibilities), depending on the circumstances and the particular relationships and duties in question. Finally, Scheffler insists that “any substantive conception of such responsibilities is hostage to some conception of reasons,” by which I believe he means that in order to justify what
Strawson calls *socially sanctioned demands* of an individual, society must be able to produce the kinds of *socially salient reasons* that also resonate with the person of whom the demand is made, in other words, they must be reasons that *all* members in morally meaningful relationships can accept as reasons for valuing those relationships.

With the question before us, and the framework in place for analysis, my aim in this chapter is to conclusively justify the claim that a morally meaningful relationship exists between soldiers and civilians. I begin in the following section by introducing the methodology I employ to make my case, then, in section III, I review and clarify Scheffler’s criteria for morally meaningful relationships. As Scheffler’s account requires *noninstrumental socially salient reasons* for each member of a morally meaningful relationship to value the other, I offer two arguments to this end in sections IV and V respectively. Section IV contains the Argument from Identity in which I hold that issues of individual and institutional identity bind civilians and soldiers in morally meaningful ways; and, in section V, I present the Argument from Implication in which I argue that the necessary role American civilians play in U.S.-backed wars also constitutes appropriate reasons for each to value the other. The chapter concludes with a consideration of how the morally paradoxical nature of war impacts the division of labor in society. In chapter four, I present the principal-avatar model as the ultimate answer to the fundamental question set out below, that is, I argue that the most acceptable political conception of the civilian-soldier relationship is in terms of principals and their avatars.

**II. Methodology**

In chapter one of *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, John Rawls stipulates four roles of political philosophy the second of which he calls “orientation”: the attempt to fulfill a
community’s need for “a conception that enables them to understand themselves as members having a certain political status—in a democracy, that of equal citizenship—and how this status affects their relation to their social world.”85 In many ways, I see this as the project of the dissertation: to orient civilians and military personnel vis-à-vis their relationship with one another in such a way so as to clarify the intended, as well as de facto, nature of the relationship. To borrow even more heavily from Justice as Fairness, the “fundamental question” of my dissertation, though more narrow than Rawls’ concern with the broad parameters of justice in a well-ordered society, can be framed in a similar fashion as “what is the most acceptable political conception of the relationship between soldiers and civilians for people “regarded as free and equal and as both reasonable and rational, and ... as normal and fully cooperating members of society over a complete life, from one generation to the next?”86

Rawls’ idea of a political conception is one that has a “public basis of justification.” And this is consistent with a Strawsonian conception of the moral universe as well. Recall that both Strawson and Scheffler stress the need for individuals who are the subjects of socially sanctioned demands to be included in the process of determining what those demands are. I believe that the democratic ideals of reciprocity and equality, taken together, constitute an adequate check for public justifiability. It is not a coincidence that reciprocity and equality are also at issue in many of the complaints soldiers and their advocates have voiced recently. For example, soldiers often say that civilians are not doing their part to protect America and keep it strong; as a result, soldiers may feel resentful and underappreciated and these feelings are likely to

86. Ibid., 7-8.
intensify once the soldier leaves the military and attempts to reenter civilian life. I believe that with respect to the relationship between soldiers and civilians reciprocity and equality can only be achieved (if they are to be achieved at all) by paying close attention to problems arising from the morally burdensome nature of war. Owing to the unique work that soldiers do, the usual arguments about the inevitable division of labor in society will not hold up without serious attention to the particulars which I touch on below.

The assumption I am making throughout the dissertation is that how Americans see themselves in relation to their military—which is what I mean by civilians’ moral stances toward soldiers—influences civilians’ behavior in a number of important ways including whether they will protest certain wars, support increases in the military budget, or concern themselves with the many challenges soldiers face upon reentering civilian society. I have been guided throughout by Strawson’s account of the moral community and the role of our participant reactive attitudes towards each other when making moral judgments. Strawson’s ideas prompted me to look for common moral stances that soldiers and civilians take toward one another and, from that, extrapolate relationship models.

Research suggests that rank-and-file soldiers and civilians typically learn about their relationship to each other through a variety of indirect sources, but most prominently through avenues such as the media, cinema, literature, academia and political speech. The language, attitudes, and imagery employed by these various means of depicting the United States Military signal to American civilians the desired stance the messenger wants them to take toward soldiers. From my analysis, I have concluded that Americans, both publically and privately, have traditionally conceived of the civil-
military relationship in roughly four ways that I refer to as the *citizen-soldier*,
*professional-soldier*, *family member*, and *warrior-hero* models. The models were
derived from a variety of sources, including: political science and civil-military relations
literature; philosophical tracts; political speech; advertising for military recruitment and
support; first hand memoirs from soldiers and war correspondents; relevant fictional
and nonfictional literature, television shows, and movies; my friends’, as well as my
family’s and my own, (admittedly limited) interactions with American military
personnel over the years. Together with the *principal-avatar* model introduced in the
next chapter, the five models comprise a list of the most viable candidates to answer the
“fundamental question”: What is the most acceptable political conception of the
relationship between rank-and-file soldiers and civilians?

Looking ahead to chapter four, I present the *principal-avatar* model as the best
description of and prescription for modern civil-military relations, and I demonstrate
that it is the nature of this type of relationship to do what the historical models fail to do,
namely promote and sustain equality and reciprocity between the two parties. Before
arguing for a specific type of relationship, however, I must demonstrate that a morally
meaningful relationship exists in the first place. Therefore, I turn now to the arguments
from Identity and Implication to show that civilians have at least two types of socially
salient reasons to value soldiers.

III. *Socially salient reasons revisited*

Scheffler’s nonreductionist account of the special duties generated by our morally
meaningful relationships underscores the idea that meaningfulness often comes out of
the places where we are able to see not only *that* we intersect with others but also *how*
we do so. Thus, acknowledgment of such connections between soldiers and civilians
should constitute the kinds of noninstrumental socially salient reasons civilians have to value soldiers qua soldiers (and vice versa). Importantly, however, not all interactions between the two groups are equally meaningful. For example, one obvious reason someone might give for civilians to value soldiers is personal safety. But, whereas this may be considered a socially salient reason to value something, it is not sufficient for valuing someone.

Valuing soldiers only because they keep us safe means having only an instrumental regard for them—it means seeing soldiers as mere tools to be used for one’s own benefit rather than as ends in themselves. This is problematic both because it fails to cultivate the kinds of moral stances and reactive attitudes that will motivate civilians to change their behavior and, relatedly, because it implies that soldiers can be devalued when they are not actively protecting civilians. In fact, this misunderstanding of what it means to properly value soldiers may well be one of the leading drivers of the civil-military divide that has recently garnered so much attention. Given that many in the United States do not actually feel physically or materially threatened by foreign powers, and that many others who do feel threatened by America’s enemies are inclined to believe that U.S. military actions make Americans less safe rather than more safe, it is not so surprising that soldiers often feel abandoned by civilians, particularly upon returning to the civilian sphere.

To avoid these kinds of problems, Scheffler, like most ethicists, insists that all moral relationships must have noninstrumental reasons for each member of the relationship to value the other. This is not to say that instrumental reasons for valuing people are completely verboten, but the kinds of socially salient reasons typically thought to be required for meaningful moral relationships to exist are those that relate
the inherent, deeply personal qualities of two distinct people, or groups of people, to each other in some way that is meaningful to and respectful of both parties. This means that we must also be able to recognize the importance of our interpersonal relationships in terms that do not merely refer back to our own physical or material advantage.

Requiring noninstrumental reasons to value soldiers might lead some readers to object on the grounds that soldiers just are, essentially, *instruments* of violence; for, by the logic of Clausewitz’s and Huntington’s military insights, if war is the continuation of politics by other, necessarily violent and destructive means, then soldiers are the instruments of that violence.\(^87\) However, while this may be logically irrefutable, it neither subverts the need for, nor the ability to find, noninstrumental reasons for valuing soldiers. On most ethical accounts, the mere fact of a person’s humanity is sufficient to generate the requirement for this—even if that person also fulfills an instrumental role in society.\(^88\) In the case of soldiers and civilians, an appeal to Clausewitz and Huntington is actually quite helpful. This is because reducing war and its willing participants to their most morally contentious aspects, as both theorists do, narrows the field of inquiry into the nature of the civilian-soldier relationship—restricting it to the morally hazardous work that soldiers are generally called upon to do, and the particular way in which American soldiers go about doing that work. This means that rather than concerning ourselves with questions about whether, and if so, how

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87. Clausewitz, *On War*, 119. Huntington, *Soldier and State*, 13-14. Huntington writes more about the professional officer corps whom he defines as the *managers* of violence but not necessarily the *instruments*. My argument targets more the rank-and-file soldier although I think the distinction is nominal primarily because civilians are not often able to distinguish between the two groups. Also, it should be noted that soldiers are clearly not solely instruments of violence. They often operate in the capacity of emergency rescuers, etc. however, any non-violent uses for soldiers are purely byproducts of an institution that only exists in order to do violence.

88. There are numerous philosophical objections to this statement, I realize, but in every day terms I think this is fairly self-evident.
soldiers benefit (or fail to benefit) civilians, if we want to understand the nature of the relationship between the two, we should be asking questions about who the soldier is, *qua instrument of violence*. Specifically, we should be asking: What are the inherent character traits that define the soldier? Where did these traits come from? How were they instilled and how are they maintained? Why are they important; that is, how are they related to the work that soldiers do? And, finally, how do they relate back to and impact the civilian?

The last question bears additional comment. As I have attempted to make clear from the beginning, the focus of this chapter is to establish that there are socially salient reasons for civilians to value soldiers; I have merely assumed for argument’s sake that the relationship is reciprocal and soldiers have noninstrumental reasons to value civilians as well. Nevertheless, reciprocity is an important element of interpersonal relationships and one way to verify that a legitimate moral relationship exists, as opposed to a merely imagined relationship. Reciprocity can also be easily confounded with instrumental reasons, as might happen in quid pro quo relationships. For these reasons, it is prudent to clarify what I believe is generally intended by the role of reciprocity in morally meaningful relationships.

Recall that Scheffler’s anti-reductionism allows for relationship claims that may be false. For example, consider a case in which a man, believing himself childless, learns he has a young son. Although the unwitting parent falsely believed he was not in a meaningful moral relationship with the child, in fact, both the father and son had reasons to value the other—that is, there turned out to be good reasons why it should matter to both the father and the son who the other person is, in the noninstrumental sense suggested above—even before they were aware that the relationship existed.
Conversely, an artist’s ardent follower may falsely believe that she is in a real and meaningful relationship with the artist. The fan may even consider her appreciation of the artist’s talent as noninstrumental since it affords her, the fan, no obvious material or physical advantage. But it is difficult to see how the artist has reciprocal noninstrumental reasons to value that particular fan, qua fan. Certainly, artists require fans if they are to make a name—not to mention a living—for themselves, but these are instrumental considerations. As far as I have been able to discern, there are no obvious reasons why it should matter to the artist who her fans are in the relevant, noninstrumental sense. The inherent character traits that define the fan don’t necessarily impact the artist at all. Thus, the grounds for claiming a morally meaningful relationship exists are generally insufficient in such circumstances due to a lack of relevant reciprocity.\(^89\)

Returning to the relationship between soldiers and civilians, I believe that the strongest noninstrumental socially salient reasons civilians have for valuing soldiers (and vice versa) can be divided into two broad categories of identity and implication. The argument from identity is, simply put, that one reason for a civilian to seek a better understanding of soldiers is in order to gain a better understanding of her own identity. Viewing the soldier as a manifestation of the civilian means that the civilian should be able to recognize herself in the soldier—that is, she should be able to see some meaningful aspect of herself reflected in the soldier. The argument from implication posits that American civilians are morally equivalent (i.e., bear equal moral

\(^{89}\) Upon rereading this paragraph, it occurs to me that there is a way in which it may matter to an artist, in the relevant noninstrumental sense, whether or not her fans hold certain values. Consider, for example, the Dixie Chicks who ran into an identity crisis of sorts when they spoke out against President Bush and the war in Iraq and their fan base largely turned against them. Nevertheless, I think there is a loophole in there somewhere – possibly at least with respect to the apparent rarity of such kinds of occurrences.
responsibility) to American soldiers vis-à-vis war because civilians are necessarily implicated in soldiers’ work in at least three fundamental ways: as the source of, reason for, and moral judge of U.S. military action.

