

AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF 'COURAGE' AMONG U.S. MARINES

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This is a theoretical and ethnographic study of conceptions of “courage” among combat infantry, specifically U.S. Marines. U.S. infantry combat soldiers conceive of the cultural value *courage* in its many manifestations and formulations. I maintain that courage manifests itself in both vocal signs, as directly or indirectly referenced spoken discourses, and in action signs, as a way of moving in a semantically-laden enactment space. In its many formulations within Western thought, courage has been understood primarily as the product of psychobiological or instinctive forces. In contrast, I shall argue it is best understood as an expressed cultural and personal value.

The study aims to contribute new knowledge to an American subculture almost entirely neglected by anthropologists: modern American combat infantry. A unique focus of this project is to argue for a conception of *courage* as a *moved* value performed by dynamically embodied persons rather than a reified entity. For example, while many Americans can readily appreciate that Japanese *Geisha* move in very distinctive ways, and acknowledge that those ways of moving are cultural, that is, value-driven, the distinctive movements of American infantry soldiers, both in terms of their cultural origins and as expressions of cultural values, are masked by the wide and deeply-held American value of *utility* and its long historical deployment in warfare. In other words such movements are viewed as merely practical in function and efficient in their execution, without links to moral, ethical, gendered, racial, or other cultural values. This invisibility coupled with a Western academic preference for explanatory resources that reify and render mysterious the source of personal action, makes *courage* as a moved value almost inconceivable.

To *see* courage according to this new formulation requires special theoretical resources, most notably an agent-centered theory of human movement, provided in the work of linguistic and socio-cultural anthropologists Drid Williams and Brenda Farnell (referred to as *semasiology*). It also requires a robust conception of agent causality applicable to the social sciences emerging from a critical realist philosophy of science as found in the work of the philosopher of science Rom Harré and the philosopher of social science Charles Varela.

The position taken in this dissertation is that courage among American combat infantry is best understood as an idiom of body movement and the expression of cultural values made

manifest in the highly detailed and nuanced social situations generated in training and on a battlefield. A battlefield *per se*, and as a value-laden context, is the joint creation of persons engaged in a certain kind of embodied talk. I argue that training for battle can be captured in the phrase “domesticated combat.” By this phrase I mean that certain key performative and contextual variables are controlled, but never entirely so, in the training context. To the extent that training replicates key factors faced by infantry on the battlefield is the extent to which courageous action can be trained. The term “courage,” at least as it is used in the United States, will be shown to be an abstract placeholder whose meaning is inseparable from specific semiotic practices of combat infantry in particular contexts. For combat infantry, specifically U.S. Marines, courage will be shown to consist in the *selfless* pursuit of prized cultural values in situations of moral and physical risk.

This study is based on over sixty individual and group, formal and informal interviews with combat and non-combat veterans from World War II through Operation Iraqi Freedom II and beyond. These interviews are complemented by participant-observation in two seven-week training courses with active duty Marines during the summers of 2007 and 2008. This study makes two contributions to anthropological understanding. It provides new ethnographic knowledge of an academically neglected and misunderstood American community, and applies, and develops further special theoretical resources within socio-cultural and linguistic anthropology that preserve and foreground embodied human agency and action. In other words, while this project is important for the empirical reason that few studies focus on modern Western combat soldiers, and none at all utilize an ‘anthropology of human movement’ approach, it is also important for the theoretical reason that it offers a conception of the relationship of biology and culture that is grounded *scientifically*, and so gives a *plausible* account of that relationship in the service of a proper representation of dynamically embodied persons living culturally. Failing to ground ethnographic interpretation in a plausible account of the relationship between biology and culture promotes the replacement of the meaning of actors with those of the researcher. As a result opinion often masquerades as insight and advocacy often becomes partisanship.

To Dr. B., Dr. W., and Dr. V., incomparable teachers and true friends

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I would like to acknowledge the assistance of the many people who generously gave their time toward making this project a reality. While the limits of space will not permit me to thank them all individually I hope they will find some bit of themselves expressed in the pages that follow. I want to recognize the veterans of military service from the United States, Israel, and Great Britain who decided that the project was interesting enough to give me a glimpse into their lives and values. I reserve a special appreciation for the combat veterans from all the service branches, ranging from World War II to Operation Iraqi Freedom II and beyond, who re-examined their experiences with and for me. Their generosity and honesty was only exceeded by their patience in explaining the obvious to me.

Besides the 60+ individual and group interviews with combat and non-combat veterans, the ethnographic content of this project was made possible by the personal leadership of Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Shusko (ret.), Director of the Martial Arts Program at the U.S. Marine Corps Martial Arts Center of Excellence (MACE) located at Quantico, Virginia. In true Marine fashion LtCol. Shusko ensured that I got what I asked for: a taste (literally) of the dirt, sweat, blood (only mine, luckily), and sheer exhaustion that constitutes advanced Marine training as well as a felt sense of the burden of leading and following a squad of active-duty Marines as they faced challenges individually and as a team. I believe that the depth of his commitment to training Marines properly is only matched by his personal exemplification of selflessness.

I would like to thank the main sources of my inspiration for this project, Dr. Brenda Farnell, Dr. Drid Williams, and Dr. Charles Varela who's many years of pursuing the highest quality of scholarly work possible have set the academic standard to which I aspire. Their efforts have yielded a corpus of work that has exorcised many of the ghosts haunting socio-cultural anthropology in particular and social science in general. In this sense they've given me eyes to see.

Finally I would like to thank my doctoral committee, Dr. Brenda Farnell, Dr. Alejandro Lugo, Dr. Ellen Moodie, and Dr. Charles Varela who have provided the freedom for me to study a community that, currently, but hopefully for not much longer, stands in problematic relationship to the discipline of anthropology in the United States.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Social science needs to do more than give a description of the social world as seen by its members (ethnography); it needs also to ask whether members have an adequate understanding of their world and, if not, to explain, why not.
-- *Peter T. Manicas, 1987*

The ontological question of the nature of being can be asked as the ethical question of the nature of courage. Courage can show us what being is, and being can show us what courage is.
-- *Paul Tillich, 1952*

The origins of this study lie in my graduate work on the values of American Civil War soldiers. In examining the original diaries and letters of soldiers from both the Union and Confederacy, I was struck by the dissonance between their self-portrayal and their representation by contemporary historians, especially when it came to battlefield actions. For historians, what counted as explanations of soldiers' actions amounted simply to subsuming certain personality traits and actions under categories like 'patriotism,' or 'honor'. Often, the connection between the category and the actions or traits being interpreted was not explicated at all. In these cases, the categories seemed more accurate in conveying the historian's interest than any sense of the values and semiotic practices of the soldiers.

In one notorious example, a Pulitzer Prize-winning historian explained an Irish immigrant soldier's fighting courageously for the Union, a fact that got him promoted to his regiment's color guard, by citing him as an exemplar of "immigrant ideology".¹ In reading this soldier's letters, however, I found that he had left his wife and home in New York City to seek work in Boston and, not finding any, lost all his money on a drunken bender. With no money and no other prospects, he enlisted. *This*, not ideological fervor, first positioned the immigrant in the Union Army, a fact that is ignored by the historian. There is a disservice here, not just to readers who are left with the impression of ideological fervor as some sort of monolithic and consuming

personal quality but also to the soldier who clearly demonstrates growing commitment over time to what we might suspect are new personal and organizational values.

This kind of residual positivism, which mimics in form the “covering law model” of explanation in the natural sciences advanced by scholars Karl Popper (1935) and Carl Hempel (1948), first introduced me to the problem of the relationship between description and explanation. For social scientists generally this problem can be captured in the question, “How do we explain social action?” An answer is neither easy nor straightforward. The prescription for research offered by philosopher of social science Peter T. Manicas indicates that a good ethnographer does not simply let her consultants speak for themselves—this is no different than showing a video recording of consultants in action—rather, she explains what is going on. For Manicas, the researcher determines the extent to which her consultants understand their world and their semiotic practices in it if she is to avoid a charge of naïve descriptivism.

