

In *Who Should Die?: The Ethics of Killing in War* (OUP) / Published 2018 / Eds.: Bradley Jay Strawser, Ryan Jenkins, Michael Robillard / DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780190495657.001.0001

# Dignity, Self-Respect, and Bloodless Invasions

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## Abstract

[*From Editor's Introduction*] In Chapter 7, "Dignity, Self-Respect, and Bloodless Invasions", Saba Bazargan-Forward asks How much violence can we impose on those attempting to politically subjugate us? According to Bazargan-Forward, "reductive individualism" answers this question by determining how much violence one can impose on an individual wrongly attempting to prevent one from political participation. Some have argued that the amount of violence one can permissibly impose in such situations is decidedly sub-lethal. Accordingly, this counterintuitive response has cast doubt on the reductive individualist project. Bazargan-Forward argues, however, that political subjugation involves an institutionally embodied form of disrespect that has been altogether missed. A proper appreciation of this sort of disrespect, he contends, morally permits much greater defensive violence against those attempting to politically subjugate us or others.

## 1. The Problem of Bloodless Invasions

A so-called 'bloodless invasion' is a hypothetical form of military aggression in which the aggressing party imposes the following sort of conditional threat: it will resort to maiming and killing only if its victims resist the purely political aims of the aggressing party. The political control the aggressors seek is unauthorized and unjust – achieving it would violate the

political rights of their victims. So the victims are, in effect, given this choice: accede to the violation of their political rights or go to war.

Crucial to the concept of a bloodless invasion is that the victims' *vital* interests – viz., their lives and their bodily integrity – are conditionally threatened as a means to undermining their *non-vital* interests – viz., their political rights. If the victims of the aggressing party choose to resist the bloodless invasion, the result will be all the attendant horrors of war, including, we can assume, massive civilian casualties.

Some theorists have cast doubt on the moral permissibility of resisting bloodless invasions on the grounds that such resistance is likely to violate the constraint of proportionality which states that the harms inflicted cannot be too great relative to the wrongful harms thereby averted.<sup>1</sup> Since resisting a bloodless invasion averts threats to non-vital interests by maiming and killing, it seems that such resistance is likely to be unjust, on the grounds that it violates the constraint of proportionality. This is a problematic outcome insofar as defensive wars against aggressors aiming at imposing unjust political dominion is supposed to be paradigmatic of a just war. If post-Walzerian reductive individualism about the morality of war is correct insofar as it analyzes war as a relation between individuals rather than between states, then it seems we are forced to concede that defense against bloodless invaders is likely unjust. This means we can only fight defensive wars against aggressors who maim and kill (or violate equally stringent vital interests) for its own sake rather than as a means to or a side-effect of establishing political control over territory. The only just defensive wars, then, would be those against genocidal aggression or mass enslavement. Such wars are comparatively rare. The upshot, then, is that if defensive war against otherwise bloodless invasions are unjust, we are forced into adopting a version of contingent pacifism.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See (Rodin, *Justifying Harm*, 2012, pp. 74-110) for a discussion of some of the factors relevant to proportionality.

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of different versions of contingent pacifism, see (Bazargan, 2015).

Some theorists regard this conclusion as evidence against the plausibility of reductive individualism;<sup>3</sup> others regard a version of contingent pacifism as a welcomed consequence;<sup>4</sup> still others argue that reductive individualism has the resources to avoid the conclusion that resisting bloodless invasions is unjust.<sup>5</sup> I will call the problem of how to respond to the possibility of bloodless invasions, “the dilemma of bloodless invasions.” This states that we either have to deny that defensive wars against bloodless invasions are morally permissible or we must deny reductive individualism. The first option seems to many excessively pacifistic, while the second option is unpalatable to those sympathetic to reductive individualism.

There are at least two versions of the dilemma’s first horn. Both conclude that defensive wars against otherwise bloodless invasions violate the proportionality constraint. The first version argues that such wars violate the *narrow* proportionality constraint, which states that harms imposed on parties *morally liable to be harmed* cannot be too great relative to the wrongful harms thereby averted. So, for example, it is presumably wrongful to defensively kill someone attempting to painfully pinch you unjustly even if that is the only way to avoid the pinch. This constraint on defensive violence falls under the aegis of the narrow proportionality constraint because the unjust pincher is morally liable to some degree of defensive harm necessary to stop her. She is not, however, liable to be killed. Defense against bloodless invasions is sometimes likewise construed as a violation of narrow proportionality insofar as it is argued that an individual who is only conditionally threatening your vital interests in order to exact concessions undermining your non-vital interests is morally liable only to the amount of defensive violence necessary to avert the threat to your non-vital interests. That is, the degree of harm that the violation of your non-vital interests consists in sets the baseline by which the proportionality of your defensive harm is measured. So the maximum amount of defensive harm you can

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<sup>3</sup> See for example (Lazar, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> See especially (Norman, 1995, pp. 133, 135) and (Rodin, 2002, pp. 43-48). In (Rodin, 2014, p. 89) he argues that “a self-help regime centered on presumptive rights of self-defense” against political aggression is morally unjustified.

<sup>5</sup> See for example (Fabre, 2014) and (McMahan, 2014).

permissibly inflict to stop a mugger who threatens to kill you if you do not hand over the money in your wallet is determined by the moral value of that money, rather than the moral value of your life.<sup>6</sup> Likewise for bloodless invasions: the maximum amount of defensive harm the victims can permissibly inflict on the invaders is determined by the moral value of the non-vital interests they unconditionally threaten – the victims’ political rights – rather than the vital interests that they conditionally threaten – the victims’ lives. Accordingly, the aggressors might not be morally liable to lethal defensive violence.