IV. Argument from identity

The overarching idea of the identity argument is that soldiers and civilians are connected through issues of identity in two interrelated ways: (1) the ideal soldier’s public image was deliberately crafted and inculcated with civilian values to reflect American ideology and the common man. The relative success of this mission is evidenced by the fact that for much of the world the American soldier is considered an accurate representation of most, if not all, Americans; and, (2) conversely, the American military ethos has so infiltrated mainstream culture that civilians necessarily confront it, though in various ways and to various degrees, when forming their individual identities. The complex nature of the military ethos and its fractured representation in the media and in fiction helps to obscure the many ways in which important elements of civilians’ individual identities are very much influenced and substantively represented by the military.

For this argument, I rely heavily on the communitarian theory of identity, made popular by theorists such as Alasdair MacIntyre and Charles Taylor because I believe it best accommodates Strawson’s analysis of the mechanics of moral reasoning as well as our common intuitions. In doing so, I hope to avoid difficult philosophical concerns about the relationship between identity and ethics without suggesting that those problems are thereby resolved. Identity is a complex notion with no end of political and philosophical entanglements so I should state upfront what will soon become clear on
its own, that I am employing a markedly simplified version of the concept and hoping it will suffice for practical purposes.

David Shoemaker summarizes the communitarian perspective:

All proper conceptions of the self are dependent on social matrices. In order to understand the self, we must view it both in its relation to the good and in its relation to other selves, for two reasons. First, we have an indispensable ability both to have certain moral intuitions and to articulate the grounds of those intuitions, and this ability presupposes the existence of what Taylor calls evaluative frameworks, frameworks also presupposed by our concept of personhood. So crucial to understanding who I am is understanding where I stand in moral space: my identity is bound up in, and at least partially constituted by, my strong attachments to a community that provides the evaluative framework within which I am able to articulate what is good and valuable.90

By similar reasoning, the American military’s identity can, arguably, be conceived of as a product of its commitment to a common ethos—albeit one more complex than most people might suppose, rooted in classical republicanism, frontier myths, and a belief in American exceptionalism, as I shall demonstrate shortly. Given that identity is also a function of how others perceive us, the identity argument can now be presented as: (1) the identity of the individuals serving in the United States’ Armed Forces is intended as

an idealized version of the American civilian, and thus also as a significant element of the national identity; (2) the identity of the American military is distilled from three relatively distinct normative frameworks from the civilian population; (3) civilians living in the United States today form their identities in relation to the American military ethos. This is emphatically not to say that civilian identities conform to the military ethos, but rather that among the many other normative frameworks civilians must confront when forming their identities the military ethos, as an important part of the national identity, is a significant force with which civilians must contend, consciously or subconsciously. (4) Therefore, there exists a reciprocal relationship between soldiers and civilians such that the normative frameworks from each sphere exert great influence on the identities of the individuals in the other sphere. (5) Premises (1) and (3) constitute non-instrumental, socially salient reasons for civilians to value soldiers.91

To better understand the point I am trying to make requires seeing the United States as more than just a collection of geographically bounded regions with a common law. Its unique history and relatively rapid rise to the top of the global power hierarchy speak to a nation whose whole is quite by far greater than the sum of its parts. Gordon S. Wood, noted historian of the American Revolution, contends that due to the unparalleled diversity of America, its identity could never have emerged in the traditional manner of other nations. Rather, Wood asserts, “The American nation had to be invented or contrived.” As a result, “To be an American is not to be someone, but to

91. The identity argument, like the implication argument to follow, supports the principal-avatar model introduced in the next chapter by reinforcing the idea that a near-identity relationship exists between soldiers and civilians; but, regardless of whether a principal-avatar model is adopted, the identity argument, as does the implication argument, stands on its own as a noninstrumental socially salient reason for civilians to value soldiers.
believe in something." This way of the conceptualizing a kind of ethnic identity for the new republic was made manifest in America’s armed forces. From the inception of the United States’ professional military, the character traits that defined the American soldier were rooted in the beliefs that gave the American people a common identity—an uneasy melding of, often clashing, language, attitudes, and imagery.

Originally, much was borrowed from the Enlightenment Era, such as a reverence for the concepts of civic humanism, rationalism, equality, human rights, the division of labor and the ideal of the citizen-soldier. The citizen-soldier as a modern civil-military relations model is discussed more thoroughly in chapter five, but for now I note only that the ideal soldier from the Founders’ perspective, was in fact not really a soldier at all. Despite wide spread support for most of the wars fought early on in defense of the new republic, it is generally accepted that the Founding Fathers and the majority of their constituents were far from comfortable with the notion of standing armies, preferring instead state militias during times of peace and a volunteer army of citizen soldiers in times of war. Even after the Founders capitulated to the idea of standing armies, however, the eventual concessions leading eventually to the world’s most powerful professional military were hard fought and begrudgingly granted in those early years. Military historian Russell Weigley suggests that it was a deeply entrenched distrust of military might that resulted in the Constitutionally enshrined doctrine of civilian control of the military:

Their stance reflected that of the nation at large. ... In ideology, the American people remained suspicious of permanent military forces as inherent threats to


93. See e.g., Huntington, Soldier and State, 163ff.
liberty. Anti-military rhetoric reflecting that ideology remained a staple of American political discourse through the Jacksonian era and beyond.\textsuperscript{94}

Over the years, the United States Military has made concerted efforts to retain and strengthen the Founders' ideological commitment to the republican values that Wood argues helped forge the American identity. Vestiges of these ideals were implanted and have taken root in the various protocols and propaganda that the military relies on for cohesion, including in the lack of a strong distinction between officers and enlisted men.\textsuperscript{95}

And yet, the United States Military would not be a uniquely American institution (and likely not as successful) if classical republicanism were its only defining characteristic. Understanding the United States Military today requires a more substantive understanding of the way in which it came into being—some might argue as an expression of American ambivalence considering the antipathy so many early Americans felt for the notion of standing armies. In this regard, classical republicanism is only the first ingredient. The influence of values and characteristics associated with the frontier myths of American expansionism helps to explain the juxtaposition between images of the U.S. Military as a cohesive unit of loyal patriots versus a rogue band of self-sufficient warrior-heroes, gritty antiheroes, and iconoclastic cowboys. Reading accounts of early American expansionism, it quickly becomes clear that the de facto citizen-soldiers responsible for settling the west were in many ways the antitheses of the Forefathers' ideal citizen-soldier: rough and uncouth, uneducated and unbending. But according to some historians, these were the very qualities that enabled success. Rather than following hierarchical protocol, waiting for orders from above (evidently a fatal strategy for many

\textsuperscript{94} Weigley, 223.

\textsuperscript{95} Huntington, \textit{Soldier and State}, 167.
British troops in the Revolutionary War), frontier soldiers were quick to learn the Indian strategy of dispersal, sabotage, and ambush. In this way, the ethos of American expansionism added elements of grit, danger, and individualism to America’s public image and these character traits and values seeped into the American soldier’s DNA.

English professor and Director of American Studies at Wesleyan University, Richard Slotkin, explains the frontier myth in this way:

The Myth of the Frontier is our oldest and most characteristic myth ... According to this myth-historiography, the conquest of the wilderness and the subjugation or displacement of the Native Americans who originally inhabited it have been the means to our achievement of a national identity, a democratic polity, an ever-expanding economy, and a phenomenally dynamic and ‘progressive’ civilization.96

In Gunfighter Nation, Slotkin tracks the use of the Frontier Myth in the tactics of twentieth century American war campaigns—both foreign and “domestic”—and in the cultural zeitgeist of the same period. He identifies the Myth as a prime source of orientation for civilian attitudes toward military violence. By most accounts, the nature of the violence visited on Indian and Latino peoples during expansion was especially vicious but the consistent insistence on its moral and practical necessity turned an instinctive repulsion of such violence into something more like begrudging pride for those brave enough to enter the fray. The ubiquitous nature of frontier myths in mainstream American culture also helps to explain how civilians have come to identify with the myths, and thus by extension, with the military.

Central to the argument from identity is the far closer relationship between soldiers and civilians in that era particularly given the porous boundaries of the professional military—comprising various combinations of state militiamen, loose “associations of volunteers, bounty men, draftees, and substitutes,” and of course, the

96. Slotkin, Gunfighter nation, 10.
“regular army”—and the isolated nature of life on the frontier. Related to this is the close relationship between the military and the creation of a unique national identity. Military historian Robert Wooster argues, “military affairs, in their varied dimensions, were of fundamental importance to the American frontiers and ... the United States Army, as the federal government’s most visible agent of empire, was central to that experience.” As Wooster pointedly reminds us, the early military’s efforts at national development ensured that, in the final analysis, it would be the American flag flying over the West.

Wooster underscores the blurred lines that separated military personnel and civilians at the time our national identity was being forged on the frontier, but he may be guilty of perpetuating a myth that Slotkin argues does not accurately portray American history. According to Slotkin, the structure underlying the Frontier Myth—separation and isolation, regression to a primitive state, and spiritual regeneration through savage violence—is based on a misrepresentation of history that is grossly inaccurate thus rendering the Myth’s functional efficacy grossly inadequate. Yet, as Slotkin observes, American mythmakers have succeeded in firmly planting the Frontier Myth in the pantheon of our nation’s historical lore largely by means of the Myth’s most popular manifestation: the American Western. Slotkin writes,


98. Ibid., xii.

99. According to Slotkin, the savage violence of our past as retold in the Frontier Myth was not the cause of our need to rationalize and justify our history, as is typically assumed to be the case, rather it was our inherent need to justify our past atrocities that caused us to look for, and create if necessary, mitigating circumstances: we believe our history was particularly violent and our modern sensibilities balk at that thought, but if the Frontier Myth is true then the violence was necessary and therefore morally justifiable. We lament its necessity while accepting it all the same, and by accepting it, in essence, we consent to it and condone it.
While Slotkin’s critique of the Frontier Myth is fascinating and tangentially relevant, the more pertinent contribution from *Gunfighter Nation* is the clear picture it offers of the symbiotic relationship in those early years between mainstream culture, political maneuvering and national identity and their one abiding commonality: the United State’s Military.