While Manicas does not mention it, an implicit *second* judgment is required: what data does the researcher pick out as relevant for explaining her consultants’ ways of life? On what basis, then, does she accept or reject their understanding of their world and semiotic practices? Was the historian mentioned above somehow *justified* in leaving out the way the Irish soldier got himself into the Union Army? Since he never tells us the basis for his judgment we are left in the dark about his standard for assessing social action. For me this an ethical issue of (mis)representation in scholarship. If Manicas is right then the grounds for explaining human social action used by the researcher must be made clear and available to readers.

Anthropologists face a similar issue in generating ethnographic accounts of the actions of members of their own or another’s culture. To assume that explanation is not intimately tied to description, and vice-versa, is to make a fundamental mistake. The philosopher of science Rom Harré (1986) illustrates the necessity of this relationship using Galileo and Ptolemy. While both scholars presented shared similar descriptions of the solar system and planetary behavior, only Galileo’s description is revolutionary because of his novel explanatory theory. In short, Harré argues, theory teaches the researcher not only what should count as data but also what shape a meaningful interpretation of that data should take. Disjunctions between explanation and description emerge when a researcher fails to specify the relationship between theory and data. What I find troubling about much contemporary ethnography is just this lack of explicit discussion of theory and its relationship to ethnographic data. One goal in this study is to

provide an in-depth, explicit discussion of my theoretical position and its relevance to my data prior to engaging in ethnography. In order to do so with clarity, I will offer vigorous and detailed critiques of some traditional approaches to ethnography offered by representative well-known anthropologists. In order to remain economical in terms of space, I focus on specific components of these anthropologists' work that are relevant to my argument, to the exclusion of a review of their entire corpus or overall contributions to the field.

This approach seems especially well suited to my topic of study, 'courage' among U.S. Marines, because, like historians and anthropologists, Marines too *share* the problem of the relationship between explanation and description. In fact, many other Americans do as well. In the course of preliminary research for this project I found that American civilians and American military personnel both describe courageous combat action in ways that *contradict* their explanations of human social action generally. For example, Americans in general and Marines in particular often describe courageous combat action using words like, "he ran into the intersection with mortar shells exploding all around to pick up the wounded Marine and carry him back to the ditch." The source of the action described here is identified in the use of the personal pronoun "he," which indexes the person. The phrase "to pick up the wounded Marine" offers one (kind of) explanation of the action. Interestingly and conversely, when explicitly asked to explain the action described above, the phrase "to pick up the wounded Marine" often disappears in favor of phrases like, "it's in our DNA," or "it's a fight or flight instinct." The assignment of responsibility for the action *suddenly changes* from the person to the implied operation of a biological entity or process.²

We are then, faced with an anthropological problem of interpretation that emerges right out of the theoretical considerations discussed above: our consultants' person-oriented, agentic *descriptions* are contradicted by their biological, deterministic *explanations*. The result is not understanding, but incomprehensibility, both for us and for them. One major question this study asks is, "How can we best explain this contradiction and so make such action intelligible, to us as anthropological researchers and to them as consultants?" While it is perhaps common for people to live their lives in the midst of contradiction, one contribution of this study will be to make the meaning of the cultural lives of Marines as they relate to courage appreciable.

Manicas's prescription alerts us to the complexity of the project. We must simultaneously assess the adequacy of our consultants' *and* our own understanding of the world.

Were we to adopt a traditional anthropological strategy of describing the ethnographic situation, for example, we would leave untouched the problem of contradiction expressed in the discourses of these consultants untouched and so their semiotic practices would remain unintelligible. Adopting the more recent ethnographic strategy of “letting consultants speak for themselves” would be ineffectual for the same reason. This means that the interpretive problem for both Marines and us cannot be solved empirically. It can only be solved theoretically. A second major question this study asks, therefore, is, “What anthropological resources are available to resolve the contradiction facing both consultant and researcher?” It is here that the theologian Paul Tillich’s insight into the deep relationship between ontology and ethics serves as a guide to what we might be looking for.

In the West, ‘courage’ has been a topic of study for more than two millennia, especially in relation to military action. A very short sampling of relatively recent scholarship includes the former British soldier Lord Moran’s *The Anatomy of Courage* (1945), the German theologian Paul Tillich’s *The Courage to Be* (1952), the British writer Compton MacKenzie’s *On Moral Courage* (1962), the American historian Gerald Linderman’s *Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War* (1987), American philosopher William Ian Miller’s *The Mystery of Courage* (2000), and the American politician and former military pilot John McCain’s *Why Courage Matters: The Way to a Braver Life* (2004). A range of other media complements the written word. In film, for example, Bruce Beresford’s *Breaker Morant* (1980), Steven Spielberg’s *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), and Zack Snyder’s *300* (2007) are depictions of and meditations on the meanings of courage. They are also exemplifications of ways of being a person.

I will argue that courage is powerfully evocative and historically persistent as a topic of study for Westerners generally and Americans in particular exactly because of its ontological implications in our cultural milieu. Courage constitutes the exercise of personal agency not for oneself but for others or for prized cultural values in contexts presenting a risk of moral degradation and physical death. Such selflessness is a critical component of courage that defies our cultural expectations. Americans in particular have for many years been subjected to the Darwinist and neo-Darwinist mantra that human behavior is, like that of any other animal, evolutionarily self-interested. Within this worldview, the source of our behavior is thought to be mechanical; automated by extra- or impersonal forces that are thought to move or motivate what

is otherwise inert human matter. Against this explanatory schema, courageous action, insofar as it is *described* as a choice and enacted selflessly seems either *unnatural* in its agentic enactment, or *supernatural* in its defiance of our specie's built-in orientation toward self as against others. Understanding human beings as ethical beings would seem to depend on an agentic ontology; that is, people have real choice over and in their actions. If the Darwinists and their followers are correct, however, courage as we seem to know it should not exist, no less be seen enacted by Marines in action. We can ask, "What kind of being is a courageous Marine? An agentic and so potentially selfless person or a determined and so selfish vehicle for evolutionary forces?"

The linguistic and socio-cultural anthropologist Brenda Farnell captures the deep connection between ontology, ethics, and the ethics of responsible interpretive representations of consultants.

Physical being and bodily actions have been denied the status of signifying acts and embodied forms of knowledge.

This raises important issues for the problem of the disembodied actor in social theory. It is of direct import to anthropological inquiry since at the heart of the social sciences are major difficulties in characterizing what human beings are like and what human agency is. Since re-inventions of nature are part of cultural politics, our constructions of human movement set on stage what kind of creature we expect to enact the human drama. Failure to make the action of moving agents central to a definition of embodiment (and therefore to social action) risks compromising anthropological inquiry by distorting our understanding of ways of knowing and being that do not evince the kinds of philosophical and religious biases against the body that can be found throughout the history of Western philosophy and social theory. [Farnell 1996: 312]

Importantly, Farnell's focus on the absent moving body in social theory is particularly apt for research on courageous combat action since, as we will see, most accounts of it demonstrate that it is accomplished with the body and not with other typically valorized modalities among Westerners such as the mind or the voice. Not only must we find an anthropological theory that possesses an agentic ontology, we must find one that conceptualizes human agency as embodied as well as thoughtful or vocal. This means we need anthropological resources that do not explain away, but rather explain, the full range of semiotic capabilities of persons.

Farnell's remarks index a major theme of this study: the relationship between biology and culture. As Westerners and Americans conceptualize it, this relationship serves as a meta-narrative contextualizing not only the descriptive and explanatory discourses of civilians and

soldiers, but of anthropologists as well. It is perhaps no surprise that this meta-narrative must be faced and addressed given socio-cultural anthropologist Doyne Dawson's contention that warfare is one of the "two main battlegrounds" of the "longest-running controversy in the history of science," namely, the nature/nurture debate (1996b: 2). The nature/nurture debate (which instantiates the science/humanism debate over the problem of freedom and determinism, or its more recent articulation as the structure/agency debate) presents a long history of intractability in the social sciences. The two sides are often seen as contradictory and diametrically opposed. In the recent anthropological past two main interpretative frameworks for understanding human social action have emerged that resonate with the contradiction between description and explanation as well as the contradiction between biology and culture in the social sciences. The first is the disembodied idealism Farnell marks, and the second is the biological determinism promoted by neo-Darwinists. While other frameworks and sub-frameworks exist (for example radical social constructionism), I will concentrate mainly on these two in order to maintain my focus.