This argument operates by ‘scaling up’ from a case in which a single individual is wrongly prevented from exercising her political rights by a wrongful aggressor. Suppose a villain threatens to kill you if you vote in a particular political election. The villain points a pistol at you – the only way to preserve your own life is to shoot the villain first (which you are able to do), or to accede to her demands. It is probably a violation of the narrow proportionality constraint to defensively kill the villain even if doing so is necessary in order to vote.

If it is a violation of proportionality to kill one unjust aggressor preventing you from exercising your political rights by conditionally threatening your life, it follows that it is a violation of proportionality to kill many unjust aggressors who are similarly preventing their victims from exercising their political rights by conditionally threatening their lives; this describes a bloodless invasion (or so it is argued).

There are problems, though, with this version of the argument. The most pressing one, in my view, is this: each invader is complicitously liable for what their comrades do because each combatant has the formal function of assisting one another in furtherance of the war’s aims.<sup>7</sup> As a result, each invader will be morally responsible for violations of the political rights of millions. These individual violations might aggregate in a way making each invader morally liable to be killed if necessary to stop the bloodless invasion.

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<sup>6</sup> (Norman, 1995, p. 130). For a real-life example of this sort, see (McMahan, 2009, p. 20).

<sup>7</sup> I argue for this view in (Bazargan, *Complicitous Liability in War*, 2012).

A more compelling version of the dilemma of bloodless invasions adverts to the *wide* proportionality constraint which states that harms imposed on parties who are *not* morally liable to be harmed cannot be too great relative to the wrongful harms thereby averted. Wars typically kill many civilians the vast majority of whom are not morally liable to be killed. If the violation of non-vital, political rights determines the threshold of the wide proportionality constraint, then killing many civilians as a side-effect of protecting those non-vital interests will likely violate that constraint. The duties of care owed toward our own citizens who would be killed by the enemy compound the wrongfulness of the harms resulting from resisting the bloodless invasion – or so it is argued.<sup>8</sup>

To recap, the dilemma of bloodless invasions is that we must either accept that resisting bloodless invasions is impermissible, or reject reductive individualism. The first horn of the dilemma has two versions. The first version adverts to the narrow proportionality constraint whereas the second adverts to the wide proportionality constraint. Since the latter is the more compelling version of the dilemma's first horn, that is the version I will target.

The bloodless invasion dilemma assumes that the political rights the invaders violate are non-vital, in that they are not the sorts of rights that we can defend at the cost of innocent lives. But bloodless invasions typically violate not just political rights but our interests in retaining the capability of living recognizably meaningful lives. And these are indeed vital – or so I will argue. The focus on political rights has had a distorting effect on discussions of the bloodless invasions dilemma. Appreciating the interests we have in regarding our own practical identities as worthwhile will reveal that many bloodless invasions can indeed be resisted by way of war. This will not completely dissolve the bloodless invasion dilemma since there remains the conceptual possibility of a bloodless invasion violating only political rights without undermining our interests in retaining the capability of living meaningful lives. But my goal here is not to dissolve the dilemma, but to complicate it by showing that there are some rights aside from those pertaining to life and limb that we can kill to protect – namely the right to self-respect.

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<sup>8</sup> See (Rodin, 2014, p. 84).

## 2. Dignity and Respect

To understand what self-respect is and the role it plays in the dilemma of bloodless invasions, it is necessary to analyze respect *simpliciter*. And to do that, we need to look at the concept ‘dignity’ since it is the grounds of our entitlement to be treated with respect. ‘Dignity’ is used in various ways by ethicists. One the most important disambiguations is between dignity as the grounds of rights, and dignity as the content of those rights. That is, the concept might be used to refer to the source of the claim that we have that others treat us in certain ways; or it might be used to characterize that very treatment.<sup>9</sup> So when we say that particular conduct – such as a violation of my autonomy – violates my dignity, we might be saying, for example, that it is in virtue of my inherent dignity as a person that I have a right not to have my autonomy violated. Or we might be saying that it is because of my status as a person that I have a right to be treated with dignity, which includes a right not to have my autonomy violated. I will use ‘dignity’ in the former sense to refer to the moral status persons have in virtue of which we have rights.<sup>10</sup>

This analysis of dignity finds its origins most famously in Immanuel Kant. He used ‘würde’ – commonly translated as ‘dignity’ – to refer to a type of intrinsic worth inhering in rational agents. The worth is intrinsic in that it does not confer value by promoting an end, but rather has value in itself. It is our nature as rational agents which grounds our dignity. Rational agents possess dignity in virtue of their autonomy, which is the power to legislate moral laws and to act in accordance with them without influence from heteronomous inclinations. We connote this special status by calling the beings possessing it ‘persons’. The required response to dignity is *achtung* –

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<sup>9</sup> (Waldron, 2012, p. 17)

For example, the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights seems to conceptualize dignity in this way when it states in the preamble that rights “derive from the inherent dignity of the human person”.<sup>10</sup>

respect – which requires we treat persons as ends in themselves. Because dignity is absolute and non-comparable and because dignity is grounded in features that all persons possess, the intrinsic worth of all person is equal, on Kant’s account. Hence each person, in virtue of her autonomous nature, is owed respect regardless of her personal achievements, social rank, or moral conduct.