The idea of the Frontier Myth as genuine history began taking root long before the advent of the film industry. In the first chapters of *Gunfighter Nation*, Slotkin speaks to the ubiquity of frontier themes in mass entertainment, particularly dime novels, since the settling of the first American colonies. One mass entertainment venture in particular became tremendously popular and—in conjunction with the legacy of Theodore Roosevelt—tremendously influential with respect to legitimizing the Frontier Myth as history. Buffalo Bill and his *Wild West Show* gained an audience after being introduced in popular dime novels but quickly grew into a massively successful stage production that “recreated” the authentic West for eager audiences. From 1883 to 1916 “Buffalo Bill’s Wild West” dominated public entertainment. In addition to consistent patronage from the masses, the show also enjoyed political and military support. The fictional character, Buffalo Bill, and the man who portrayed him, William F. Cody, were both hailed as the representative American everyman by commentators, and the Wild West was featured as a “…typically American’ display” during several European tours.

100. Ibid. 311.
101. Ibid., 87.
The stellar, over three-decade long run of “the most important commercial vehicle for the fabrication and transmission of the Myth of the Frontier” also dovetailed neatly with Theodore Roosevelt’s rise to the top of the political elite. Roosevelt’s credentials as an “authentic” representative of the west came not only from having been a respected historian and author of several books about the frontier but also from his time as a rugged frontiersman in his own right, thriving in the harsh conditions of the borderlands and eagerly practicing what he would soon be preaching.

Slotkin points to the similarities between Roosevelt’s arguments for American imperialism as presented in his essay “Expansion and Peace” and “the historical argument” laid out in the program for the Wild West. Underscoring this synchronicity was a significant change in the Wild West program at one point in which “Custer’s Last Fight” was replaced by a recreation of the Battle of San Juan Hill less than a year after the actual battle took place. Additionally, whether by chance or contrivance, Roosevelt’s “First Volunteer Cavalry regiment was best known by its nickname, ‘the Rough Riders’”—a select cadre of hand picked volunteer soldiers from the upper classes of American aristocracy and “the most celebrated single regiment of the war”—whom Roosevelt famously led to glorious success in the Spanish-American War.

Thus, in addition to Buffalo Bill’s own Congress of Rough Riders of the World, the Wild West would now feature a re-creation of Roosevelt and his “real-world” Rough Riders in action as well.

102. Ibid. 87, 66.

103. Ibid., 82. Slotkin tells of a correspondence between Roosevelt and Cody on the matter in which Roosevelt is claimed to have denied purposefully coopting the name; however, upon Cody’s incredulity that the Wild West show had nothing to do with Roosevelt using the name, Roosevelt apparently conceded that it was possible that some of the men who had encouraged Roosevelt to use the name may themselves have been influenced by Buffalo Bill.
Slotkin suggests that the overlap in symbolism results in a kind of symbiosis between politics and culture:

This exchange of names between the agents of real-world imperialism and the myth-makers of the Wild West defines a significant cultural and political relationship. ... By the terms of this exchange, the categories of myth shape the terms in which the imperial project will be conceived, justified, and executed; and the imperial project is then re-absorbed into the mythological system, which is itself modified by the incorporation of the new material. One effect is clearly that of glorifying the “imperialization” of the American republic. But the use of Wild West imagery also has the effect of “democratizing’ the imperial project—or rather, of investing it with a style and imagery that powerfully (if spuriously) suggests its “democratic” character. ...

Since its transition from stage to cinema, the Frontier Myth has remained influential as an ostensible artifact of our history, a mainstay of our entertainment, and a rallying cry for our wars. Slotkin documents the way in which arguments on both sides of debates concerning foreign wars and domestic crises have found parallel expression in Washington and Hollywood using the language of the Frontier Myth. Not as a result of collusion, he explains, but rather as a result of a shared set of underlying beliefs about our past.

For the purposes of adequately conceptualizing the identity of the United States Military, I believe one more normative framework is required: *American exceptionalism*. Though the term has been used in a variety of ways, not all of which are consistent with one another, I still believe it is the best term to use for my purposes. I employ the idea of American exceptionalism here to invoke a rigid belief in the infallibility and superiority—of American intellectual, moral, and military power. It is best understood as a psychological principal in which American people are equated with all that is just and good in the world, which also means that when we employ our military it is necessarily

104. Ibid., 83.

105. Ibid., 350, 642-43.
for just and good reasons. This principle is a special case of the apparently universal need for humans to see themselves as morally good, or at least decent, people. In the American version, we seem to need to see ourselves—collectively and individually—as more than just good, we want to see ourselves, and be seen by others, as heroes.

Though certainly already alive and well at the outset of the American Revolution, American exceptionalism, as I am using it here, is a separate, though related and overlapping, set of values from classical republicanism and the frontier ethos. Whereas the latter frameworks are primarily concerned with the soldier’s behavior towards others—for example, what she owes her country and her fellow countrymen or to what extent she is willing to break the rules in order to succeed against native populations—American exceptionalism refers to a more inward stance about how one should see oneself as an American and with respect to the rest of the world. With respect to soldiers, American exceptionalism imbues their work with the moral, intellectual, and military authority necessary to succeed in battle and after the battle. Although, in fact, American exceptionalism is a fallacy that fosters denial and other dysfunctional coping strategies, it does offer soldiers a buffer against military critics and occasionally against their own consciences. It is also the most obvious category of overlapping frameworks shared by both the military and civilian spheres. This normative framework can be observed in Peace Corps volunteers’ attitudes towards the people they help just as easily as in soldiers’ attitudes. It is also the medium by which ordinary Americans are able to take pride in the accomplishments of extraordinary Americans.

By describing the foundations of the United States Military ethos, I have tried to show that the American military presents itself to the world as a representative sampling of the entire nation. Soldiers in the United States Military are not only intended to
represent the civilian population, they are also intended to be instantiations of that population. Both the citizen-soldier bound by civic virtue and the frontiersman bound by sheer determination share a deeply entrenched reverence, as civilians, for the land they have sworn to protect as soldiers. Soldiers are in fact drawn from the civilian population and many return to civilian life after they serve—they are a subset of the population whose only justification for existing is in helping to maintain, or improve, the conditions necessary for the civilian population to thrive. Though they belong to two separate worlds, soldiers and civilians are meant to be interchangeable.

The communitarian theory of identity that I have been relying on also implies that living in a country with the world’s largest and most powerful military inevitably influences civilian identities. I think this must be true but articulating how the military’s identity manifests itself in civilian identity formation is difficult to do. One reason for the difficulty is the already confounding nature of identity in and of itself. I tried to simplify the concept with respect to military identity by focusing on the major normative frameworks that inform the military ethos. While this seems reasonable to do within the scope of institutional identity, it would likely be far too unwieldy, if not impossible, to do for civilian identity. But it may not be necessary. I suggested above that the military ethos is part of the national identity and therefore to be an American, or to identify as an American, means identifying in some way with the military ethos. I don’t think it necessarily means agreeing with or even consciously adopting the military ethos, however. Consider Germany, for example. Even today many Germans will admit to the onus they still carry with them because of who their predecessors were and many Germans work hard to make amends for the harms caused by their ancestors. Identifying with the American military ethos because one is American may simply mean
acknowledging that one’s fate is intertwined somehow with the military, or that the military belongs to the people, whether the people want it to or not.

V. Argument from implication

The fact that American civilians are intimately implicated in their military’s operations is the second category of noninstrumental socially salient reasons American civilians have for valuing American soldiers. Being implicated in military operations means playing a necessary role in ability of the military to operate in the world to the extent that it does, and as such it binds soldiers and civilians to one another even more tightly, signaling a kind of moral equality with respect to war.106 Specifically, and regardless of whether American civilians can actively or directly influence their government’s military activity, civilians are implicated in war as the ostensible reason for the use of military violence, the actual source of the instruments of violence (i.e., the manpower), and, practically speaking, the final arbiters of whether the violence was justified. These points of influence are evident, as I will try to demonstrate below, when one considers from a pertinent perspective the founding of the United States, the doctrine of civilian control of the military, the political speech of government and military leaders with respect to American wars then and now, and the reactive attitudes of contemporary American soldiers toward their civilian counterparts.

War and violent rebellion constitute an essential mechanism by which the modern state, and in particular the United States, came into being. The military making of the United States implicates civilians because America’s earliest wars and rebellions were justified by arguments that they were necessary in order to avoid the dangers of anarchy and oppression, and to ensure justice and liberty for all. Since wars were being

fought for the sake of everyone, everyone had a stake in how the war was carried out and everyone had a stake in who won. But the fundamental role war has been able to play in the founding and maintaining of the United States would not have been possible without a relentless culling of civilian youth for military fodder. So, in addition to acting as a reminder that one's civilian’s status is secure only to the degree that the military is already adequately manned, the prominent role of war in the founding and maintaining of the United States implicates American civilians because it suggests that the United States could not have been fought and won, and cannot be maintained, without them.

And not just contingently decided by whether or how a person participates in the political process, civilians are also a theoretically necessary element of modern democratic war, without which democratic nations cease to exist and the justification for war evaporates. Clearly, a nation that openly wages war against the interests or support of its own civilians could not survive long as a democracy. To guard against precisely this possibility, the Founders constitutionally bequeathed the professional military to the People. Civilian control of the military is considered an important constraint on military might. By holding the purse strings and requiring military leaders to answer to civilian leaders, civilians are better able to protect themselves from coercion and violence by the military. As Professor Kohn explains, “the point of civilian control is to make security subordinate to the larger purposes of a nation, rather than the other way around.” Given that a democratic state such as the United States is ostensibly predicated upon the will of the people, “civilian control allows a nation to base its values and purposes, its institutions and practices, on the popular will rather than on the
choices of military leaders.”107 It should be noted that, practically speaking, the doctrine of civilian control of the military concerns elite civilians and politicians who actually interface with military leaders; but rank-and-file civilians are implicated in military affairs by the doctrine because its purpose is to ensure the safety and relative liberty of all Americans against foreign and domestic threats. The doctrine should also serve as a reminder of the putative costs involved in maintaining the conditions necessary for civilian life to flourish even as it insists upon ultimate civilian ascendancy over the military.

In modern times, political rhetoric (for both foreign and domestic audiences) implicates civilians when it makes reference to the American population in order to justify military operations. For example, humanitarian interventions often get explained by reference to the fact that the American people can’t just stand idly by when human rights are being so egregiously violated. And, the reactive attitudes of soldiers implicate civilians by calling attention to the lack of reciprocity on the part of civilians. Soldiers are often reported to be fairly critical of civilians, claiming they are “nasty,” “selfish,” “lazy,” etc. and these attitudes imply that soldiers expect civilians to participate in contributing to the greater good (by which I believe is generally meant that they believe civilians should contribute to maintaining the United States’ superior position among super powers) and that they are often disappointed in those expectations. But, if civilians are in fact implicated in their nation’s military operations, then they have a moral duty to consider the effects of their actions (or lack of action) on the individual service members going into battle. Even the inadvertent enabler has a moral duty to

acknowledge her role in the country’s military operations and the part she plays in the particular tasks that particular military personnel perform.

VI. The moral burden of war

Motivating much of my argument for a new perspective on civil-military relationships is the idea that the morally hazardous nature of war requires all civilians to acknowledge the role that they play—willingly or not—and the consequences of their actions or inactions. This is the corollary of a principle largely absent from debates about military ethics: that civilians may delegate the physical labor of military operations to their agents, but the moral burden of war is not similarly transferable. Failure to adequately acknowledge one’s role in war theoretically deprives one of the relative moral autonomy traditionally required for meaningful membership in a moral community. As it turns out, the actual outcome in the United States today is trending more toward relegating soldiers to a type of (admittedly, relatively well remunerated) second-class citizenship by means of self-segregation and isolation.