Unfortunately, not since the mid-1970's through the early 1980's has the relationship between biology and culture been regarded as a serious, foundational concern for the discipline, cast in theoretical terms, and placed at the forefront of the discipline for systematic consideration. Socio-cultural anthropologists Sherry Ortner (1974) and Carol MacCormack (1980), for example, placed the relationship at the forefront of the discipline as part of a sustained feminist critique. Similarly, socio-cultural anthropologists Clifford Geertz in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973) and Marshall Sahlins in *The Use and Abuse of Biology: An Anthropological Critique of Sociobiology* (1976) raised theoretical questions about the relationship between biology and culture that, while not inflected by considerations of gender, focused specifically on the issues I have so far been discussing. Since the early 1980's the discipline seems to have chosen to remain agnostic about the relationship or has cast its arguments in ethnographic rather than theoretical terms. This does not make the task of finding appropriate theoretical resources within anthropology any easier. There is, however, an anthropological theory that appears to provide the required resources. *Semasiology* (Williams 1982) is an agentic theory of human social action that specifies that relationship between biology and culture according to the resources of a new realist meta-narrative, called critical realism.³

In semasiology the individual human organism (biology) and the embodied person (culture) are understood as *one naturally occurring, unified entity*. From a non-positivist scientific point of view, this unity is the only appropriately structured and so plausible entity capable of producing the variable and rich ethnographic record so powerfully illustrative of human agency. Moreover, the plausibility of the conception of human being embedded in *semasiology* grounds and guides the kinds of terms and predicates used by the researcher in describing and explaining human social action without contradiction. It provides an in-principle reason for understanding the semiotic practices of persons from *their* perspective prior to assessment or criticism, as well as a standard for assessing human social action.

In this study, the kind of social action I wish to explain is combat action and training for combat. My motivation for exploring combat and training is threefold. First, I want to offer an in-depth, appreciative study of modern American combat soldiers, one that grows out of my experience with the same kind of people referred to by a Marine I trained with in the summer of 2007. He said, “I constantly have people telling me, ‘Marines are stupid. Who moves towards enemies firing?’” (Survey, July 23, 2007). I want to know, are these “people” right in their assessment? Are Marines stupid in the way they move toward people trying to kill them? Second, I want to bring out into the open the notion that the quality of ethnographic representation is a matter of ethics that depends fundamentally on the choice of theoretical commitments by which anthropologists define the nature of human social action (even those researchers who claim to be “simply describing, not explaining” their consultants’ ways of life). Finally, I want to show that today, the relationship between biology and culture should be of utmost importance to any anthropologist seeking to understand consultants whose way of life, like that of the U.S. Marines, is primarily expressed in dynamically embodied semiotic practices.

To be sure, other anthropologists have studied the American military, and warfare generally, *but not from the standpoint of modern, Western combat infantry*. There is currently a deficit of anthropological knowledge about U.S. combat soldiers. In *Anthropology and the United States Military* (2003), Pamela Frese and Margaret Harrell note that, “Today we find only a few book-length ethnographies that examine military units or military communities, whether in peacetime or in combat” (2003:x). Though Frese and Harrell do not name the “few” ethnographies that concern *U.S. combat soldiers*, in my research I found the earliest to be Ralph Linton’s *Totemism and the AEF* (1924). Linton argues for the appearance of “primitive”

totemism in a “modern” state as evidenced by the adoption of a totemic symbol by a particular division of soldiers in the American Expeditionary Force in World War I. The paper was thus primarily a contribution to the anthropological literature on the primitive-modern relationship and not about the soldiers themselves. I will return to this issue of the lack of ethnographic focus on modern Western and American combat soldiers, as well as other issues, in chapter 4 where I examine the Anthropology of Warfare literature in its various traditional and contemporary permutations.

The data I use in this study comes from three sources. First, between 2002 through 2008 I conducted a set of sixty formal and informal, individual and small group interviews. I had in-depth conversations with active duty, retired, and reserve military personnel from all service branches, with and without combat experience, ranging in time period from World War II through Operation Iraqi Freedom II and the war in Afghanistan. Second, and weighted more in this study, I completed three periods of participant-observation in training for combat with active duty soldiers and Marines. In the summer of 2004 I spent four days with members of the U.S. Army’s 101st Airborne Division at Fort Campbell, Kentucky in live-fire, day and night iterations of woodland tactical problems. In the summer of 2007 I was a participant in a seven-week Martial Arts Instructor-Trainer course with active duty United States Marines at the Martial Arts Center of Excellence at Quantico, Virginia. In the summer of 2008, I repeated the Martial Arts Center of Excellence training program as a guest Instructor-Trainer. An additional source of data is popular media such as films, books, and songs. While I do not examine the relationship between popular images and the self-identity of U.S. Marines, I do use these media to demonstrate the pervasiveness of otherwise complex notions of combat and courage as well as other themes in American culture

Having introduced the problems to be addressed by this study in this chapter, the next, chapter 2, is given over to a more detailed examination of Tillich’s insight into the relationship between ontology and ethics as seen in the intuitive sensibilities of American civilians as expressed in the popular media. This is the larger culture in which American combat infantry exist. I first demonstrate a general American appreciation of battlefields and courageous action that leads to moral comparisons between the actions of soldiers and the actions of civilians. We find these comparisons in a wide range of popular modalities such as films, popular music, and billboards. These comparisons will be shown to assume human agency as a *sine qua non* of

ethical action and that, for soldiers, such agency is primarily exercised in and through the body. The conception of agentic, courageous battlefield action in popular modalities will be juxtaposed with pervasive and hegemonic bio-reductive resources for explaining human action among the American public. From this juxtaposition I generate a preliminary formulation of courageous action on the battlefield and conclude that there is no way to honor simultaneously agentic descriptions of courage and deterministic explanations of social action.

In chapter 3 I explore potential resources for solving the contradictions between description/explanation and biology/culture, from within Western anthropology. I also explore the possibility that, despite the inability to honor agency and determinism simultaneously, there may be no way even to decide between agentic descriptions and deterministic explanations of human social action. It will be shown that an in-principle decision is in fact possible, but not without clarifying the relationship of perception to conception (and vice versa), as well as the relationship of both to learning, especially in cases of novelty. This will lead into a discussion of the actual bio-physiology of our species in pursuit of an understanding of how human beings actually work on that level. A sustained critique of the bio-reductive framework emerges that provides the basis for a principled rejection of deterministic accounts of human social action. I then delve into the ethical implications of social scientific research that chooses an interpretive framework based on a surprising similarity between idealistic and deterministic theories of human social action. I move on to specify in more detail the characteristics of the resources necessary for resolving the contradiction(s).

In chapter 4 I use the profile thus developed to review literature found in the *Anthropology of Warfare* and assess its applicability to the problem of contradiction. I argue that the literature shows three trends. First, an early twentieth century trend toward utilizing the ethnographic record as a way to argue against the inevitability of war, second, a multi-century realist trend toward explaining war as a function of impersonal biological or social forces, and third, a late twentieth and early twenty-first century idealist trend that assumes warfare is a cultural convention while hoping for its demise through a covert appeal to a common humanity through ethnographic descriptions of the experience of warfare. I conclude that the *Anthropology of Warfare* literature in its various traditional and contemporary forms does not provide appropriate resources for resolving the contradiction between description and explanation or between biology and culture.

In chapter 5 I present *semasiology* as an anthropological theory of human social action that fits the requisite profile for resolving the contradiction(s). I examine the realist scientific roots of semasiology and their critical role in grounding any theory of human agency as well as the impact on interpretive decision-making on the part of the researcher. *Semasiology* will be shown to be an effective solution to the problem of disembodied social theory as well as the problem of bio-reductionism, and on that basis I offer a sense of the theory's power using a sampling of ethnographic and ethno-historical military events.