More modern writers also ground rights in dignity-as-status. James Griffin, inspired by the fifteenth-century writer Pico della Mirandola, develops the idea that dignity is the human capacity “to... be that which he wills”. Beings possessing this capacity are what Griffin calls ‘normative agents’.<sup>11</sup> Possessing this capacity is “a highly-prized status” – one which grounds “[t]he sort of dignity relevant to human rights.”<sup>12</sup> It grounds our rights in that protecting them – for example, by respecting our autonomy – upholds our normative agency.

Joel Feinberg and Jan Narveson also propound the view that dignity-as-status grounds rights. On their account, to have a legal right is to possess the dignity of a “recognized claimant” – someone entitled to demand that her case be considered. They suggest that human dignity consists in the status of possessing “the recognizable capacity to assert claims”.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Stephen Darwall states that dignity consists in “the second-personal standing” each individual has which authorizes every individual “to make claims and demands on one another as free and rational agents” – claims and demands that others must respect.<sup>14</sup>

On all these views, dignity-as-status grounds a right to what has come to be called ‘(moral) recognition-respect’. Recognition-respect is an attitude consisting in giving appropriate consideration to some (morally relevant) features of the object of respect in the course of deliberation. To say that a person qua person is entitled to recognition-respect is to say that she is entitled to have others, in their deliberations, take seriously and weigh

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<sup>11</sup> (Griffin, 2009, p. 31)

<sup>12</sup> (Griffin, 2009, p. 152)

<sup>13</sup> (Feinberg, 1970, p. 252)

<sup>14</sup> (Darwall, 2004, pp. 43-44)

appropriately the fact that she is a person. What qualifies as ‘taking seriously’ and ‘weighing appropriately’ will depend on the specific account of what recognition-respect requires.<sup>15</sup> But regardless of how the details work out, recognition-respect requires that the relevant features of its object factor into our deliberations about how to treat that object. Crucially, the restrictions and requirements on our actions deriving from recognition-respect are not incidental but instead arise from the relevant features demanding recognition-respect – such as rational agency, or the ability to feel pain.

Whereas the appraisal of individual excellences will and ought to vary from person to person according to her character and abilities, the recognition-respect to which individuals are entitled will be the same for everyone, insofar as such respect is grounded in the dignity-as-status which each individual shares in common. Whether the dignity grounding recognition-respect derives from our status as autonomous agents (as Kant thinks), or our status as normative agents (as Griffin thinks), or our second-personal standing as free and rational agents (as Darwall thinks), or our recognizable capacity to assert claims (as Feinberg and Narveson think), the fact remains that everyone who has the relevant status has it to the same degree and in the same way, thereby demanding the same basic treatment: the recognition-respect of our fundamental dignity as persons.

### 3. Expressivist Accounts

Some have tried to ground the claim that we are permitted to resist otherwise bloodless invasions by appealing to the claim that oppressive regimes systemically violate the recognition-respect we are owed.<sup>16</sup> When we

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<sup>15</sup> (Darwall, 1977, p. 38)

<sup>16</sup> See (Iser, 2016). Whereas he argues that averting violations of recognition-respect is itself sufficient grounds for resisting otherwise bloodless invasions, I will argue that the effects such violations have on the self-respect of its victims is what provides such grounds. The practical difference is this: on Iser’s account virtually all bloodless invasions can be permissibly resisted as a last resort since such regimes by imposing unauthorized laws *eo ipso* violate the recognition-respect the people are owed. On my account, however, we can only resist bloodless invasions that will otherwise impose



harm someone in a way that violates the recognition-respect owed in virtue of her dignity, we are acting wrongfully. Insofar as oppressive regimes not only violate political rights but systemically deny the recognition-respect the population is owed, the wrong that they commit is compounded in a way that permits violent resistance – or so it might be argued. The challenge is to specify the way that denying recognition-respect wrongs its victims.

When we commit a wrong, we do not always thereby deny the victim fundamental recognition-respect since not all rights-violations suggest that the wrongdoer thinks that the victim is less than a full-fledged person. For example, an assassin might murder a target despite knowing that what she is doing is morally verboten; she knows that the victim has a legitimate moral claim against her, grounded in her status as a person, that the assassin refrain from ending her life. But she does so anyway because she is not properly or sufficiently motivated by what she knows to be true.

Perhaps, though, the assassin's conduct belies the claim that she believes that the victim is a full-fledged person with all the attendant rights. We can nonetheless usefully distinguish the assassin from a wrongdoer for whom the victim's status plays an explicit motivational role in explaining why the wrongdoer committed the harm. A racist who kills partly because she believes that the victim is not a full-fledged person is an example. This partly explains why we might think that rights-violation motivated by abject forms of racism, sexism, or other forms of bigotry, are especially wrongful. The wrong of a racist assault violates the right that the victim has against being physically harmed; but this wrong is aggravated by the fact it was motivated by a belief that the victim bears a fundamental moral status less exalted than that of the wrongdoer's preferred race. So the wrongdoer here commits a double wrong (or perhaps a morally aggravated wrong). She fails to abide by the rights in question, but she also violates the recognition-respect of the victim at least partly out of the belief that the victim lacks the fundamental dignity-as-status grounding a moral protection against such rights-violations.