There have always been complaints about unfair distribution of benefits and burdens with respect to who serves and who doesn’t; various attempts were made over the decades to make military service less selective and more evenly spread out. Though not consistently upheld in earlier years, conscription appeared to alleviate at least some of the problem because, ostensibly at least, every family ran the same risk of having a father, son or brother called away to war; and therefore, ostensibly, everyone had occasion to contemplate the reasons for going to war in the first place. The call to war, whether it is oneself or a loved one who is being called, forces a person to confront her

108. There are discussions about the ethics of paying a substitute to fight in one’s stead but the arguments against this practice tend to focus solely on the injustice of unevenly distributed benefits and burdens rather than on whether one may delegate one’s moral responsibility.
own most deeply held beliefs about who she is and what her moral priorities are—for what, if anything, she is willing to die, and perhaps more difficult to know, whether, and if so for what, she is willing to kill.

But, after the draft definitively ended in the wake of the Vietnam War, opportunities for this crucial confrontation between one’s ideal self and the real world were significantly reduced for most American civilians. Consequently, despite that the United States Military continues to engage “the enemy” and innocent foreign civilians continue to get stuck in the middle, and despite that foreign cities continue to be decimated by American artillery and American soldiers continue to come home in body bags, ending the draft appears to have ended much of the vocal opposition to the injustices of war as well, at least domestically. It is as if Americans interpreted ending the draft as permission to divest themselves of any responsibility at all for military actions, including even the responsibility simply to be informed.

Nevertheless, despite one’s intentions or desires to remain detached from a state’s political and military machinations, even the passive civilian population has some degree of influence over a large swath of soldier-centric issues, including which wars our military engages in and for how long, what tactics our soldiers use in battle, who qualifies to serve in the military, how prisoners of war are treated, how soldiers fare upon returning to civilian life, and how military personnel perceive civilians. War is a phenomenon that we do not appear able to escape even while claiming to seek peace, but the apparent inevitability of war does not absolve us of responsibility for the part we play in its continuance. Given the overwhelmingly destructive costs of war, whatever role one plays, no matter how small or inadvertent, requires introspection and justification. Even if we play an unwilling or involuntary role in military operations, we
still have control over how we play our part, for example, whether we act with integrity or in denial and whether we treat our service members with respect and dignity or with apathy and disdain.

Unfortunately, the seemingly simple solution to reinstate the draft doesn’t stand up to close scrutiny. The reality concerning conscription is that it doesn’t do the work advocates argue it does. It isn’t really able to fairly navigate the complicated machinations people—especially, wealthy and powerful people—go through to avoid service for themselves and their loved ones. Moreover, there is a concern that mandatory universal service isn’t able to evoke the kind of patriotic fervor necessary for success. And perhaps the biggest obstacle to bringing back the draft is that today’s all-volunteer force is working far too well to imagine any politician attempting to reinstate conscription in the near future. But even if the draft were able to somehow succeed in overcoming every obstacle mentioned above, the nature of the work is such that there would always be a small number of people who did the dirty work of a larger, relatively oblivious, society.¹⁰⁹ To wit: by most accounts, the size of the United States Military is steadily decreasing and those who do serve are coming from a more and more narrowed pool of volunteers, which is not surprising if one considers that the needs of the professional military today require a far more selective group of enlistees than in the past. Exacerbating the problem (and exacerbated by the problem) are the differences between military culture and civilian culture including social values, attitudes toward each other, and personal connections to the military. The evidence suggests that these differences are driving the two spheres further apart, segregating the military from

¹⁰⁹. For a compelling allegorical account of this dynamic, see Ursula Andrews’ Those Who Walk Away From Omelas. Andrews’ fable was intended as a critique of utilitarianism and does not allude to military service really, but the message is nonetheless relevant.
mainstream society and fostering a hostile relationship between the two groups. Peter Feaver and Richard Kohn’s volume *Soldiers and Civilians* offers empirical grounding for the claim that a “civil-military gap” exists and is reason for concern.\textsuperscript{110} Though acknowledging that the problem has not yet become a crisis, the authors contend that it is serious enough to warrant immediate attention.

According to Feaver and Kohn, the real threat to national security, if the divide is not attended to, is not that the military will turn on society as much as that society will cease to support and adequately fund the military. Lack of public support would seriously undermine the effectiveness and efficiency of the military. Among other things, it is not difficult to imagine that the growing lack of public support could worsen mental health problems in the military and further complicate reintegration of military personnel into mainstream society after leaving the military. In response to their findings, Feaver and Kohn recommend a three-tiered solution: increase the military presence in society, *improve civilian understanding of the military*, and include a more comprehensive account of civil-military relations in the curricula of military schools.\textsuperscript{111} The hope is that with greater exposure to the realities of military operations, civilians will take a greater interest in the political processes that justify war in the first place; and they will be more likely to ensure that soldiers are fairly treated upon their reentry into the civilian sphere.

Improving civilian understanding of the military is arguably the most contentious and difficult of the recommendations to implement. Feaver and Kohn suggest various methods to increase awareness in civilians, but almost all of their suggestions rely on

\textsuperscript{110}. Feaver and Kohn, *Soldiers and civilians*.

\textsuperscript{111}. Ibid., 469-473.
targeting political leaders, government officials, and the civilian elite. What they fail to adequately address is the need to educate *rank-and-file* civilians, and not just about military operations but about the civil-military relationship itself and the intransience of one’s moral responsibility for war, because efforts to educate civilians are not likely to get very far if civilians fail to see how they are personally involved every time their military is deployed. Thus, rather than perpetuating the practice of passive instruction on the civilian-soldier relationship, efforts to improve civilian understanding of the military should include explicit expectations of rank-and-file civilians vis-à-vis rank-and-file soldiers based on a clearly articulated relationship model.

In chapter four, I argue that the principal-avatar model is best suited for such an undertaking as it is the only model that consistently promotes equality *and* reciprocity between the two parties. Once civilians are able to sincerely accept their de facto foundational role *underlying* military operations, and conscientiously confront the soldier as a manifestation of their own priorities, their own values, their own history and their own present day lives, they should also, thereby, be able to satisfy the conditions for the relative moral autonomy theoretically necessary for meaningful citizenship. And this, in turn, is likely to spur a more organically inspired desire on the part of civilians to participate in the political processes of going to war.
CHAPTER FOUR

Principals And Avatars

I. Introduction

The principal-avatar model, as I am framing it, refers to the undefined yet discrete set of language, attitudes and imagery associated with (though not strictly determined by) Hindu and digital avatars and their principals. In short, the principal-avatar model is intended as a conceptual guide to the moral stance rank-and-file civilians should take toward rank-and-file soldiers vis-à-vis American military combat. The model stipulates the essential nature of the relationship—a near identity yet ultimately hierarchical relationship—that in turn implies a range of appropriate reactive attitudes like pride and shame, and offers a way in which to explain the inappropriateness of others like hero-worship or indifference. The model is “applied” anytime the civilian-soldier relationship is described in principal-avatar terms.

Ideals and models often work in subtle ways as suggested by Strawson’s insistence that most of our relationships come with pre-attached duties and obligations: the parent-child relationship, the married spouses relationship, and the employee-employer relationship are all examples of symbolic shorthand for a set of expected attitudes and behaviors depending on one’s role in a particular relationship. Though the actual participants in any of those types of relationships may behave in any number of atypical ways, the information that is automatically relayed by means of naming the relationship as one kind or another offers a theoretical platform of sorts on which to begin a conversation about one’s actual relationships in the real world and the duties, or socially sanctioned demands, that they generate.
Like Rawls’ use of abstract conceptions and idealizations, the principal-avatar concept is employed as a means of abstracting from the particulars of both soldiers’ and civilians’ lives that are not pertinent to the fundamental question.\textsuperscript{112} As stated, the model is abstract—retaining only relevant aspects of soldiers’ and civilians’ lives—and ideal—retaining only positive elements of each role that they play—but the principal-avatar relationship is also a highly accessible concept and growing more familiar to Americans due to the popular use of digital avatars for work and leisure purposes. This matters because any attempt to encourage civilians to change their perceptions of soldiers must employ language and conceptual ideas that can be readily grasped by the intended audience—the principal-avatar model is able to do this.

While the citizen-soldier, family member, warrior-hero, and professional-soldier models (briefly introduced in chapter three and described in more detail below) have something of a home-court advantage, each already having been used to varying degrees as a civil-military template, the principal-avatar concept is not altogether alien. Admittedly, however, because digital avatars are relatively new concepts (despite their steadily growing popularity) and Hindu avatars are ancient ideas no longer prevalent in mainstream America, the language and behaviors associated with avatars and their principals are not as intuitive as those of the other models. Thus, I rely not only on definitions and descriptions from both the old and the new, but also on more generalized definitions and usage to illustrate the essentials of the principal-avatar relationship as it relates to the civilian-soldier relationship. For example, one dictionary defines “avatar” as “an embodiment or personification, as of a principle, attitude, or view of life” which, in terms of the principal-avatar model, can be understood to mean...

\textsuperscript{112} Rawls, \textit{Justice as Fairness}, 8.
that soldiers are the embodiment of civilians’ principles or the personification of civilians’ attitudes toward foreign relations and armed conflict. This, in turn, implies that civilians ought to take moral responsibility for those principles and attitudes.

In the following section, I distill the principal-avatar model into a set of defining elements or guidelines derived from the commonly expressed and agreed upon language, imagery, and participant reactive attitudes of the larger moral community in relation to those terms. This definition is then used to assess the model with respect to Strawson’s socially sanctioned demands and with respect to how well it accommodates equality and reciprocity given the special nature of war and inevitable divisions in labor discussed in the previous chapter. I describe the other four models in more detail in section four and argue in section five that the principal-avatar model offers better reasons for preferring it above any of the historical models.

II. Language, attitudes and imagery

Let me begin this section by emphasizing that I am using the term avatar here purely as a conceptual tool to help progress the debate regarding civilian responsibility for war. My purpose in positing the soldier as the civilian’s avatar is to underscore the far more personal nature of the relationship than that which is typically conceived. When I first began this project I struggled to articulate a few key intuitions that were driving my research, primary among these were the way in which rank-and-file soldiers and civilians are essentially interchangeable in the eyes of democratic governments and that civilians share equal (or close to equal) moral responsibility for their nation’s wars. Even after conscription ended the ideal American soldier was still intended to represent the ideal American citizen; and, if ever there should be a shortage of volunteer soldiers,
government and military leaders would not hesitate to reinstate universal conscription. At some point it occurred to me that the relationship I was conceptualizing and trying to describe to others was much like the relationship between principals and their avatars.

The term *avatar* is especially apt for reasons having to do both with its meaning in ancient Hinduism as well as with its modern day use as an on-line digital representation of oneself. Though avatars do represent their principals (deities in Hinduism or computer users in the virtual world, for example), the idea of an avatar should connote something closer to an incarnation of the principal as opposed to a more impersonal, third party intermediary. Whereas Hindu avatars are earthly incarnations of the god Vishnu sent to Earth to protect the good and punish the evil, and digital avatars are online personalized icons that allow the computer users they represent to express previously unexplored aspects of their inner selves, military avatars, on my account, are U.S. rank-and-file soldiers ideally conceived as embodying certain essential aspects of their civilian principals. Thus, unlike the politician or the lawyer, this view takes the soldier as more a *representation of* rather than a *representative of* the civilian.