In chapter 6 I focus on using the appropriate theoretical resources rigorously to analyze the ethnographic context and detail of Marine combat training. Based on my field research at the Martial Arts Center of Excellence (MACE) in Quantico, Virginia I show that the Marine Corps is a special kind of sub-culture, purpose- and value-driven in definitive ways based on their encounter with killing, life, and death. I structure and base this demonstration on the *semasiological* principle of "nesting" that suggests critical contextual elements are necessary to understand the meanings generated by actors. In this case I concentrate on the Marine Corps itself and the MACE as the most relevant contextual elements. I explain the semiotic practices of Marines in training for combat in terms of formal and informal rules for action that then opens up a discussion of which values are embodied by Marines and why.

chapter 7 develops the connection between embodied movement, meaning, and context in actual training. I analyze the vocal and gestural discursive practices used in Marine combat training and formulate the conception of courage that emerges from them using *semasiological* principles. In doing so, courage becomes *comprehensible and so appreciable*. The *semasiological* framework respects Marines' agentic vocal descriptions of courage, as well as their agentic, embodied expressions of, courage, even as it reveals interesting fault lines in the otherwise unitary presentation of Marine training. I also provide an exposition of the relationship between combat training and actual combat, which grounds my claims about the nature of courage through two martial arts techniques taught at the MACE. I present "training" as "domesticated combat," meaning that it approximates and in some ways replicates actual combat, but is never identical to it. An explanation of how visible, dynamically embodied movement constitutes this semiotic practice will be offered. These endeavors culminate in an answer to the question, "What *is* courage to U.S. combat infantry?"

Chapter 8 is devoted to adding more depth to our appreciation of the complexities facing combat infantry in trying to be good in, and at, their way of life. I examine a form of doubt about values and training at the MACE through an analysis of the views of one MACE trainer, Staff Sergeant Demster. This doubt centers on the ethics of being an ethical warrior and is captured in the question, “Whose ethics should we use in MACE training?” SSgt. Demster’s views lead me to consider one way to answer concerns offered by retired Marine captain and master martial artist named Jack Hoban. Mr. Hoban, a special advisor to the MACE, advocates for a supposed universal human value, called the “dual-life value,” as the inviolable basis for assessing human social action. Consideration of Mr. Hoban’s answer leads to an analysis of exemplary, and primarily vocal, discourses that simultaneously obscure and highlight the (ir)relevance of gender in being a good Marine. The link between Mr. Hoban’s formulation and gender will be shown to be a startlingly similar universal standard for assessing human action advanced by the socio-cultural anthropologist Michelle Z. Rosaldo over thirty-five years ago. After developing this analysis I offer a few limited remarks on ethnicity.

In chapter 9 I clarify the relationship between courage and fear. I then discuss the deleterious and unethical effects of a social science that fails to include critical realist, scientifically plausible resources when addressing these issues, using an example from my own experience with a grant application. In so doing, I summarize the benefits of such resources as they appear in *semasiology*. I then summarize my findings and offer a few additional insights into courage, among them the fact that courageous action is both intelligent and learned, and melds realism with idealism in important, if at times contradictory, ways. I also offer summary comments on the management of gender and gender relationships in Marine combat training at the MACE. Using the deep connection between dynamically embodied movement and the expression of prized cultural values, I suggest that a more overt conversation about ethics and morals may be required to help Marines learn how and why to live with killing, and with the deaths of comrades. I illustrate this suggestion with a brief analysis of the story of Marine Staff Sergeant Travis Twiggs, with whom I trained. I end the chapter with an analysis of and commentary on the use of realistic as against ideological views of soldiers and warfare. At the center of this analysis and commentary is Albert Einstein, whose mocking comments about soldiers, I argue, invites exactly the kind of violence that Western and American soldiers are dedicated to stopping.

In this project I hope to enlist the patience of the reader. Based on my perception of serious problems underlying ethnographic work in American anthropology (to be delineated in chapters 2 and 3) I offer some exacting and detailed analyses. These analyses are necessary steps, in my estimation, to resolving the problems I identify. As such the first part of the study will concentrate extensively on theoretical issues. This resolution of theoretical problems leads to an ethnographic presentation that, moreover, does not concentrate *primarily* on typical American anthropological categories of concern such as ethnicity, race, gender, or religion. These will be shown to be secondary issues to soldiers in combat and in combat training.

¹ See James M. McPherson's *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (1997), Oxford University Press.

² There are, of course, other options for both non-military Americans and Marines. For example, "to fulfill his destiny," or, "because God willed it."

³ For example, see Aronson, Harré, and Way (1995), Bhaskar (2008), Bunge (2001), Harré (1986), Keat and Urry (1975), Manicas (1991), and Shotter (1994).

CHAPTER 2

FORMULATING A CONCEPTION OF COURAGE IN THE UNITED STATES: THEORETICAL AND ETHNOGRAPHIC CONSIDERATIONS

This chapter is organized by Paul Tillich's insight that, "The ontological question of the nature of being can be asked as the ethical question of the nature of courage. Courage can show us what being is, and being can show us what courage is" (2000: 2). I intend on demonstrating that there exists among Americans a deep and intuitive sensibility about courageous action and its form on battlefields. This sensibility, often expressed in films, popular music, analogies between military and civilian actions, and descriptions of battlefield actions, focuses the moral worth of persons who act courageously: their actions are lessons on how to act for the rest of us. The general assumption, then, is that persons have the ability to manage their actions and it is this assumption of agency—the ability to choose how, when, why one acts—that generates the basis for an ethical component to action. I will show that Americans implicitly focus on the human body as the primary resource for ethical expression in battlefield action. This American sensibility is used pervasively in process of ascribing courage to persons as part of general cultural negotiations of moral standing.

In this chapter I will also show the American conceptual landscape is dominated by biological explanatory resources that *deny* human agency and so present a contradictory understanding of human social action that results in explaining away, denying, or simply ignoring socio-cultural concepts like "courage." This is accomplished by locating the source of human social action in biophysical or bio-psychological structures and forces that determine behavior. The contradiction not only fails to account for battlefield action in its full context and detail, it renders courageous action *incomprehensible* from an anthropological point of view. The biological explanatory resources as they are presented in what I call the bio-reductive framework will be juxtaposed to the agentic, descriptive accounts of battlefield action to highlight the radical differences between the two. As I proceed I will offer a preliminary formulation of courageous action on the battlefield and from it specifically identify the impossibility of respecting the ethical nature of courage as Americans understand it descriptively

if we employ a deterministic bio-reductive framework for explaining human action generally. These issues are, as Tillich argues, primarily *ontological*.

Combat Infantry Actions Are Penultimate Examples of Courageous Action

To begin I would like to offer a few categorical statements whose truth will be explored, assessed, and supported in the course of this study. One is that the actions of combat infantry on the battlefield stand out as penultimate examples of courage for Americans. In the United States and the West, infantry exist primarily for the purpose of attacking enemies or defending against them. Infantry, by definition, are trained to engage in combat. The term “combat” comes from the Latin word *combattuere* that translates into “to fight/pound/beat/strike with.” We should notice that the translation of the original Latin and our modern usage implies that combat is a social event: infantry *fight with* others, the enemy.¹ Combat is a social action that forms the basis for ascribing the culturally important quality of “courage” to the infantry that engage in it. Though important in its own right, the historical record of combat evoking a range of emotional reactions, from revulsion to amazement, such experiential reactions are not the point of this study. Rather, the point is the connection between combat and courage as an expression of allegiance to prized cultural values.

For many Americans, infantry combat and courage are synonymous if not closely linked. Poetry, novels, fictional and non-fictional accounts, paintings, sketches, videos, movies, documentaries, combatants’ letters, memoirs, blogs, and history textbooks bring the courageous actions of infantry into focus for Americans. While varying in quality, the sheer amount of material is staggering. Consider just the relatively recent phenomena of filmmaking, which developed into a robust expressive medium in the 1920’s. Brassey’s *Guide to War Films 2000* (2000) contains an “A to Z” listing of international war films covering over 200 pages and numbering in the hundreds of films. While only *representations* of actual combat, some of these films, like Steven Spielberg’s *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), portrays infantry combat so realistically that some World War II veterans reportedly were unable to view the entire movie or watch it without breaking down in tears. It is this kind of realism that will permit me to develop a sense of popular depictions and metaphors of, as well as allusions and references to, combat across media that circle around the common notion that combat and courage are synonymous.