So wrongs motivated in part by the belief that the victim is not a full-fledged person seem morally worse. One might attempt to explain this by appealing

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norms that undercut our ability to live recognizably meaningful life (see sections 5 and 6).

to expressivist accounts of wrongdoing. According to such theories, what individuals express in their actions matters morally in that such expressions play a substantial role in explaining or grounding the wrongfulness of certain kinds of immoral conduct.<sup>17</sup> When a harm we commit is motivated or otherwise explained by a wrongful attitude – such as the belief that the victim lacks fundamental moral worth – the manifestation of that attitude in our action makes the act especially wrongful.<sup>18</sup> This is an expressive wrong. Expressivism is not a theory of normative ethics, on par with consequentialism or Kantianism. It does not specify substantive, independent, content-laden grounds for moral content. Rather, it makes a claim about how attitudes are manifest in action, and the way doing so is relevant to the moral assessment of action: *expressive* wrongs are wrongs over and above the object-level violation of a right not to be attacked, deceived, defrauded, and so on.

Importantly, expression is not the same as communication. An actor expresses an attitude simply by adverting to particular reasons for action. “To ascribe attitudes to an agent coherently,” write Elizabeth Anderson and Richard Pildes, “we need only be able to sensibly interpret the agent’s actions as resulting from reasons -- that is, as taking particular goals or purposes as reasons for particular actions.”<sup>19</sup> Acting on the reasons in questions manifests the expressive content of the action. Communication, on the other hand, requires (on a Gricean account) that the communicator intends to induce certain attitudes in an audience where the audience reasons their way to those attitudes via their recognition of the communicator’s intention to induce those very attitudes. Accordingly, communicative acts represent a small subset of expressive acts.

Expression should not be confused with profession either. Linguistic utterances fail to carry the same social meaning as expressive actions, in that “there are some things we can express only with deeds because words alone cannot adequately convey our attitudes.”<sup>20</sup> On this view, the wrongfulness of

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<sup>17</sup> (p. 1570)

<sup>18</sup> (Anderson & Pildes, 2000, p. 1509)

<sup>19</sup> (p. 1520)

<sup>20</sup> (p. 1568)

an expressive wrong is not limited to what it reveals about the wrongdoer's attitudes. The reification and manifestation of that attitude via action constitutes part of the wrong. The medium, as it were, is an ineluctable part of what is expressed. When a wrongdoer is motivated to commit a rights-violations out of the belief that the victim is not entitled to the recognition-respect to which full-fledged persons are entitled, and when this belief is expressed in their actions thereby revealing to the victim that the wrongdoer has this belief, the victim is thereby harmed over and above whatever harm the rights-violation itself consists in.

This version of expressivism has the resources, I believe, to explain why we are permitted to resist certain bloodless invasions. In what follows I argue that systematically denying recognition-respect by imposing oppressive social and legal norms can inflict expressive harms which undercut the victim's self-respect to an extent that makes it difficult to live a recognizably meaningful life. It is, ultimately, to prevent this sort of outcome that we can resist bloodless invasions.

#### 4. On Self-Respect

Systemically denying the recognition-respect a victim is owed in virtue of her dignity-as-status can result in a harm over and above each individual harm in which that denial consists. Specifically, systemically denying recognition-respect to a victim can do violence to the victim's sense of self-respect.

John Rawls famously wrote that "perhaps the most important primary good is that of self-respect."<sup>21</sup> Laurence Thomas identifies securing the self-respect of blacks as *the* goal of the civil rights movement.<sup>22</sup> Modern philosophical accounts vary greatly, though, in what self-respect fundamentally is. Some

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<sup>21</sup> (Rawls, 1971, p. 386) I will return to Rawls's account of self-respect. For criticism of the view that self-respect is *the most important* primary social good, see (Massey, 1983, p. 259). Other have argued that Rawls equivocates between two different notions of self-respect. See (Doppelt, 2009), (Eyal, 2009), and (Moriarty, 2009). But see also (Stark, 2011).

<sup>22</sup> (Thomas, 1983)

conceptualize self-respect as fundamentally a *belief* about one's self.<sup>23</sup> Some take it to be fundamentally a disposition.<sup>24</sup> Others regard it as fundamentally interpersonal in that it includes expectations about how others will respond to one's own actions.<sup>25</sup> Some argue in favor of an 'objective' account in which you have self-respect only if such self-respect is warranted. Others argue in favor of a subjective account.<sup>26</sup> But as Robin Miller points out, all of these accounts share in common the view that self-respect involves "a sense of self-worth."<sup>27</sup>

The sense of worth implicit in *self*-respect can be divided into the kind of worth that individuals earn – merit, which can be gained or lost – and the kind of worth inhering in our fundamental status as persons – dignity, which is inalienable, unearned, and invariable. I will focus on the latter kind of self-respect. In the same way that respecting others means appreciating their fundamental status as persons, bearing self-respect means appreciating one's own fundamental moral status as a person. To have self-respect, then, "is to understand oneself to be a person with the same intrinsic value and standing in the moral community as every other person and unconditionally owed the equal recognition respect of all persons."<sup>28</sup>

Diminished self-respect threatens to undermine what Robin Dillon calls "basal" self-respect, which establishes at the most basic level our sense of whether our practical identity is of any worth. "The heart of basal self-respect," she says, "is our most profound valuing of ourselves."<sup>29</sup> Diminished

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<sup>23</sup> See (Rawls, 1971, pp. 386-391), (Thomas, 1983), and (Moody-Adams, 1993).

<sup>24</sup> See (Telfer, 1968), (Darwall, 1977), and (Sachs, 1981).