Most importantly, I would like to make quite clear that my intention is not to trivialize (or glorify, for that matter) the difficult work real soldiers do; nor do I assume that civilians are ever able to adequately grasp the true combat experience. Clearly, if a principal-avatar understanding of the civilian-soldier relationship is to be effective, it will have to respect the fact that actual people—living, breathing, fallible human beings who often wind up making sacrifices to a degree that few American civilians have had to contemplate—inhabit the uniform and suffer the very real physical and mental consequences of war. This is a concern that I take seriously but one I am confident a
relationship-based theory of moral responsibility modeled on principals and avatars can accommodate.

In fact, far from undermining the real men and women serving in the military, I believe that the avatar metaphor has the power to elevate the human element of the relationship since even in Hinduism and the digital world avatars are entities that interact with the real world and whose presence cannot be taken for granted. The language employed and the imagery that is evoked with respect to avatars often conveys a sense of dimensionality and efficacy, and these qualities are reinforced by the special skills with which the avatars are endowed (ostensibly by their principals) and that allow them to impact their world in ways principals are unable to. In his book *The Advaitic Theism of the Bhagavata Purana*, Daniel P. Sheridan describes a particular type of Hindu avatar—the “play manifestation”—that he believes is most commonly evoked by the term:

Bhagavan creates the different worlds and appears ... in the guise of gods, human beings and animals. His purpose is to protect by means of his quality of pure being ... the universe and his creatures. ... Bhagavan also comes to earth “in deference to the wishes of the devotees.” The devotees would be bereft of their innermost self without Bhagavan.114

As Sheridan notes, there are many types of avatars documented throughout the ancient texts of Hinduism, but, as they are all manifestations of the Supreme Being, they all share the same heroic qualities. Regardless of the physical form, be it fish, boars, bears, or dwarfs, they, “by their unequalled valour and might, rescued the whole world from the dominion of malignant fiends.”115

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114. Sheridan, *Advaitic Theism*, 65, emphasis mine; “The cosmic manifestations are concerned with the universe and the presiding manifestations with the states of a person’s mind,” (Ibid.).

James O'Donnell employs a more general sense of the concept in his book *Avatars of the Word: From Papyrus to Cyberspace* but the imagery also evokes dimensionality and purpose: “I take ‘avatar’ throughout in the sense of ‘manifestation’—the form in which some abstract and powerful force takes palpable shape for human perception.”

Film and Media Studies Professor Bob Rehak’s description of the digital avatar in the gaming world is similarly evocative:

> [The avatar’s] behavior is tied to the player’s ... At the same time, avatars are unequivocally other. Both limited and freed by difference from the player, they can accomplish more than the player alone; they are supernatural ambassadors of agency....

Because the avatar concept inherently connotes the presence of a singular force interacting with one’s conventional self, a force that commands attention and respect, comparing soldiers to avatars or ascribing avatar characteristics to soldiers is not likely to elicit much rebuke from military personnel.

Necessarily, the avatar concept speaks to another central aspect of soldiering in the real world: limited freedom. At its core, the avatar—whether Hindu, digital, or otherwise—lacks the requisite autonomy to be entirely its own person; similarly, albeit to a far lesser degree one may hope, the soldier ceases to be a fully morally autonomous individual when she is in uniform.

In addition to pledging unconditional obedience to the military hierarchy, American soldiers are bound by a commitment to the just war tradition and to the Constitution’s provision for civilian control of the military. While the civilian sphere promotes, and arguably even requires, individuality the military

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117. Rehak, “Playing at Being.”

118. I don’t mean to imply by this that the civilian (or the soldier once she takes off her uniform) is ever fully autonomous in the literal sense. I am also aware that many civilians are constrained by the rules and standards of their profession in ways that impinge on their moral autonomy.
sphere is intended to represent a commitment to values that are common to all, like justice and equality. The person who fights for the United States is expected to step outside of herself, to sacrifice her own interests for the greater good. The hierarchical structure and authoritarian nature of the military ensures the obedience of soldiers and further secures civilian control of the military while the norms and values soldiers are taught to inhabit are believed to give them the fortitude required to endure the physical and mental brutalities of combat. Every minute of every day that they are in uniform, soldiers are expected to practice—and so are judged on how well they observe—rules of conservation, obedience, physical and mental fitness, honor and integrity.¹¹⁹

The subordination of military power to the civilian population not only helps to ground the principal-avatar metaphor by limiting the autonomy of soldiers as suggested above but also by allowing civilians to play a significant role in determining soldiers’ quality of life. Digital avatars, by definition, imply an essential element of user influence in order to distinguish them from mere icons. Whereas computer icons are relatively static impersonal pictures or symbols provided by developers to assist users in navigating the Internet, digital avatars are essentially users’ proxies and so they must reflect, or inhabit, some aspect of the individuals they represent. Professor Laetitia Wilson attributes the ability to imbue digital avatars with real life significance to the user’s influence over various aspects of the avatar’s existence,

[An avatar is] a virtual, surrogate self that acts as a stand in for our real-space selves, [and] represents the user. The cyberspace avatar functions as a locus that is multifarious and polymorphous, displaced from the facticity of our real-space selves.... Avatar spaces indisputably involve choice in the creation of one’s avatar; there is substantial scope in which to exercise choice and create meaning....¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Of course many, if not most, fail to achieve such lofty goals on a consistent basis, but then they must bear the consequences of failing to live up to their superior’s expectations. See, e.g., “Dishonesty is common in military, study finds” in Orlando Sentinel Monday, February 23, 2015.
The ability to customize (within certain more or less fixed parameters) one’s own digital avatar, on this account, is not unlike the ability to choose how one’s military looks in terms of gender, race, and sexual orientation. In fact, from the wars they fight in to the people they fight with, civilians impact soldiers’ lives both on and off the battlefield, during active service, and upon returning to the civilian sphere (where soldiers often experience their greatest challenges). If Professor Wilson’s insights into the relationship between digital avatars and their users are applied to the civil-military relationship, then these points of influence are the loci where civilians should look to find meaning in their relationships with soldiers.

III. **Socially sanctioned demands**

One of the enduring hallmarks of Strawson’s work is his commitment to clarity and common sense. For Strawson, the fact that each of us requires the broad framework of some sort of larger society in order to prosper, and even in order to realize our individual ethical worldviews, means that we can understand moral concepts such as integrity, responsibility and conscientiousness in the fairly commonplace terms of *socially sanctioned demands*. Strawson is not above employing complex concepts to work out his ideas, including his calculation that any adequate theory of social morality must include “the abstract virtue of justice, some form of obligation to mutual aid and to mutual abstention from injury and, in some form and in some degree, the virtue of honesty,” but he points out that the duties and expectations that accompany our various

120. Wilson, "Interactivity or interpassivity."
positions and interpersonal relationships within the greater society are often easily accessed and understood.\textsuperscript{121} Strawson notes, 

There is nothing in the least mysterious or metaphysical in the fact that duties and obligations go with offices, positions and relationships to others. The demands to be made on somebody in virtue of his occupation of a certain position may indeed be, and often are, quite explicitly listed in considerable detail. And when we call someone conscientious or say that he has a strong sense of his obligations or of duty, we do not ordinarily mean that he is haunted by the ghost of the idea of supernatural ordinances; we mean rather such things as this, that he can be counted on for sustained effort to do what is required of him in definite capacities, to fulfill the demand made on him as student or teacher or parent or soldier or whatever may be.\textsuperscript{122}

Applying this idea to my model means that the duties and obligations civilians acquire because of their relationship to soldiers can be understood as the expectation that civilians act toward soldiers as principals are typically expected to act toward avatars.

I will talk more about how principals are expected to behave with respect to their avatars shortly, but first I would like to stress that the obligations civilians incur according to a principal-avatar framework are obligations to real people rather than to the abstract concept itself. My model presents a way for actual civilians to understand their obligations vis-à-vis actual soldiers in the real world. The fact that civilians are obligated to real people offers the kind of visceral appeal Americans are more likely to respond to—one way or another—versus the more anemic tactic of holding civilians responsible to the state or the Constitution. The model implies a near-identity relationship between real world soldiers and civilians that I believe already exists but has yet to be fully realized. Even those civilians who are tempted to reject such claims outright are more likely to invest more time and effort into better understanding what exactly is being said because the appeal made by the theory is clearly personal—it is an

\textsuperscript{121} Strawson, “Social Morality and Individual Ideal,” 12.

\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 7-8.
appeal to each person’s individual sense of self that, if accepted, could have life-altering consequences. It is, perhaps, not unlike being informed as an adult that you have a twin or a clone you never knew about. Regardless of whether the idea frightens, offends, or amuses you, chances are that you will want a little more information to be sure of the facts.

With respect to expectations generated by the civilian-soldier relationship there is still much more scholarly work to be done, but a starting assumption is that a conceptualization of soldiers as avatars entails affective concern for the soldier’s wellbeing on the part of the civilian that is consistent with the commonly associated language, attitudes and imagery Americans have (or have access to) regarding principals and avatars. In order to fully employ the model, one must bear in mind that certain participant reactive attitudes are more appropriate than others depending on the kind of relationship in question; for example, given that the avatar is a representation of the principal herself, adoration and gratitude are inappropriate reactive attitudes for principals to have toward their avatars. We tend to look askance at people who openly adore themselves and it sounds nonsensical for a person to say she feels gratitude toward herself or that she is indifferent to herself. But attitudes such as pride and shame, concern and even anger can be appropriate attitudes to hold toward oneself in certain circumstances.

Perhaps the most challenging expectation generated by the ideal principal-avatar relationship is for the principal to attain something approximating a first-person perspective vis-à-vis her avatar. 123 This is essentially what distinguishes the

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123. When I say that “the civilian-principal” has duties to “her soldier-avatar,” or use language of that nature, I mean that every American civilian has individual duties to understand the real lives of soldiers in general from a perspective that is as if the civilian were herself a soldier. For a reasonable, psychologically
relationship from a mere principal-agency focus of the type promoted in contemporary civil-military relations literature. The principal-avatar model emphasizes the near identity relationship between soldiers and civilians, created by a shared national identity and their moral equality vis-à-vis war; but the nature of the principal-avatar relationship is such that the principal retains moral custody of her avatar, by which I mean that the principal-civilian is held morally responsible for—because she is identified with and as the source of—the public image and behavior of the avatar-soldier. But authentically assuming moral responsibility for something surely requires a deeper understanding than the level of understanding the average American civilian currently has about the average American soldier. Given the nature of the work that soldiers do and the effect that work can have on soldiers’ mental and physical wellbeing, civilians must acquire a more visceral understanding of soldiers than previously sought. To this end, civilians must avoid relying on cursory assumptions and secondary sources and instead confront the soldier and her work directly—this is something of what I mean by attaining a first person perspective.