Representations of combat in the U.S. are complemented by the ready availability of actual infantry combat through news channels like CNN and MSNBC. Youtube.com and similar video posting sites make available graphic depictions of combat, as do bloggers like Michael Yon. In his entry entitled *Gates of Fire* (2005) he offers a first-hand account of American soldiers attacking insurgents. His story coupled with still photographs covers a hand-to-hand fight between an insurgent and an army sergeant major as well as an army colonel being shot in the leg at close range. Finally, veterans themselves offer explicit descriptions of their personal experience and understanding of battlefields in books, through websites, and in documentaries. This material is only what is most recent. Hundreds of years of oral and written stories, photographs, drawings, carvings, textiles, and other media stand behind it.

Bridging the gap between representations of combat and actual combat in the popular realm are the recent phenomena of computer video games. These games are designed to deliver an immersive experience of virtual battlefields. While one example actually produced by the U.S. Army was designed for the purpose of supporting recruitment, the appeal of the production rests, in my opinion, on the realistic portrayal of how and why combat infantry act on the battlefield. Realism is enhanced by the ability of gamers to “fight” other gamers online.² The game, *America’s Army 3*,

delivers an authentic and entertaining Army experience by reflecting the training, technology, actions and career advancement of a Soldier within a unique exciting game experience. AA3 highlights different aspects of the Army from Army Values and the Warrior Ethos to Army career opportunities and lifestyles both on and off duty. Through their in-game characters, AA3 players will be able to experience the way Soldiers train, live, and advance in the Army. AA3 players will also experience different types of technologies and equipment used by the Army’s high-tech Soldier. Players are bound by Rules of Engagement (ROE) and gain experience as they navigate challenges in team-based, multiplayer, force on force operations. In the game, as in the Army, accomplishing missions requires teamwork and adherence to the seven Army Core Values. In the game, a player’s actions and demonstrated Army values will have consequences that are integral to success in gameplay and will affect a player’s career progression.

[<http://www.americasarmy.com/intel/article.php?t=289892>]

By October of 2007, the game had been downloaded 40 million times and registered 8.5 million users (Costa 2007: 54). Importantly, of course, the actual experience of having an arm blown off

or seeing an friend shot in the head is missing, not because depictions of such events are not represented in these games (they are) but because they are in fact not real.

U.S. Marine, veteran of close combat in Iraq, and interviewee for this project Colonel Bryan P. McCoy affirms this understanding. In his small but powerful book, *The Passion of Command: The Moral Imperative of Leadership* (2006), he writes that despite the “daily deluge” of violence in the media and video games,

[Americans] still fear interpersonal violence to our core. Notwithstanding all this exposure to violence and our affinity for firearms, our alleged comfort with interpersonal violence is a cognitive illusion. Ask yourself this question: Which do you fear more, death in a car crash or intimate death at the hands of another human? Intimate death is an act of ultimate domination; another human snuffs out your life at close range. Nothing unnerves us more. This is why we, as a culture, collectively denounce violence. [2006: 15]

While I will take up a number of Colonel McCoy’s themes later in this study, what I want to emphasize here is that these games *do* provide is a sense of how infantry, for example, are *supposed* to act on a battlefield along with a more or less visceral encounter with being hunted by other people. For the critical reviewer, the encounter with these mediums can guide the imagination toward an in-depth appreciation of combat and the battlefield even if the experience of actual combat remains unavailable. I take it as a matter of interpretive discipline to honor the realism of the American military to ensure that an imaginative appreciation of combat is different in kind from experiencing, especially, actual hand-to-hand combat.

The exceptional quality of what the American military does on the behalf of the American people *is* constituted by their volunteering to embrace this radically different experience and with it a radically different ethic as Colonel McCoy implies. In turn, Americans often look to the actions of combat infantry depicted in popular media as *moral lessons*, that is, how to be a particular kind of “good” person, a “courageous” person. It is important to realize that *the very presence of combat infantry* can, and usually does generate a context of physical and moral danger. Combat infantry *means* force or the threat of force for many, *and rightly so* given the purpose of combat infantry. Associate Professor of History Anni P. Baker writes in *American Soldiers Overseas: The Global Military Presence* (2004),

The example of the U.S. forces in Germany demonstrates the importance of maintaining a defense consensus among host nation populations. If the people do not see the need for defense measures, their patience is taxed by any sign of the military presence, whether in the form of maneuvers, missiles, or merely the sight of uniformed personnel. [2004: xvi]

The dissonance between American regard for combat infantry and German animosity toward combat infantry alerts us that the *context* makes a critical difference in ascriptions of courage. To be clear about my focus, I am referring to American regard for combat infantry action *on the battlefield*, not combat infantry stationed in a base on foreign soil. To be even clearer, I am not referring to *all* combat infantry actions. For example, eating on a battlefield might not be relevant to a discussion of courage, and *might be* a detail to be ignored, although the availability of what one puts into stomachs is of critical concern. Breathing on a battlefield, however, might be highly important although *not directly relevant to* courage. Peak physical condition increases the capability of soldiers to act *at all* as the Roman writer Vegetius tells us in Book III of *De Re Militari*, entitled *Dispositions for Action*, “What can a soldier do who charges when out of breath?” (390 C.E.).

With these considerations in mind, we can pick out some battlefield actions as conspicuous. *Charging* on a battlefield, for example, has become one action that appears to generate the American close identification of combat action with courage and so suggests that the soldier taking this kind of action is morally good. Actions like those represented in Edward Zwick’s film *Glory* (1989) are more in line with what Americans pick out as pertinent to discussions of courage. The climactic scene shows African-American soldiers fighting for the Union in the American Civil War *charging* a Confederate fort. In point of historical fact, it was on the basis of this fundamental action of combat infantry—charging the enemy—that black soldiers silenced critics arguing that, as biological and so psychological inferiors of whites, blacks were incapable of the expression of commitment to values other than those of immediate self-interest. James Horner’s accompanying musical score magnificently captures the pathos of their magnificent expression of commitment to the values of the Union and equality.

The Morality of Battlefield Action: Negotiation and Contradiction

During the American Civil War the point was, and still is, that *charging* an enemy indexes, or points to, values prized as underpinning or constituting a way of life. It does so especially because of the high risk, if not likelihood, of harm or death. But the relationship between battlefield actions like charging the enemy and larger socio-cultural values is negotiable, not fixed. For example, it is well known that American combat infantry in World War II differed radically from their Japanese counterparts in their view of the battlefield action of *surrender*: American cultural values permitted infantry to surrender while retaining their honor while Japanese cultural values did not. American views of the Japanese *as fighters* was overshadowed if not compromised by this ethic. In other words, the Americans nearly universally refused to honor the Japanese for their prowess in battlefield action like charging exactly because of the larger socio-cultural values for which those actions were taken. This point is highlighted *and reversed* by those Americans who, especially after the war, expressed their respect of the battlefield actions of some German soldiers in Europe by describing them as “tough fighters” for example, *despite their allegiance to Nazism and fascism*. It is this negotiable connection, sometimes denied, sometimes claimed, sometimes obvious, sometimes implied, that permits a *distinction in the quality of courage that underwrites a distinction between what American combat infantry do and what Al-Qaeda suicide bombers do*. That is, American combat infantry act by taking into account, and therefore respecting, the status of non-combatants as non-combatants by, primarily, not killing them. Al-Qaeda suicide bombers make no such distinction (more on this later in the study). This exposes, of course, the idea that there are some combat infantry actions that Americans view as morally bad, such as killing civilians.

While Americans can negotiate or take as given the relationship between battlefield actions, larger socio-cultural values, and conclusions about the morality of those actions, there exists what might be a meta-narrative about the source of human social action, and therefore courage, that introduces a subtle but important contradiction into the conversation. For example, during my field research in July of 2007, a U.S. Marine infantryman and combat veteran told me “aggressive behavior,” which is part of the meaning of combat and so part of the meaning of being an infantryman, is “instinctive.” Killing, aggression, and courage are clearly linked on the battlefield. This meta-narrative, therefore, prompts the question, “Are combat actions and their

moral status somehow biologically mandated? Problematically, however, the same kind of biological meta-narrative is accessed by another U.S. Marine combat veteran in a Marine Corps Gazette article who ascribed to humans a “natural instinct *not* to kill” (Stevens 2008:20, emphasis added). Two interrelated problems emerge. First, it is not clear how we can reconcile the pronouncements of these two Marines: how can aggression (killing) be an instinct at the same time that not killing (aggression) is an instinct. The second problem has to do with the fact that this meta-narrative locates the source of human social action in human biology functioning automatically (an instinct). If so, it is not clear how or why we can (and apparently do) utilize these actions as bases for socio-cultural moral judgments. After all, if this meta-narrative is right, we are essentially handing out medals for what amounts to good digestion. The wide-ranging popular American encounter with military action, its presence in daily American moral discourses in light of larger socio-cultural values, and contradiction among combat veterans about the source of that action suggests we take a much closer look at what is going on.