<sup>25</sup> See (Taylor, 1985).

<sup>26</sup> See (Massey, 1983).

<sup>27</sup> (Dillon, 1995, p. 20)

<sup>28</sup> (Dillon, 1992, p. 55)

<sup>29</sup> (Dillon, 1997, p. 242) As Daniel Statman notes (in addition to Dillon herself), the psychological literature bears out Dillon's notion of basal self-respect. He cites empirical work distinguishing between 'contingent' and 'true' self-esteem, where the former esteem resulting from satisfying one's one special criteria of excellence, whereas

self-respect threatens basal self-respect in the following way. A person will believe that her practical identity imparts a life worth living only if she believes that she is constitutionally capable of possessing a life worth living in the first place. If her recognition self-respect is damaged, then she by definition does not think of herself as a person with the same intrinsic value as everyone else. This means no matter what practical identity she has or adopts – no matter how she chooses to live her life – there is a ceiling on the value of who she is. If the absence of recognition self-respect is thoroughgoing, she believes that *no* practical identity of substantial worth is available to her. And this is just to say that she lacks basal self-respect.

Self-respect, as I have discussed it so far, is chiefly a psychological concept.<sup>30</sup> It refers to favorable self-regarding evaluative beliefs and feelings. To possess this sort of self-respect, it is not necessary that the beliefs be correct or that the feelings be warranted. The only criteria relevant to determining whether an agent is worthy of the favorable self-regarding evaluative beliefs and feelings is the agent's own. That is, there are no independent standards she must meet in order to have this sort of 'subjective' self-respect

In contrast, an individual possesses *objective* self-respect only if the favorable self-regarding evaluative beliefs and feelings satisfy objective criteria. Thus an individual possesses objective self-respect only if she *correctly* recognizes and values her moral status as a person with equal basic rights. And a person possesses objective appraisal self-respect only if her achievements actually warrant the positive evaluation she gives them. On this view, self-respect is not just a matter of valuing yourself, but doing so properly. This means that sometimes individuals might possess subjective self-respect but not objective self-respect, or vice versa. This happens in cases where a person's own basis for self-respect come apart from what the appropriate bases are. We might accordingly say that such an individual possesses too much or too little subjective self-respect, in that her behavior and attitudes fail to match independent standards of evaluative worth.

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the latter is grounded in "a solid sense of self" largely independent of meeting meritorious criteria. See (Statman, 2000, p. 538).

<sup>30</sup> (Massey, 1983)

Perhaps the most famous subjective account of self-respect in modern philosophy belongs to John Rawls. In *A Theory of Justice*, he defines self-respect as including "...a person's sense of his own value, his secure conviction that his conception of the good, his plan of life, is worth carrying out."<sup>31</sup> In *Political Liberalism*, he characterizes self-respect as "rooted in our self-confidence as a fully cooperating member of society capable of pursuing a worthwhile conception of the good over a complete life."<sup>32</sup> In what follows I describe the sorts of psychological harms that wrongfully undermining this sort of subjective self-respect can cause. After, I explain how undermining objective self-respect can be harmful even if it does not cause those psychological harms.

## 5. Undermining Subjective Self-Respect

Diminished subjective self-respect, to the extent that it undermines basal self-respect, infects every aspect of the victim's life. When our basal self-respect is damaged, we are unable to justify who we are and what we do to ourselves or to others. The result, as Dillon puts it, is that

"the abiding flavor of our life is shame, self-contempt, or self-hatred, or anxiety, despair, or apathy about our worth... we experience a profound and pervasive sense of ourselves as inconsequential, inadequate, worthless, not as comparatively valuable, or not as worthy as they of the good things in life... our lives seem meaningless, our activities of little value, our capabilities minimal, our character base... when living is like this living well is impossible."<sup>33</sup>

For this reason among others having a secure sense of self-respect is morally important. A powerful political regime is capable of undermining the self-respect of entire populations, thereby plunging their lives in to the kind of purgatory Dillon describes. This is because self-respect is in part socially

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<sup>31</sup> (Rawls, 1971, p. 440)

<sup>32</sup> (Rawls, 2005, p. 318)

<sup>33</sup> (Dillon, 1995, p. 34)

constructed; it is determined in part by and reflects the norms of social life.<sup>34</sup> Every society, by way of its cultural, political, and economic practices and institutions, develops norms establishing criteria of self-worth; societies consequently provide the framework in which individuals may seek self-respect. In a society discriminating on the basis of race, class, gender, (and so on) the norms establishing the criteria for self-respect devalue those people. The result is that members of the disfavored groups have difficulty establishing and maintaining self-respect. To the extent that a political regime is able to influence or determine the cultural, political, and economic practices and institutions of a country, it is capable of profoundly influencing the self-respect of large swaths of the population.

When an oppressive regime undermines the self-respect of a population by instituting oppressive social and legal norms, the downstream effects can be devastating. Dillon notes for example that

...it is impossible to address the crisis concerning the African American community, especially in America's inner cities – increasing racial discord and violence [...] the tragically high death rate of young Black men; the failure of educational systems to meet even minimal needs of African American children; chronic underemployment and welfare dependency; the wasted lives, thwarted talents and hopeless rage that characterizes the Black underclass – without some attention to the self-hatred and crippled self-worth that fuels and is fueled by these conditions.<sup>35</sup>

Social scientists have explained how diminished self-respect can take root and spread so easily in a society with oppressive social and legal norms. For example, Robert Merton has described a phenomenon which he calls the “self-fulfilling prophecy” in which an individual is prompted to engage in behavior harmful to herself or others precisely because she knows that she is expected

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<sup>34</sup> For further discussion of the sociopolitical determinants of self-respect see (Dillon, 1997).