Necessarily, on this model, there cannot be one or even a few prescribed ways for civilians to respond since civilians of modern democracies are necessarily individuals with diverse and often contradictory beliefs. It should also be noted that from a principal-avatar perspective it isn’t necessary for civilians to make an always difficult, and often arbitrary, judgment on a particular war’s legitimacy, then actively support the


124. See, for example, Feaver, “The Civil-Military Problematique.”
wars one deems just and protest those deemed unjust (and hope one’s decision is, and continues to be, supported by the larger community). How someone acknowledges the relationship, i.e. whether or not, and in what way, a civilian changes her behavior, will depend on her own assessment of what that relationship means to her. Of course, since the appeal for civilians to authentically acknowledge their relationship to soldiers is deeply personal, civilians can be expected to actually respond to such an appeal in a variety of ways, from the subtle to the outrageous to the complete lack of any response whatsoever, depending on their own individualities and their own sense of self. There is no particular obligation that all civilians must honor uniformly beyond sincerely, or authentically, acknowledging that the relationship exists; but, it may also be expected that civilians who sincerely conceive of soldiers as their military avatars will naturally view the prospect of war in more personal terms.¹²⁵

Ultimately, the hope is that the near-identity element of the principal-avatar model will prompt the civilian to consider that the degree to which she cares about her own image in the larger global community should correspond to the degree to which she is concerned with the public image of the American soldier. The appeal is more than just a concern with one’s material or physical wellbeing (though there is certainly that instrumental element to consider elsewhere); it speaks to a deep-seated sense of self that most Americans value in relevantly non-instrumental ways.¹²⁶

¹²⁵. By “sincerely acknowledging” I mean to invoke Sartre’s distinction between acting in good faith versus acting in bad faith, or deceiving oneself, which is what civilians are doing when they deny the principal-avatar-like relationship to soldiers.

¹²⁶. As I see it, civilians such as pacifists who do not want to be identified with U.S. Military values, or who do not want to be seen as in a principal-avatar relationship with American soldiers have a moral and practical responsibility to publically separate themselves from that relationship to the greatest possible extent. Some ways that such civilians may respond to the relationship might include: working to tweak or change the soldier’s public image (i.e., taking greater control of one’s avatar as, for example, activists do by agitating for allowing openly homosexual or transgender individuals into the military or allowing
IV.  Four historical models

In chapter three, I stated that there were four historical models for civil-military relationships: citizen-soldier, family member, warrior-hero, and professional-soldier. In this section, I describe these models in more detail and, in section V, I show that the language, attitudes, and imagery associated with the other models, and the socially sanctioned demands generated by them, do not promote equality and reciprocity between soldiers and civilians as well as does the principal-avatar model.

*citizen-soldiers*

In ancient Greece and Rome, and on the classical republican model in general, service to one’s country was the mainstay of good citizenship; and serving in the military was the highest service one could offer. Of course, there were always men who could not (or would not) fight but by and large the expectation and high regard for military service was universal. The prevailing thought, prior to the institutionalization of professional standing armies, was that military service was necessary for one to fully experience true citizenship. The martial virtues, on this view, were the means by which man’s higher and nobler faculties were exercised and developed. For this reason, military service was often a prerequisite for political office. Naturally, civilian citizens (and non-citizens) held their warriors in the deepest regard, either desiring to emulate them or to benefit from their exalted position in some way. This relationship was made highly visible by the many public celebrations and award ceremonies honoring warriors and the level of every day respect these early citizen soldiers were accorded.

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female soldiers to serve in active combat roles); working to replace one’s own avatar-soldier with another type of avatar, e.g., an avatar-peace activist; or, moving to another country, though this has obvious complications and can not be taken lightly.
In his book *The Idea of America*, Gordon Wood argues that one of America’s defining beliefs was born out of the republican morality wielded by the Revolutionaries and their descendants:

When fused with Protestant millennialism, it gave Americans the sense that they were chosen people of God, possessing peculiar qualities of virtue, with a special responsibility to lead the world toward liberty and [democratic] government.\(^{127}\)

Values and ideals such as “integrity, virtue, and disinterestedness,” were adopted from the ancient Greek and Roman republics, claims Wood, as a countercultural rebuke against the licentiousness and corruption the Revolutionaries saw in the monarchy.\(^{128}\)

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Wood argues, “for educated Britons on both sides of the Atlantic ... [classical republicanism was] the principal source of their public morality and values. All political morality was classical morality.”\(^{129}\)

Prominent within this ideology is the assumption that citizens have an obligation to the state to participate in political life and to defend their country when called upon to do so. The widely held ideal of the citizen-soldier initially encouraged the Founders to argue against the need for a standing army in the new republic. Despite widespread support for most of the wars fought early on in defense of the new republic, it is generally accepted that the Founding Fathers and the majority of their constituents were far from comfortable with the notion of standing armies, preferring instead state militias during times of peace and a volunteer army of citizen soldiers in times of war. In addition to being considered unnecessary due to the geographical advantages of the United States, standing armies were also tainted by their association with British

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\(^{127}\) Wood, *The Idea of America*, 326, cf. 322: “For the term ‘republicanism’ we today have to substitute the word ‘democracy,’ or we won’t understand what was meant in the eighteenth century.”

\(^{128}\) Ibid., 65.

\(^{129}\) Ibid., 67.
aristocracy and despotism; they represented sharp divisions between classes and allegiance to the Crown, precisely that from which the colonists were trying to escape. According to Samuel Huntington, in his seminal treatise *The Soldier and the State*, the Founders believed that ideally the citizen-soldier would defend his new nation, leaving his home and family only temporarily, the loyal citizen would be eager to fight for his country and able to commit himself admirably to the cause. Upon almost certain victory, the citizen-soldier would then put down his rifle and pick back up his plough to resume his civic life, secure in the knowledge that he is an integral part of something bigger than himself.

As it turns out national security concerns eventually broke through the biases against standing armies but the Founders attempted to block any possible military *coup d’etat* or other internal military threats by establishing, within the Constitution itself, the principle of civilian control.130 Historian Russell Weigley credits Jefferson and Madison specifically with laying the foundations for modern civil-military relations. Weigley argues that it is largely as a result of their anti-military ideology that fears of a military coup today are virtually nonexistent. It is also, no doubt, to the Founders’ credit that the ideal of the citizen-soldier is firmly entrenched in the American military ethos and continues to dominate discussions of civil-military models. Although he is not an uncritical advocate of the ideal, Krebs shows that even with today’s all-volunteer force the citizen-soldier ideal is evoked over its modern alternative, which he calls the employee-soldier ideal, in at least three areas: how soldiers and veterans narrate their own service, how they and “the fallen” are represented in political rhetoric and in the media, and how special rights are claimed and granted (or denied) “on the basis of

130. Weigley, 223-225.
special obligations performed.”

Krebs argues that the true source of the citizen-soldier’s political power is:

... as mythic tradition, legend, and ideal .... It is because of the citizen-soldier ideal—because of the citizen-soldier’s privileged cultural status—that veterans and minority groups have been able to offer moving and even effective claims on the grounds of battlefield sacrifice.

family-members

World War II marks the golden age of civil-military relations when the two spheres worked together most harmoniously. It also coincides with an era in which the general population discussed military operations more often and civilian-soldier relationships were publically modeled with far greater frequency than they are today. Patriotic slogans and cinematic propaganda depicted the ideal soldier as the boy next door—in essence, the citizen-soldier as family-member—doing his duty with pride just as the larger community did it its part in turn. Every patriotic individual had a part to play and was given every opportunity to pitch in for the war effort one way or another. Vestiges of viewing the military in this intimate and often familial way can still be found in contemporary culture, for example, “Bring our boys home!” is a familiar rallying call that remains a popular protest slogan today for civilians who want to support “their” soldiers in general but not a particular war.

132. Ibid., 159.
133. One telling example is the big band song “Kiss the Boys Goodbye” exhorting young women to be affectionate to departing soldiers as part of their patriotic duty, though to be fair, the song does allow for women who don’t feel romantically toward a young man: they “can always kiss him in a sisterly way.” This song can be found on an appropriately named compilation CD, Songs That Won The War: A Salute to the Stagedoor Canteen, 1972, 1994 Stanyan Records.
professional-soldiers

By most accounts, the political fallout from the Vietnam War led to a culture of, if not quite secrecy about military operations, then something like a “don’t ask don’t tell” policy. Politicians came to realize that civilians quickly got weary of hearing about war; and without being fully cognizant of the details, but given a certain amount of time and a certain amount of losses, the public often abruptly withdrew their support. By the time the draft was officially rescinded, it was clear to the political and military elite that military operations ran more smoothly without excessive civilian oversight.

Around this time, recruitment ads started promoting the ideal of the professional soldier, touting individualistic slogans like “an army of one” and “be all that you can be.”\(^{134}\) I have opted for the term professional-soldier over employee-soldier in order to capture the more normative nature of the military ethos. Huntington stresses the professional nature of the military officer who, by virtue of being a professional, acquires a special moral responsibility to work toward the benefit of society. Failure to abide by the ethical principles of one’s profession is grounds for expulsion from that profession. For example, a physician is no longer a physician by Huntington’s standards if he uses his skills to harm society. According to Huntington, “The responsibility to serve and devotion to his skill furnish the professional motive.”\(^{135}\) On this view, then, the officer corps of the U. S. Military comprises professionals who have as their client the People of the United States.

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The popularity of the professional-soldier model is, I believe, due to the appeal of its simple underlying principal-agent structure. Political scientist and civil-military relations expert Peter Feaver characterizes the relationship between soldiers and civilians simply as one between delegates and their agents. According to Feaver, the relationship between a citizen and the military is no different than that between the citizen and her political representative, or between any agent and his delegate. He writes,

People may choose political agents to act on their behalf, but that should in no way mean that the people have alienated their political privileges. Most of democratic theory is concerned with devising ways to insure that people can remain in control even as the business of government is conducted by professionals. Civil-military relations are just a special extreme case, involving designated political agents controlling designated military agents.¹³⁶

warrior-heroes

Around the same time that the professional-soldier model gained prominence, the soldier as a warrior-hero was also evoked in political speech and in appeals for supporting military members post-service, such as in television advertisements for the Wounded Warrior Project, a contemporary advocacy group for battle-wounded soldiers reentering civil society.

V. Problems with historical models

Krebs has concerns about the overly militaristic conception of good citizenship that the citizen-soldier ideal promotes, but the problem in terms of civil-military relations is that the traditional citizen-soldier ideal actually dissolves the civilian-soldier relationship

¹³⁶ Feaver, “Civil-Military Problematique,” 153, 168-69. Feaver argues for a theory of “American civilian control” of the military that he refers to as “the delegation-agency focus” in which the “civil-military problematique … is about the delegation of responsibility from the notional civilian to the notional military. … “ Feaver only suggests an outline of the benchmarks such an alternative theory should reach, which is likely the reason for his failing to discuss the problems associated with delegating moral responsibility for war.
completely by conflating the two groups. If every citizen is also expected to defend her country as a soldier when called upon by her state to do so, then there is no analytical distinction between citizens who fight and those who don’t. Presumably, those who don’t fight (or otherwise actively and officially help to defend the nation) aren’t citizens and thus have no corresponding obligations. Those who are citizens, and therefore sometimes also soldiers, aren’t obligated in any special way to each other simply by virtue of being citizens or soldiers, whatever that entails, because whatever it may entail is ostensibly the same for everyone. “Agreeing” to be a citizen-soldier is considered a part of the social contract, if one agrees to be a citizen, then one agrees to be a soldier, and so however citizen-soldiers relate to one another isn’t special—it is the baseline of acceptable behavior for the entire moral community. As a result, on this model, soldiers and civilians—qua soldiers and civilians—are essentially morally autonomous strangers to one another.