Everyday Analogies and A Conception of Courageous Action

Positive, everyday analogies and metaphors made by ordinary American citizens use these kinds of combat infantry actions as a standard for civilian actions. They are a good place to start our examination. These analogies and metaphors appear to be “master models,” that “help shape and organize large and important aspects of experience for particular groups of people” (Gee 1999:69). Analogies and metaphors are broadcast daily through a range of popular cultural mediums ranging from commemorative writing to popular music and public billboards. Sometimes they are constituted in a simple phrase, as when a news reporter characterizes an impoverished single mother “courageously fighting” for a better life for her children. Other times they are complex, like former Mayor of New York City Rudolph Giuliani, who, in the context of the attacks on World Trade Center Towers One and Two in September, 2001, wrote, “Like the brave soldiers who stormed the beaches of Normandy...our firefighters found themselves on the front lines of a war between freedom and tyranny” (2001: v). Though I suspect that for many Americans the meaning of each analogy is clear and unproblematic, unpacking the more complex of the two will yield a more precise understanding of the “courageous action” of combat infantry. From this we can develop a conception of “courageous

action” for further analysis. This is especially important if we want to come to some better understanding of the contradiction between such presentations and the bio-reductive meta-narrative we encountered above.

One approach to unpacking Giuliani’s analogy is to do a close textual reading of the analogy by posing and answering the question, “What does Giuliani mean by it?” Giuliani claims that the 9/11 firefighters share a similar action with World War II soldiers—storming the Normandy beaches—in a similar context—a war between freedom and tyranny. The context for his analogy, an introduction to a book commemorating dead firefighters, suggests that he wants us to conclude that the 9/11 firefighters ought to receive the same respect we accord those World War II soldiers. But isn’t our sense of what can reasonably be concluded as a “likeness” between firefighters and soldiers challenged to the breaking point on closer consideration of the first claim? Is it reasonable to think that soldiers “storming” beaches filled with rifle, machine gun, mortar, and artillery fire directed at them by other soldiers is “like” entering skyscrapers filled with fire and smoke as well as disoriented, scared, injured and trapped people?

Perhaps the similarity is at a somewhat more general level. Perhaps it is captured in, say, the term “fighting.” The firefighters fought a fire while the soldiers fought enemy soldiers. Still, however, we are faced with a difference *in kind*. The two actions are qualitatively different. Despite the bathetic, anthropomorphic presentation of fire by screenwriter Gregory Widen—“it eats, it breathes, it hates”—in the film *Backdraft* (1991), fire cannot possess the capability of intelligently hunting firefighters and purposefully killing them as do enemy soldiers. By this analysis, Giuliani’s analogy is unconvincing in terms of the “likeness” at its heart, though I think there remains some sense of truth in it. What is it, then, that the analogy captures, even tenuously, as a similarity between the actions of 9/11 firefighters and World War II soldiers?

A billboard (see Figure 1 in the Figures section below) posted across the United States by The Foundation for a Better Life soon after the 9/11 attacks suggests an answer. The image of the dust-covered firefighter evokes the mortal danger of the collapse of the towers. Though no one knew that the towers *would* collapse, that they did reminds us that they *could* collapse, and firefighters like this one would have been aware of that risk. Moreover, the quality of that risk was exceptional—1,350 vertical feet of collapsing steel and concrete would not yield good odds for survival. The image, then, conveys a firefighter who, *despite the odds*, acted in this environment.

The image is associated with a phrase that describes the action taken by the firefighter *given* the lethal environment evoked in the image: he *moved toward, not away from, this mortal danger*. The phrase implies that the firefighter *chose* to move toward, not away from, this mortal danger. The combined image and phrase construct the firefighter's choice to engage in this kind of movement as *exceptional* in three ways. That the firefighter *rushed* denotes, at least, his willingness to engage the danger as well as his sense of obligation toward saving life and property. That the firefighter rushed *in* suggests he actually entered a tower thereby assuming the high risk of harm or death should the tower collapse. That others *ran out* affirms the mortal danger of the environment. The word "courage" against a red background is the suggested interpretation of the image and the phrase. In sum, then, *moving toward (mortal) danger is exceptional; it is courageous*.

While both fire and enemy soldiers are dangerous, the quality of danger differs radically between the two. That difference focuses squarely on the notion of intelligent action: enemy soldiers can use their intelligence to purposefully attack soldiers. A fire has no such intelligence. What the billboard adds to Giuliani's analogy, then, is a clarification of the nature of the environment. "Fire" was not the only danger. "Collapse" was also a danger, and in skyscrapers there is a very high probability of harm or death. It is, I think, this sense of an environment in which *harm or death are highly probable* that Giuliani's analogy contains an element of truthful likeness and that "courage" is appropriately attributable to firefighters and soldiers alike. Both firefighters and soldiers *choose to perform their respective purposes in environments presenting a high probability of mortal danger*.

In this light we can identify one key term in Giuliani's analogy that is responsible for much of the success *and* the failure of the analogy: "stormed." In the context of the analogy and the kinds of things involved—soldiers, firefighters, enemy soldiers/gunfire, and fire/collapsing buildings—there is a sense in which the word *does not* accurately portray actions Americans tend to associate with firefighters. Firefighters "enter" buildings, they might even "rush" into them, but they do not "storm" them. Soldiers and police storm buildings. There is a sense of force, violence, and destructiveness associated with the term when it is used to characterize the actions of persons. That contextual sense is derived from the notion that within the building is a danger source that needs to be overwhelmed. The implication is that "storming" has to do with buildings occupied with intelligent people who have the capability of intentionally doing harm to

the soldiers or police entering. Persons described as “storming” a building are, *ipso facto*, not the same kind of person as those who “enter” a building.

We now have a basic understanding of an American conception of “courage” in terms of exemplary action of combat infantry: *moving toward danger*. The quality of that danger is special: persons who use their intelligence to fatally harm combat infantry. The phrase “moving toward danger” is neither an explanation nor an idealization of what persons (combat infantry) are doing or why they are doing it. Rather, it functions as an analytical device telling us what sorts of actions (moving toward) to look for in what sorts of contexts (danger) among the myriad actions taken by and associated with combat infantry. A foundational assumption of this conception is that persons are the sources of the actions-in-context we are seeking. Based on the interpretive analysis of Giuliani’s analogy, this analytical device constitutes a value judgment—we *should* look here, not there; *this counts, that doesn’t*.³ Combat infantry then choose to move toward danger, danger that is constituted by intelligent others seeking to kill them.

Perhaps this is why Americans who have a deep and intuitive sensibility about courageous action, rarely pick out eating or breathing on a battlefield as courageous. We should, however, moderate this claim since it is possible to imagine a context in which eating or breathing might prompt an ascription of courageous. A soldier, for example, who calmly eats her lunch on a picnic table while mortar shells fall nearby might be considered courageous.

A Conception of Courageous Action Against Other Battlefield Actions

This conception of courageous action enables us to explore other important conceptions. For example, a combat infantry action exists at the heart of an analogy in Bruce Springsteen’s pop song “No Surrender” (1984):

Like soldiers in the winter’s night
With a vow to defend
No retreat baby, no surrender

Just as Giuliani picked out a characteristic action of combat infantry—storming enemy-held beaches—Springsteen picks out another characteristic action, vowing to defend. This action is constituted positively by fighting an enemy when he appears and negatively by a prohibition on

two other kinds of possible actions, retreat and surrender. In the song, Springsteen is addressing not us, the audience, but the flagging commitment of his lover to each other and their way of life. In the song, the danger is presented by her flagging commitment in the face of an opposing but intangible social Other representing a contrary way of life. The danger of flagging commitment is like the danger of enemy gunfire in Giuliani's analogy and the threat of skyscraper collapse in the Foundation for a Better Life billboard. Springsteen's analogy, then, likens his preferred level of his lover's commitment to that of soldiers who never give up, despite the commitment-sapping cold and darkness, even if it means their death. Given the prohibition against giving up, Springsteen's call is for his lover to choose to fight to the death when their way of life, their being together with and for one another, is endangered.