<sup>35</sup> (Dillon, 1995, p. 36)

by others to behave as such.<sup>36</sup> For example, suppose an instructor does not expect superior or even adequate academic performance from her Black pupils. These pupils, knowing that their efforts won't be taken seriously, refrain from putting forth that effort. The result is that the student does poorly, which seems to confirm the instructor's prediction – not only for the instructor, but crucially, for the students as well.<sup>37</sup> Gordon Allport describes a related social phenomenon, which he dubs the “reciprocal conduct of human beings in interaction.”<sup>38</sup> He notes that negative expectations about behavior, and the subsequent behavior exhibited, will tend to converge. For example, a policy of racial exclusion and animosity toward a minority group might be motivated by the racist belief that members of that minority are violent. This policy will tend to elicit anger and bitterness in the victims, sometimes expressed through violence, which seemingly confirms the soundness of the racist policy, thereby reinforcing it.

Because social institutions have these sorts of profound effects on subjective self-respect, and because undermining self-respect undermines our ability to live recognizably worthwhile lives, Thomas (in accordance with Rawls) argues that we should evaluate social institutions primarily according to whether it is conducive to the self-respect of the individuals in that society.<sup>39</sup> And one factor determining whether a social institution is conducive to self-respect is whether that institution recognizes equal rights by enshrining them in law. As Diana Meyers points out, such legal rights “promote self-respect by creating a social environment conducive to the autonomous creation and pursuit of life plans.”<sup>40</sup> Denying such legal recognition is wrong not just because the victims have the right to such legal recognition, but because doing so has debilitating psychological effects, of the sort described.<sup>41</sup> We are

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<sup>36</sup> (Merton, 1948)

<sup>37</sup> (Himma, 2001)

<sup>38</sup> (Allport, 1979)

<sup>39</sup> (Thomas, 1983)

<sup>40</sup> (Meyers, 1986, p. 87)

<sup>41</sup> It is still each individual's responsibility to ensure that the bases of her subjective self-respect are not overly demanding of others. Suppose my sense of self-respect



in a position, then, to characterize the sort of expressive harms that bigoted oppressive regimes cause: the oppressive norms that the regimes impose diminish self-respect in that the victims come to believe that they are not worthy of the ends closed off to them.

Acceding to a bloodless invasion aiming to demote all or a portion of the population to second-class status – socially, legally, and culturally – does not thereby undermine that group’s vital interests. But it does risk preventing them from living meaningful lives by imposing norms undermining their subjective self-respect, without which they are incapable of seeing themselves as possessing the sort of value that makes our ends worth pursuing. I submit, then, that that the moral permission to prevent the sorts of psychological harms precluding the possibility of living a recognizably meaningful life is as stringent or nearly as stringent as the moral permissions to protect life and limb. So if killing innocents as a side-effect of preventing unjust aggressors from killing us can satisfy the wide proportionality constraint, then killing innocents as a side-effect of preventing unjust aggressors from depriving us of the ability to live meaningful lives can satisfy the wide proportionality constraint as well.

This seems to show that we can permissibly respond to an otherwise bloodless invasion with warfare even if absent that response our vital interests would not have been threatened – provided that the aggressors, left unopposed, would have reduced the population or part of the population to second-class status by depriving them of their basic civil rights (though presumably the wronged population must be sizeable enough for violent resistance to satisfy the proportionality constraint – this goes for resisting violent aggression as well). Bloodless invaders often target a particular ethnicity, race, gender, nationality, religion, or culture for second-class treatment. But the aggressor might deny or deprive basic civil rights to a population that meets other criteria – from geographic location to political affiliation. These groups would also be entitled to violent resistance, all

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demands that others grovel before me. I cannot permissibly force them to abide by this requirement even if their failure to do so will plunge me into depression. This is because *objective* self-respect places an upper limit on the permissible bases of *subjective* self-respect.

things being equal, for the same reasons. In addition, there needn't be a privileged group bearing full civil rights for those deprived of their basic civil rights to violently resist permissibly.

A proponent of the view that we ought to accede to bloodless invasions might argue that this conclusion is too quick. The debilitating downstream psychological effects of instituting bigoted social and legal norms – that is, the effects of the regime's expressive harms – do not occur immediately. It might take years or decades for the new, oppressive norms to undermine the self-respect of the victimized population to the point that they are no longer capable of leading recognizably meaningful lives. In the meantime, there remains the possibility of non-violent resistance as a means to either overthrowing the ruling regime, or pressuring it to recognize the civil rights of the aggrieved population. Of course, passive resistance is not always successful – but neither is the relevant alternative, which is war with its attendant devastation. The upshot is that a contingent pacifist who argues that we should accede to bloodless invasions can acknowledge the debilitating downstream psychological effects of imposing oppressive social and legal norms, while consistently maintaining that we should nonetheless accede, provided that passive resistance remains a live possibility.

The problem with this view, though, is that it ignores the fact that over time the victims internalize the oppressive norms of the regime in ways that prevents them from recognizing the reasons they have to resist. To understand this problem, it is necessary to move from a discussion of *subjective* self-respect to *objective* self-respect.