The professional-soldier ideal is problematic in much the same way as the citizen-soldier ideal, although the problem lies at the other end of the morally autonomous strangers spectrum. Rather than conflating the two groups, the model allows far too much distance between soldiers and civilians. The “delegation-agency focus” may be considered an accurate enough description but, as it focuses primarily on elite civil-military relations, it offers little insight into the nature of rank-and-file relationships. Also, although it is true that the professional nature of the military does not in and of itself exclude the participation and oversight of rank-and-file civilians, nevertheless it does appear to help dissipate any visceral connection between the citizen and the soldier. For the most part, Americans expect a relatively large degree of emotional distance when the relationship is one between clients and professionals. And
emotional distance easily lends itself to physical distance. As a result, it tends to encourage civilians to view soldiers as akin to political representatives at best and, at worst, as paid bodyguards; and perhaps most importantly, it fails to compel the average civilian to reevaluate her relationship to the military and to consider the possible responsibilities such a relationship may generate. Of additional concern, professionals, by Huntington’s definition, are not motivated by financial gain. This should affect the professional-client relationship significantly. If the professional is not seeking financial reward then remuneration must consist of something else, and if the professional’s client is society then society must pay the cost. This raises a curious possibility: if the military officer works for the betterment of society, can this be seen as his “fee,” and would this mean, then, that society has a duty to improve?

Admittedly, the family member and warrior-hero models do appear to imply meaningful moral relationships between soldiers and civilians, relationships that could motivate civilians to be more informed regarding military affairs and more conscientious about acknowledging their part in military operations. Nevertheless, it seems equally true that viewing soldiers as warrior-heroes or as family members posits an asymmetrical relationship vis-à-vis war and thus generates significant problems in terms of political equality and reciprocity. Family member and warrior-hero models imply that civilians should be removed from the dangers and unpleasantness of war, standing safely on the sidelines while rooting for their hero or family member to win. As a mere spectator, the civilian may easily consider herself absolved of responsibility for any unpleasantness beyond her country’s borders. She may care for the soldier as a family member or as a hero-worshipper (for lack of a better term) but neither
relationship compels, or necessarily even encourages, the civilian to take personal responsibility for her country’s participation in war.

The conviction of many civilians (and members of the military) that all soldiers are heroes who deserve to be treated as such fuels the warrior-hero model but is also highly problematic. If all soldiers are heroes, then virtually by definition, all soldiers are morally praiseworthy. The troubling implications of this stance are most clearly presented when one confronts the fact of atrocities committed by some of these “heroes.” Moreover, although these types of relationships are not inconsistent with civilians becoming informed about war, they tend to promote unquestioning deference to military authority as a sign of good citizenship. Assigning soldiers the role of warrior-hero or family member is an affectively prescriptive act: the people on whose behalf the hero or family member fights ought to look at the soldier with unadorned awe and gratitude. Family members and hero worshippers are often quick to defend their loved ones and sometimes at the cost of their own reason and objectivity. In political terms, this translates into a socio-political dictate—something like what I believe is meant by Strawson’s “socially sanctioned demands”—that requires the uncritical support of all true “patriots.”

The warrior-hero model is not as prominent in (relative) peacetime, but nearly all politicians immediately adopt it any time soldiers are discussed in public. Even in today’s political climate, it may be socially acceptable to opt out of military service, and even to decry particular wars, but expressing anything other than unconditional support for the men and women who fight America’s wars is seriously taboo. An apparently
widely accepted and long held tenet of American politics is that politicians who fail to
evince the requisite military ardor often fail to win the requisite votes to stay in office.\textsuperscript{137} 

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Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the socio-political value of an individual’s military
service has waned over time. In days of yore, military service is what made the
statesman—those who could not, or would not fight, were not eligible for full standing in
the community. But by the time the United States had fully instantiated a professional
military, the idea that a person could earn the right to citizenship by means of
nonmilitary civic participation was commonplace. Today the number of Americans
serving in the armed forces comprises only a small fraction of the population and they
are coming from an increasingly insular pool of recruits. For most people living in the
United States, the path to achieving relatively full and equal status in society is far
removed from military service and, increasingly, from traditional political participation
in any form. Thus, while there are strong theoretical and historical arguments that war-
related public service—of some meaningful sort or another, including conscientious
objection and other nonviolent participation—is a necessary (and possibly even
sufficient) condition for achieving full and equal membership in society, the empirical
facts of the matter show that it is possible for things to be otherwise.

Apparently, the end of conscription in the United States signaled the end of
civilian responsibility for war as well, to the civilian community at least. But moral
responsibility for the outcomes of war, and for the inevitable injustices perpetrated
during the course of war, is not the kind of responsibility one individual can cede to

\textsuperscript{137} E.g., former California Representative Barbara Lee was politically shunned for casting the single vote
against bombing Afghanistan following the events of September 11th.
another. Whereas the right of any person to refrain from serving in the armed forces may in fact be justified, this right does not entail the right to be free from all moral encumbrances pertaining to war. Specifically, it does not free civilians of modern democratic states from the responsibility to take an informed moral stance with respect to the wars their governments wage. That so many civilians choose to remain ignorant is a source of resentment for many military personnel. In recent years—roughly since the beginning of America’s retaliatory wars following the events of September 11, 2001—there has been a marked increase in complaints by soldiers and their advocates regarding soldiers’ standing in the larger community, the kinds of jobs they are being asked to do under the conditions they are being required to do them in, and the challenges they face upon returning to civil society. To many men and women who serve in today’s American military, the occasional eruptions of civilian gratitude and support for soldiers are just empty slogans. In real world interactions with civilians, soldiers—especially returning veterans—are apt to feel invisible and powerless.

In their defense, and as I discussed above, civilians have often received mixed messages regarding their role and responsibilities vis-à-vis war, including periods of time when there was no messaging at all, which sends its own message of sorts. If the goal is to awaken civilians to their civic duty then, in an increasingly confusing and distracting world, it is vital that civilians receive clear information about the role they personally play in military affairs. Adopting the principal-avatar model can help toward this end. The principal-avatar model pulls the civilian in by positing the soldier as “simultaneously both self and other.” The model acts as a reminder that the civilian is responsible for the part of the soldier that she has reasons to recognize as also being part of herself—this is the soldier qua means of state supported violence, the part that is
oriented toward war and yet sworn to uphold a strict American-centric ethical stance, and this is the part that much of the world equates with all Americans. Identifying an essential part of themselves with soldiers is likely to motivate civilians to act in ways that suggest a shared sense of moral responsibility for war.

VI. Conclusions

One need only observe any circumscribed environment to see that our individual day-to-day behavior is greatly influenced by our often abstract and even generic ideas about what certain types of relationships entail. For example, it is not too much of a stretch to argue that the golden age of civil-military relationships in which most civilians made some effort to respond meaningfully to the war effort, including in opposition to it, wasn’t achieved because Americans were more patriotic back then (even if Americans actually were more patriotic back then), it was achieved because most American civilians had at least one meaningful moral relationship in which the other person was somehow intimately connected to the war (whether through active support or active opposition).

Self-ascriptions of a shared moral responsibility with the military by the public have great potential to alleviate some of the tensions in civil-military relations attributed to the civil-military divide. For one, moral ascriptions of responsibility can create bonds between responsible parties that foster mutual cooperation and moral support. Simply by acknowledging responsibility, civilians communicate to soldiers their own moral awareness. This may help to dispel the perception that many military personnel have of civilians as immoral and self-involved, and thus, engender a greater amount respect on both sides of the divide. And it could help some military members deal with the
emotional and psychological trauma of armed combat by sharing the emotional burden of the harms they may have inflicted on others in the course of following orders.

Thus, if the concern is with how one behaves in the real world on a relatively daily basis—that is, if the desire is to influence actual American civilians to change their behavior in relatively significant ways such that they become informed about foreign affairs and proposed military operations, and possibly even become informed, conscientious voters actively participating in the democratic process—then it behooves us to increase our understanding of the impact interpersonal relationships can have on political behavior. Rather than attempting to ground civilian responsibility in debatable degrees of individual agency or in the shaky foundations of republican civic virtue, I believe that a public perception of the relationship between soldiers and civilians binding the two as closely as principals are bound to their avatars can help generate a clear, actionable, and intuitively acceptable account of civilian responsibility towards soldiers that fosters cooperation and respect between the two groups.
CHAPTER FIVE

The Soldier And The Civilian

I. Introduction

I believe that serious consideration of the principal-avatar model has the potential to generate substantive discussions between rank-and-file civilians and soldiers (as well as among the academic and military elite) regarding any number of urgent issues facing the military today. Some of the conversations that I am particularly interested in pursuing include whether the principal-avatar model also accurately describes the passive pacifist’s relationship to the military; whether, and if so, in what way, civilians have a responsibility to returning veterans; and relatedly, whether the principal-avatar model can help alleviate some mental health problems for soldiers by more sincere attempts on the part of civilians to help shoulder the moral burden. Unfortunately, time and space constraints preclude delving into such a wide array of issues here. Thus, after expounding a bit further in the following section on the ways in which civilians’ relationship with soldiers significantly differs from their relationships with other public service professionals I conclude the dissertation with a brief review of the debate over civilian immunity in military conflicts and the way in which the principal-avatar model best conforms to just war theory in this matter.

II. A unique relationship

It may be argued that soldiers are essentially civil servants—in the same category as firefighters, postal workers, political representatives, and law enforcement. This argument can be reframed as the morally autonomous strangers objection outlined in
chapter two: namely, that there does not exist a morally meaningful relationship between civilians and soldiers beyond the relationship that holds between civilians and any number of other professionals. Someone arguing from this perspective may concede that the civilian has some special obligations to soldiers that she does not have to complete strangers who are not soldiers but that whatever these obligations may be they could be no more or less than what civilians owe to any other public servant or professional with whom she has some intercourse.

In chapter three I defended the claim that the civilian has a unique relationship with the soldier based on *socially salient reasons* having to do with identity and implication. The *Argument from Identity* calls attention to the way in which the American military identity was forged out of civilian values associated with at least three distinct normative frameworks: classical republicanism, frontier myths, and American exceptionalism. Modern American civilians, in turn, form their individual identities within the context of American military superiority. The *Argument from Implication* links civilians to military operations through their role in providing the putative impetus for going to war, providing the manpower necessary to fight the war, and making the final judgment regarding the war’s moral justifiability and the military’s degree of success. I also spoke in that chapter about the special nature of war giving rise to particular duties on the part of civilians, including the need for retaining *moral custody* of the soldier’s actions, qua soldier, and striving for a *first person perspective* regarding military operations. All of these arguments also demonstrate the many ways in which the civilian-soldier relationship is meaningfully different from the civilian’s relationship with any other professional.
The nature of war itself is so different from any other publically sanctioned endeavor that it stands to reason the civilian would also be differentially situated to the person who carries out that task in her name than she would be to someone who’s job is more ethically on a par with her own. As many philosophers and students of the military have noted, soldiers are not only permitted but also required to perform actions that civilians are legally and ethically prohibited from doing. The catch is that soldiers must follow a panoply of rules regarding every aspect of their behavior, hence Huntington’s reliance on the phrase “war is the management of violence” to mark the key distinction between military and civilian professionals and Walzer’s assertion that the rules of war are all that make the difference between legitimate war and “mere” crime and mayhem.\textsuperscript{138}

While it may seem reasonable to equate soldiers with political representatives, as Feaver does, in terms of their relationship to civilians, the stark difference between how politicians represent us from how soldiers represent us knocks the civilian-soldier relationship into the stratosphere and calls out for a more nuanced reference. The reason for urging others to adopt a principal-avatar perspective on the civilian-soldier relationship is largely because the near identity aspect of the relationship requires that civilians attempt to acquire as close to a first person perspective as possible of the soldier’s life; and the reason for requiring a first person perspective is because the nature of war and the work that soldiers do is so outside the norms of most societies that civilians are not easily able to really comprehend that work. It takes continuous and consistent effort and guidance to introduce the uninitiated to the reality of war but the benefits of doing so successfully could very well include increased civilian participation.