"Courage" in this analogy is conceived very differently though the principle of *choice* is retained. The principle of *choosing to move toward danger* is not quite precise enough to capture the nuanced meaning in Springsteen's analogy. Rather, it is something like *moving and not moving when endangered*. *Moving* in terms of fighting, and *not moving* in terms of retreat or surrender. Springsteen's analogy forces us, in the interest of clarity, to come to an understanding of moving and not moving. In *moving toward danger*, the soldier is the active party in seeking out the source(s) of danger. In *not moving when endangered*, the source(s) of danger is the active party in seeking out the soldier.

Assuming the soldier has decided to await the danger, as is conveyed in the word "defending," "not moving" applies to a range of possible actions from which the soldier must choose as the danger nears. "Not moving" *entails* some form of "fighting" *if* the soldier rejects either the option of moving away from the danger (retreat) or the option of not moving *at all* (surrender). Technically, there is no sense in which any of these options means "not moving" *literally* since even "surrendering" requires moving, for example, waving a white flag or relinquishing weapons or raising one's hands.

These remarks highlight important details of both Giuliani's analogy and Springsteen's analogy. Giuliani's analogy focuses on likening firefighters' actions with soldiers' actions through the key word "stormed." The analogy rests on a metaphorical understanding of the characteristic actions of combat infantry as forceful, violent, and destructive. Springsteen's analogy focuses on likening his lover's (future) actions to soldiers' actions through the key phrase "vow to defend." The analogy does not rest on a natural event metaphor (storm) to

characterize combat infantry action but their action *per se* as an index of a level and kind of *commitment*. Springsteen defines the meaning of “vowing to defend” as no retreat, no surrender. This means, in turn, that opposition to danger is “to the death” (or, perhaps, incapacitation). Importantly, in the context of the song Springsteen and his lover are *morally, not physically, endangered*. “Fighting” here is figurative. The actual struggle is of his lover with herself. At issue is her choice to remain committed to him and them.

In this construction, Springsteen reflects what seems to be an important American value: physical death is an absolute—“Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Dust” as the religious saying goes—despite the fact that many Americans believe in an afterlife. This world is qualitatively different than the one inhabited by the living. The kind and meaning of actions taken when faced with physical death are considered the ultimate expression of the quality of a person’s life. “Live every day,” as another saying goes, “as if it were your last.” Moral death, on the other hand, is not absolute, since, after all, redemption is possible; but, more to the point, moral death can be just as deadly as physical death. Napoleon Bonaparte is quoted as saying, “Death is nothing, but to live defeated and inglorious is to die daily.” Oscar Wilde explores this theme in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1998). The horrible visage of the painting tracks Gray’s moral degradation, his ability to sow death and destruction for himself and for others. Gray’s suicide, his physical death, is the result of a prior moral death. Springsteen’s call is for his lover to act *as if* she were faced with physical death in order to save the life she and he live in the name of a particular set of values.

Courage: A Summary *En Passant* and A Challenge

Courage is a concept with which Americans are familiar through the example of combat infantry battlefield actions. Generally, courageous action is a way of being a good person in American culture. Everyday analogies between American civilian and combat infantry actions among a range of popular mediums provide evidence of this familiarity. When unpacked and closely scrutinized, everyday analogies also provide us with popular views of what combat infantry actions mean. These views are useful for developing conceptions of “courageous action” as starting points for developing clarity and precision of meaning in light of a contradictory meta-discourse. Two of those conceptions are *moving toward danger* and *not*

moving when endangered. *Moving toward danger* is a choice to proactively seek out dangerous environments. The quality of danger depends on the kinds of things found in the environment such as fire/collapse and enemy soldiers/gunfire. *Not moving when endangered* actually is a form of movement as well as a choice to be reactive in a dangerous environment with, again, the quality of danger assessed by the kinds of things found in the environment.

Both conceptions lead to the understanding that “courageous action” is choosing how and why to move one’s body—to act—in a dangerous environment. Action in a dangerous environment is an expression of commitment, or lack thereof, to a valued way of life. There appears to be a scale of courage grounded in our assessments of just how dangerous the environment actually is. Just how dangerous the environment actually is depends on our conception of the capabilities of the things, events, or processes we think are causing the danger. As the danger increases so does our sense of the level of commitment it takes to act. The implication here is that our knowledge or appreciation of the quality of the danger being faced makes it that much harder to remain committed. As the level of commitment increases so does our sense of the level of courage when action is taken to express or realize other values.

From this discussion we can conclude that there are at least three major, interrelated value judgments made in attributing “courage.” First, the value of the actions-in-context—are they, for example, selfless or selfish; second, the value of the context—is it, for example, lethal or (merely) dangerous; and finally, the value of the purpose toward with the actions-in-context are directed—is it, for example, saving fellow soldiers so they might take their place again in the future among their families and friends or killing children to scare those still living into adhering to a value system.

While the foregoing analysis has provided us with a good start in understanding the meaning of courageous action rooted in everyday descriptive analogies, we encountered another kind of explanatory discourse among Americans that not only raises serious questions about, but also in important ways contradicts, this analysis. To go further then will require us to closely examine a distinctive American discourse occurring at the same time as the everyday use of civilian-military action analogies. This discourse is positioned as having explanatory authority over human behavior.

For example, Professor of Law John M. Conlon and Professor of Cultural Anthropology William O’Barr (1998) would have us believe that human social action—like combat infantry

storming a beach or firefighters rushing into a burning skyscraper—is to be explained by referencing the operation of biological entities or processes like ‘genes,’ ‘DNA,’ and ‘protein reactions.’ Supposedly these entities or processes mechanically *determine* our behavior. These entities or processes and so human behaviors are thought to exist for the survival and evolution of humans as a species. Since this biological narrative is thought to *explain* the actions of all humans, including of course combat infantry, it is accorded a special authoritative status among Americans. We can think of this narrative as a framework of thought for understanding human behavior biologically. Importantly, the framework runs counter to anthropologist Clifford Geertz’s (1973) contention that human life centers not on biology but on culture, which is constituted by persons interacting to create meaning. If the biological framework has it right about human behavior then the accounts of courageous action we typically encounter in, for example, newspaper stories that honor the actions of combat soldiers are delusional. Honoring soldiers for moving toward the enemy or not moving when endangered by the enemy becomes no different from honoring them for, say, their fine digestive processes that may be good for the survival of the human species.

Describing and Explaining Human Social Action

The analysis so far has proceeded on the assumption that precision in the use of a descriptive vocabulary is a fundamental component of a grounded and plausible social scientific inquiry about human socio-cultural actions *if* the goal is to respect the persons involved by respecting what they mean. Though, as the philosopher Peter T. Manicas (2006) points out, our human languages reflect concepts and distinctions about action gleaned over long periods time, that fact does not mean that we have it right about our social or natural worlds. We saw that Giuliani’s use of the metaphor “stormed” stretched the meaning of that word to the breaking point because it was being used to associate a class of persons, firefighters, with actions *atypical* of that class. Firefighters, that is, *cannot* be characterized by reference to the qualities our culture associates with a “storm” as a natural event: force, violence, and destructiveness. Strongly implicated though not necessarily implicit in Giuliani’s well-intentioned analogy is an unintended form of disrespect—not of firefighters, but of soldiers.

We should take away from the analysis so far four important insights to guide the study of combat infantry action and its relationship to courage. First, our language use, even single terms, captures or suggests something about our understanding of the way the natural or social worlds work. As stated above, the metaphor “stormed” captures something distinctive and real about the actions of soldiers in the social world by referring us to a sense of the actions of storms in the natural world. To the extent that firefighters *don't really act that way* is the extent to which our sense of the likeness between soldiers and firefighters is stretched. This view runs contrary to post-modern views of language advanced by, for example, Jean Baudrillard (1995), who flirts with anti-realism when he argues that government and media images, not actions on the battlefield, constituted the American-led coalition forces’ “war.”