## 6. Undermining Objective Self-Respect

As we have seen, systemic failures to give an individual the recognition-respect to which she is entitled as a person can undermine the victim's self-respect in profound ways. But many of the negative downstream psychological effects of forcing a population to see themselves as inferior are absent in cases where the victims internalize the oppressive norms by not only coming to see herself as less worthy than others, but also by *failing to see this as morally problematic*. Recall that subjective self-respect is based on standards of personhood endorsed by that individual. If an individual accepts

standards permitting her to debase or degrade herself before others, the result will be that she possesses self-respect where it is actually unwarranted. This is a case where subjective self-respect is a force for the oppressive status quo in the form of servility. Such individuals come to accept, and even thrive in their allotted, circumscribed social roles. Take for example an ‘Uncle Tom’ – a black man deferential to the authority of whites, which Thomas Hill described as such:

He always steps aside for white men; he does not complain when less qualified whites take over his job; he gratefully accepts whatever benefits his all-white government and employers allot him, and he would not think of protesting its insufficiency. He displays the symbols of deference to whites, and of contempt towards blacks: he faces the former with bowed stance and a ready 'sir' and 'Ma'am'; he reserves his strongest obscenities for the latter.<sup>42</sup>

The Uncle Tom is not a cunning manipulator who shrewdly avoids reprisals to himself or to his family by maintaining good terms with those in power while privately disdaining their authority and disavowing his expressions of fealty. Rather, he accepts without question that as a black individual, “what he values, aspires for, and can demand is of less importance than what whites value, aspire for, and can demand.”<sup>43</sup>

Here is another potential example of how internalizing oppressive norms can result in servility. In 1944, just after the Great Bengal Famine, 45.6% of widowers surveyed ranked their health as either “ill” or “indifferent.” Only 2.5% of widows ranked themselves the same way. Yet all the other evidence indicated that the widows were either as badly off or worse off than the widowers. In effect, masses of starving women claimed not to be ill. Amartya Sen argued that the Bengali women believed that given the scarcity of food, they should not consume what little there was.<sup>44</sup> They believed this as a result of having internalized prevalent sexist norms that discounted the

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<sup>42</sup> (Hill Jr., 1982, p. 88)

<sup>43</sup> (Hill Jr., 1982, p. 88)

<sup>44</sup> (Sen, 1984), (Sen, 1995).

interests of women. As a result, they did not recognize that they had a reason to complain about their own starvation.

We can see, then, why responding to a bloodless invasion by acceding to it, and then bidding its victims to passively resist for decades to come in the hopes of overturning the oppressive social and legal norms, is problematic. A passive, intergenerational conflict against an oppressive regime will abate if the victimized population comes to internalize the oppressive norms. By doing so they fail to see these norms as morally problematic; consequently, they will not fight against them, even passively. Indeed, the challenges that many civil rights movements face is not limited to resisting the overwhelming political, military, and juridical power of a racist regime; a more basic problem is unseating the recalcitrant attitude among the oppressed that the status quo is unproblematic. As Dillon points out, one of the themes of Martin Luther King's "Letters from Birmingham Jail" is the inability of blacks to "see the intolerable as intolerable" as a result of generations of oppression.<sup>45</sup> Given this tendency, the suggestion by contingent pacifists that we respond to bloodless invasion by engaging in passive, intergenerational resistance risks entrenching the oppressive regime by eliminating the source of opposition – i.e., the victims who are not yet in the grip of internalized oppression. In short, the prospects of effective passive resistance will likely dim as time passes.

Against this, however, one might note that those who internalize oppressive norms are often largely content with their lives, precisely because they have internalized those norms. Consider again the case of the Bengali women and the Uncle Tom. There is a sense in which these victims fail to respect themselves in that they do not take seriously their own moral status and rights. Yet it is perfectly possible for the victims to see themselves as acting with self-respect. For example, Stephen Massey asks us to imagine that the Uncle Tom is honest, trustworthy, and deeply concerned for the happiness of his kith and kin. "He may not regard his values and the fulfillment of his desires as having an importance equal to his master's, but he thinks they have some importance and respects himself for meeting what he regards as

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<sup>45</sup> (Dillon, Introduction, 1995, p. 38)

his obligations.”<sup>46</sup> We can also easily imagine that the Bengali women respect themselves for recognizing and responding to the perceived self-abnegating duties. In these cases, the victims would not regard themselves as lacking self-respect. The result is that many of the debilitating psychological effects of lacking *subjective* self-respect are absent in these cases.

One might reiterate that the victims in these cases lack objective self-respect; but the challenge is to explain why we should believe that this state of affairs is particularly bad. After all, by hypothesis, the victims do not see themselves as victimized. Nor are they (we can assume) particularly unhappy or unsatisfied. To the extent that we have difficulty explaining what is so bad about this state of affairs, we have difficulty explaining how bloodless invasions leading to this state of affairs can be permissibly resisted at the cost of innocent lives. That is, though the victims of a bloodless invasion who internalize the oppressive norms of the regime might thereby come to lack objective self-respect, this seems to be no basis for resorting to war so long as they do not suffer psychologically debilitating harms. The upshot is that the contingent pacifist can admit that over time the prospect of effective passive resistance will diminish in accordance with the propensity for the population to internalize the regime’s oppressive norms; but this is a self-correcting problem in that as the population comes to internalize those norms, the need for revolution diminishes.