\textsuperscript{138} Huntington, \textit{Soldier and State}, 13-14; Walzer, \textit{Just and Unjust Wars}, 42.
in and oversight of military operations, which could also mean, among other things, better mental health outcomes for returning veterans and perhaps even fewer battles into which our soldiers must be sent.

These are not concerns that are generally cited when speaking of civilians’ relationships to other professionals but this is not to say that those other relationships would not also benefit from a reevaluation of the language, attitudes, and imagery we associate with them. It may even be that the principal-avatar model is an appropriate relationship model for some or even all of those relationships, but it isn’t feasible to expect (let alone to morally require) civilians to be able to achieve anything resembling a first person perspective for more than one extra-personal relationship. The civilian-soldier relationship is not only unique in many ways but it is also, arguably, more urgently in need of our ethical attention due, at the very least, to the disproportionately large scale of possible suffering involved in even the most “usual” of battles and on even the best days of any given war.

III. Civilian immunity

I wrote in the introductory chapter that one reason it was important to determine whether civilians bore moral responsibility for war was that on some accounts moral responsibility is thought to bestow combatant status upon the responsible parties, thereby making them justifiable military targets. The merits and demerits of this position are still very much in theoretical and practical debate (although those debates are not taking place in the “public square” as far as I can tell). What bearing, if any, does the principal-avatar model have on this question? I believe that the principal-avatar relationship is consistent with many tenets of contemporary Just War Theory, in ways the other models are not, and especially with respect to the apparently ethically
preferred position that civilians be protected from deliberate military targeting without necessarily being absolved of moral responsibility. I begin with a brief account of the theoretical debate regarding civilian immunity after which I argue that the principal-avatar model is the most conceptually appropriate relationship for reinforcing the modern just war norm of civilian immunity without loss of responsibility.

The question of whether civilians should be considered as justifiable military targets in war is generally thought to have originated within the broader debate regarding the merits of Just War Theory. Those early debates—before there were such persons as civilians to consider—revolved around a concern for the innocent bystanders of war who often were merely caught in the middle of a battle that had little if nothing to do with themselves and their interests. At that time, it was taken as virtually axiomatic that intentionally harming innocent persons was unjust and so many theorists such as Francisco de Vitoria and Hugo Grotius focused on if and when it might be justifiable that innocents were harmed in war as long as they were not intentionally targeted.

After the emergence of democratic nation-states and the civilian populations that they governed, however, the question of responsibility for war grew far murkier and with it so did the question of justifiable targets of war. And yet philosophers and policy makers continue to rely on some of the earliest tenets of just war theory to justify rules of war today despite the decidedly different nature of modern combat from its earlier iterations. These continued attempts suggest an accord with Walzer’s claim, just cited above, that “war is distinguishable from murder and massacre only when restrictions are established on the reach of battle.”139 In contemporary analysis, the concern regarding innocent persons is largely downplayed even while the principle of

139. Walzer, Just and Unjust Wars, 42.
Discrimination—which states that noncombatants may not be intentionally targeted—continues to receive much scholarly attention. The debate regarding permissible military targets is simplified by eliminating the exceedingly difficult demand to distinguish between the innocent and the guilty and, instead, sorting all possible victims of war into two clear categories: combatants and noncombatants. Combatants are roughly those directly engaged in warfare—thus, following the example of other writers in this field, I use the term combatants and soldiers interchangeably—while noncombatants are simply not combatants and this term is often used interchangeably with civilians as I do here.

The bifurcation of moral subjects into combatants and noncombatants rather than into guilty and innocent facilitates discussion regarding who may be intentionally and permissibly killed in war, particularly with respect to the common intuition that soldiers and civilians of modern democratic states are morally equivalent to one another (to borrow Walzer’s phrasing) vis-à-vis their nation’s wars. That is, depending on whether or not the war being fought is a just war, they are both either guilty or they are both not guilty. Though the intuition is common, the result is what some have called the Responsibility Dilemma according to which if responsibility determines liability—that is, if it determines who is liable to be killed in battle—then, in many cases both combatants and noncombatants are equally liable to be killed and in those cases in which civilians may not be killed then neither may soldiers; in other words either both soldiers and civilians may be permissibly killed or neither may be.

In order to escape from the realist horn—both are responsible so both may be targeted—and pacifist horn—neither are responsible so neither may be targeted—of the dilemma the principle of Moral Distinction is often evoked in which it is posited that
civilians are morally distinct from soldiers in certain ways (other than through liability) such that killing civilians (i.e., non-combatants) is worse than killing soldiers. For example, some have argued that deliberately killing noncombatants is usually opportunistic and violates the essential just war principle of necessity. The simplest and most common arguments for civilian immunity, are that non-combatants are, by definition, more vulnerable and defenseless, and therefore it is worse to kill non-combatants—that is, civilians—than it is to kill combatants—that is, soldiers. There are also arguments supporting civilian immunity from military attacks that are not civilian-centric but rather focus on why killing combatants in war is not as bad as killing noncombatants. Along these lines, it has been argued that soldiers are better able than civilians to protect themselves from the enemy in war, that most soldiers appear ready and able to fight, and that most soldiers sincerely believe that they have permission to kill the enemy. Finally, although many contemporary theorists have rejected Walzer’s contention that all soldiers forfeit their right to life simply by partaking in battle, there is support for the idea that soldiers may waive their rights in some more limited way when they commit to the safety of their compatriots by enlisting in the military.\textsuperscript{140}

Rather than relying on traditional arguments about innocence and guilt, the principle of moral distinction hinges on a sense of fair play that most people accept, which may be why acts of terrorism are still so widely condemned despite a growing awareness of the moral complicity of most civilians. Most relevant to the dissertation, is the necessarily clear delineation of two distinct groups who, nevertheless, share a common bond of moral responsibility for the wars of their nations. Among the five

models of civil-military relationships that I have posited—the four historical models discussed above and the principal avatar model introduced in chapter four—only the professional soldier and the principal-avatar models can conceptually accommodate the complex moral equivalence between soldiers and civilians; and of those two, the principal-avatar model is more likely to engage civilians in the intended way. As I argued in section two of this chapter, the civilian-soldier model fails to adequately distinguish between the military and civil spheres; moreover, the ideal of the citizen-soldier implies that citizens who fight do so willingly, for themselves as well as for their country—which in turn implies the kind of moral responsibility usually associated with combatants. Therefore, on this model, civilians are more likely to be considered acceptable military targets. On the other hand, family member and warrior-hero models clearly distinguish between soldiers and civilians, but civilians are portrayed as innocent bystanders in both models. So, while soldiers may (or may not) be considered justified military targets, civilians are a categorically protected class. The professional-soldier and principal-avatar models imply responsibility on the part of the civilian as well as on the part of soldiers but, again, as stated above in section two, the tendency on the part of principals to create affective distance between themselves and their representatives allows room for principals to disavow responsibility for the actions of their representatives.

The principal-avatar model offers a unique conceptual imagery for understanding the civil-military relationship as a partnership between two physically distinct groups—combatants and noncombatants—who nevertheless are morally equivalent. The nature of principal-avatar relationships, both spiritually and digitally, is that the principal relies on a fully realized version of herself—a version that is uniquely suited to the intended
task—to do battle with her enemies. But because the principal recognizes that the avatar is a version of her own self she remains emotionally invested in her avatar’s activities. As I stated in chapter four, the principal retains moral custody of her avatar. In this way, the principal-avatar model encourages civilians to keep in mind that soldiers are the direct manifestation of their own civilian values even when one’s own civilian identity appears quite different from the military identity. In fact, arguably, it is precisely in order to protect our (or our allies’) individual civilian identities that many Americans are willing to go to war at all.

Unfortunately much of this debate would seem to be merely academic since civilians just are made targets of military attack and will likely continue to be made so in the foreseeable future. Consider, for example, the so-called “American Rule,” a military exception that significantly weakens the Geneva and Hague Conventions’ prohibition against bombing “unfortified” cities: In addition to the outright prohibition, military and government leaders were also tasked by the Conventions with giving fair notice to a region’s civilians prior to any bombing so that the civilians could evacuate the area safely. The American Rule allowed the United States to agree to the restrictions but with the caveat that civilians would be warned unless military victory required civilians not be told. The unfortunate fact of the matter is that American political and military leaders have often ordered targeting, or condoned targeting, of large numbers of civilians in enemy territories for a variety of reasons while American civilians are rarely targeted, the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 being the most obvious exception. Perhaps this is why American civilians seem to rarely think about the issue of civilian immunity and when they do, they fail to see the connection between civilian immunity

141. Wells, “Can Modern Wars Be Just?,” 32.
as it pertains to themselves and civilian immunity as it pertains to the “enemy’s” civilians.

The ideas and arguments presented in this dissertation stem from my attempt to discern the real reasons for American apathy with respect to war and the real forces that could propel us to change. I sincerely believe that how we talk about ourselves, and how we understand our relationships to each other, can determine the degree to which and the manner in which we engage with the people around us and with the larger society as a whole. Whether or not civilians are granted immunity from military attacks impacts rank-and-file American civilians directly and for this reason they should be more directly involved with the decisions being made regarding civilian immunity. But it is crucial that they understand both that civilian immunity applies to all civilians—not just Americans or their allies—and that, although they are civilians and therefore ought to be protected this does not mean that they are also thereby absolved of responsibility for the outcomes of American wars. Using the language and imagery typically associated with principals and their avatars to talk to civilians about such matters can help achieve these goals by clarifying the civilian’s role in the business of war.

**IV. Conclusion**

Our own day-to-day behavior, and our judgments about other people’s behavior, are significantly influenced by the types of relationships we believe ourselves to be in with those people. I have been arguing that civilians should see themselves in a kind of proxy relationship with soldiers such that civilians remain morally bound to the actions of the person who volunteers in their place. Unfortunately, in the process of freeing the civilian from her obligation to serve, the volunteer soldier also removed the civilian’s opportunity to be confronted with the moral dilemma that actively serving (or actively
resisting service) in a military presents. As a result most American civilians today are content to accept “the myth of war” and this allows them to, at best, admire soldiers from afar and, at worst, remain blind to individual military personnel and the truth behind the myth. Scheffler cautions us, however, that moral relationships and the obligations that accompany them exist and have real consequences regardless of whether they are known or accepted by the parties to the relationship. This is the problem that I believe exists for many civilians—they are unaware of the relationship that they, in fact, already have with soldiers.

I believe that civilians have a right and an urgent need to fully understand their relationship to the military. Even those who feel a deep disconnect with, or are morally opposed to, the institution of the United State’s military (e.g., anti-government militias and pacifists come to mind) have a vested interest in assessing their own role and responsibility for its continued predominance. Strawson reminds us of the important role our moral relationships play in justifying our moral judgments and defining who we are as a species. In doing so, he also underscores the need for gaining clarity about all of our interpersonal relationships. But when the relationship is with the world’s most powerful military, the need to understand and acknowledge the relationship becomes paramount.
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