The problem with this response, though, is that it understates what is wrong with the sort of servility concomitant with the absence of objective self-respect. In the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* Kant argued that our dignity as rational beings demands not only that others respect us qua persons, but that we respect ourselves qua persons – i.e., as ends in ourselves. We accordingly are enjoined to refrain from acting in ways that debase, degrade, or disavow our status as rational beings. We might say, then, that we have a duty of objective self-respect. In *The Metaphysics of Morals* Kant claimed that this duty of self-respect is the most important moral duty partly because it is precondition for recognizing and acting upon all other moral duties. Servility, then, is contrary to a perfect non-juridical duty to oneself. The duty is perfect in that the circumstances in which it applies are fully

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<sup>46</sup> (Massey, 1983, p. 252)

determinate and not subject to our own volitional preferences – we can't "pick and choose" when to abide by the duty. And the duty is non-judicial in that a person cannot be permissibly coerced to abide by the duty.

But this account of what is wrong with servility is unconvincing because we tend to think that what morality obligates us to do must be characterizable in part as claims that others have against us, whether these claims are second-personal or third-personal. This means that a moral duty that I have to respect my own status as a rational being amounts to a claim that I have against myself. But it is unclear how to make sense of first-personal claims. Some have argued, in Kantian fashion, that the object of the claim is 'morality itself', rather than other individuals. Morality accordingly enjoins us not to disavow our moral status.<sup>47</sup>

A more promising approach – one more congenial to the view that internalized oppression is a self-inflicted harm and not necessarily a self-inflicted wrong – focuses on how internalized oppression damages our rational capacities. Carol Hay explores several ways in which internalized oppression can damage our rational capacities so thoroughly that our ability to act rationally is severely, and sometimes permanently, compromised.<sup>48</sup> For example, internalized oppression causes self-deception insofar as the oppressive social systems creates incentives for the oppressed people to believe certain falsehoods about themselves, contrary to the available evidence. This, in turn, impinges upon our autonomy; because we are acting under substantial falsehoods inculcated by the dominant class about who we are and what we are capable of, our resulting decisions while in the grip of internalized oppression cannot be regarded as fully autonomous. In addition, internalized oppression can damage our capacity for rational deliberation. Servile individuals have less deliberative control over which goals they pursue and what means by which they pursue them. This impairs their deliberative capacities insofar as they are left unexercised and uncultivated (which in turn reinforces the belief that the victims are constitutionally incapable of exercising deliberative independence).

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<sup>47</sup> The most influential modern account of this sort belongs to (Hill Jr., 1982).

<sup>48</sup> (Hays, 2011)

Given this account of what makes internalized oppression harmful, we can better understand why it is wrongful to oppress a people, even if they come to adapt to that oppression by internalizing its morally pernicious norms. By doing so, they maintain some degree of subjective self-respect, thereby insulating themselves from the debilitating psychological effects of coming to believe that their practical identities are without worth. But internalizing oppressive norms also has the effect of damaging their most fundamental rational capacities.

Can we go to war to protect these capacities? More to the point, is it permissible to kill innocents as a side-effect of protecting our autonomy and fundamental rational capacities? It is difficult to weigh the value of protecting these capacities against the disvalue of lost innocent life. But it is not my purpose to demonstrate definitively that violently resisting bloodless invasions will typically be permissible. Rather, my goal is to show that when doing the proportionality calculation determining whether we are morally required to surrender, we ought to include more than has been properly appreciated. In calculating the moral costs of surrendering, we obviously include the setback to our political interests resulting from surrendering our rights of political autonomy and political self-determination. But we also ought to include the moral costs of suffering from violations of recognition-respect. Specifically, systematically denying recognition-respect by imposing oppressive social and legal norms can inflict expressive harms which undercut the victim's self-respect to an extent that in severe cases makes it difficult to live a recognizably meaningful life. Where the victimized population will ultimately internalize the oppressive norms, we ought to include the moral costs of undermined objective self-respect. These costs will include diminished rational capacities and diminished autonomy. Once we grasp these debilitating moral harms and include them in the proportionality calculation, the claim that we typically must accept them rather than kill to prevent them becomes that much more difficult to accept.

## **7. Conclusion**

Recall that in the dilemma of bloodless invasions, the maximum amount of defensive harm the victims can permissibly inflict on invaders is determined

by the moral value of the non-vital interests they unconditionally threaten. If this is limited to the victims' political rights, then it is hard to justify a defensive war. But if what I have argued is correct, the harms the invaders will unconditionally commit is not limited to undermining our political rights when they do so by imposing oppressive social and legal norms. This is because the expressive harms caused by imposing such norms undercuts the subjective self-respect among members of the oppressed population who retain the capability of recognizing that they are victims of the new social order. And they undercut the objective self-respect of those who internalize the oppressive social norms of that regime. Inasmuch, the maximum amount of harms we can inflict in such a case is determined not solely by the value of retaining legal rights to political representation, but by the value of living a recognizably worthwhile life, and the value of protecting our rational agency. I suggest that the aim of averting the debilitating psychological effects of diminished subjective self-respect among members of the oppressed group can satisfy the wide-proportionality constraint for war; likewise, for the aim of averting the damage to deliberative capacities of among members of the oppressed group who have internalized the norms of the oppressors (thereby manifesting a lack of objective self-respect).

The upshot is that we can indeed, at least in principle, go to war against an otherwise bloodless invader intent on imposing oppressive social and legal norms. This does not vindicate the view that defensive wars against *all* otherwise bloodless invasion are permissible – but I do not think that such a conclusion is one we should seek to defend.

2016

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