Second, and because of the first insight above, even a simple description of the actions of persons in a context *necessarily expresses a framework for explaining those actions*. The ontological commitments that are conveyed through choice of terms as well as the choice of adjectives, predicates, and grammatical constructions that relate the subjects, objects, concepts, and values of the description constitute that framework. In other words, to be accurate, such terms *are* theoretical, and therefore they reveal that theory expresses the ontological commitments of the theorist. Thus it suggests to the observer or reader what (the author thinks) is real, what social action is, and what people are (e.g., machines, computers, animals, souls) even if the author is not explicit about these implicit theoretical commitments.

By implication, the framework should *control* the author’s use of language if a consistent, precise, and clear description, explanation or interpretation is sought. In the human social world of intersubjective semiotic practices, the descriptive sentence, “The soldiers stormed the beaches of Normandy,” expresses an explanation such as, “The soldiers wanted to capture the area from their enemies.” As Manicas contends, “The social world is constituted by agents and thus become intelligible only insofar as one can discover the meanings or intentions of those agents” (1987: 267). It might not be the only explanation or the only way to express it, but most plausible explanations of the description of the soldiers’ actions should be related to it.

Third, understanding particular combat infantry actions as exemplary of courage for Americans is primarily a serious matter of semantics. We need to understand how the actions of persons are meaningful in order to understand what the persons who are combat infantrymen mean. Critically, the two conceptions of “courage” developed from Giuliani’s and Springsteen’s

analogies are ways of moving in a certain context. Accordingly, we need to orient the study of combat infantry to how they move, not necessarily to how they speak. In short, we need to understand the dynamics of human embodiment.

Fourth, to generate a grounded and plausible interpretation of human social action requires rigor and precision in the use of language. This is a special valuative interpretive matter. Attributing the characteristic of courage to a person, group, or action in the context of an analogy, for example, is a complex interpretive act that combines ontology and ethics. On what basis are the actions themselves considered “courageous” and on what basis are the actions attributed to both types of persons (e.g., civilians and combat infantry) in the analogy? Giuliani’s analogy picked out from the vast range of words that describe human social actions the act of storming, versus, for example, the act of sitting. He did so rightly because the characteristic actions of combat infantry bear a family resemblance to the force, violence, and destructiveness of a real storm.⁴ But the analogy also attributed a distinctive kind of action characteristic of combat infantry to firefighters. Again, the attribution fails because firefighters do not act with the force and violence characteristic of a real storm. The actions of picking out (terms, phrases, examples) and attributing (qualities, moral status, values) are value-driven decisions.

Deconstructing the term “courage” into two component conceptualizations—“moving toward danger” and “not moving when endangered”—suggests that for *combat infantry courageous action has to do primarily with how one moves one’s body, and why, in context.*⁵ Specifying how and why is a *necessary* step, not an option, because our major, interrelated value judgments about the actions-in-context, the context, and the purpose for the actions-in-context rely fundamentally on them. Similarly, we have seen that the context for moving one’s body plays a critical role in the generation of meaning and so too needs to be specified in detail. The strong implication here is that Americans can and do make fine-grained distinctions among *degrees*, if not *kinds* of courage in an attempt to express a precise judgment of the quality of courage itself. The U.S. military itself exemplifies these judgments in awarding different medals, in ascending order, for “meritorious,” “heroic,” and “extraordinary heroic” service.

Similarly, we should be aware that attributions of “courage” depend on *who* is making the attribution and *for what reasons*. To cite a negative example, the U.S. Army awarded former U.S. Army Private First Class Jessica Lynch a Bronze Star for “meritorious service in combat”

as reported by ARNEWS, the U.S. Army News Service in July of 2003. Problematically, Lynch herself has since stated that she never actually fought in any way and when her column of vehicles was ambushed in Iraq her weapon was jammed and then she passed out. The grounds for the attribution of the award were contradicted by Lynch's inability to act in particular ways expected of a soldier in the context of lethal threat. Since her weapon was jammed she could not kill her attackers, and since she passed out, she was incapacitated generally. There was literally no way for her to be of service, no less of meritorious service. Lynch herself later condemned the U.S. Army and Department of Defense for fabricating actions-in-context as grounds for the medal to increase support for U.S. military involvement in Iraq. A political interest generated a disregard for reality; in short, it was an expression of commitment to an ideological position on the part of the U.S. Army and Department of Defense.

I now turn to an analysis of a description of courageous action found in a respected American newspaper. This further analysis will build on the basic conception of "courageous action" as "moving toward danger" in an attempt to push our appreciation to a deeper level. The description and analysis together will also set the stage for the next section of this chapter in which I consider a range of explanations of "courageous action" that have been offered by scholars and service members.

Fine-Tuning A Conception of Courageous Action: Military Examples

A May, 2004 edition of *The Wall Street Journal* reported the story of U.S. Marine Corporal Jason Dunham. The events in the story took place the month prior, in April of 2004, in the Iraqi town of Karabilah, where a convoy of Marines was ambushed. Corporal Dunham was part of a group of Marines going to help the convoy.

Around 12:15 p.m., Cpl. Dunham's team came to an intersection and saw a line of seven Iraqi vehicles along a dirt alleyway, according to Staff Sgt. Ferguson and others there. At Staff Sgt. Ferguson's instruction, they started checking the vehicles for weapons.

Cpl. Dunham approached a run-down white Toyota Land Cruiser. The driver, an Iraqi in a black track suit and loafers, immediately lunged out and grabbed the corporal by the throat, according to men at the scene. Cpl. Dunham kned the man in the chest, and the two tumbled to the ground.

Two other Marines rushed to the scene. Private First Class Kelly Miller, 21, of Eureka, Calif., ran from the passenger side of the vehicle and put a choke hold around the man's neck. But the Iraqi continued to struggle, according to a military report Pfc. Miller gave later. Lance Cpl. William B. Hampton, 22, of Woodinville, Wash., also ran to help.

A few yards away, Lance Cpl. Jason Sanders, 21, a radio operator from McAlester, Okla., says he heard Cpl. Dunham yell a warning: "No, no, no -- watch his hand!"

What was in the Iraqi's hand appears to have been a British-made "Mills Bomb" hand grenade. The Marines later found an unexploded Mills Bomb in the Toyota, along with AK-47 assault rifles and rocket-propelled-grenade launchers.

A Mills Bomb user pulls a ring pin out and squeezes the external lever -- called the spoon -- until he's ready to throw it. Then he releases the spoon, leaving the bomb armed. Typically, three to five seconds elapse between the time the spoon detaches and the grenade explodes. The Marines later found what they believe to have been the grenade's pin on the floor of the Toyota, suggesting that the Iraqi had the grenade in his hand -- on a hair trigger -- even as he wrestled with Cpl. Dunham.

None of the other Marines saw exactly what Cpl. Dunham did, or even saw the grenade. But they believe Cpl. Dunham spotted the grenade -- prompting his warning cry -- and, when it rolled loose, placed his helmet and body on top of it to protect his squadmates. [Phillips 2004: A1]

For clarity and emphasis, I have not yet provided the whole description of the event. Pausing at this point permits us to focus our attention on the description of Dunham's actions-in-context. Two are central. First, Dunham is presented as fighting hand-to-hand with an Iraqi insurgent. Second, Dunham used his helmet and body to absorb the blast of the grenade. For his second action Dunham received a Congressional Medal of Honor, the highest honor in the U.S. military. Speculatively, most Americans would agree with the U.S. Congress and the U.S. military that Dunham's actions were courageous.⁶ As anthropologists, however, we should ask *how* and *why* his actions are courageous.

As we saw through the distinction between "fighting a fire" and "fighting an enemy," the kind of thing being fought and its capabilities bears directly on assessments of courage. To this idea I would now like to add a similar claim about context. The kind of context in which fighting occurs both creates, and is created by, the nature of the kinds of things involved thereby bearing on assessments of "courage." In short, if the 9/11 firefighters had entered fire-engulfed buildings that were 200 feet tall rather than over 1,350 feet tall and with no damage to their structural integrity rather than with substantial portions of their structural integrity compromised,

our judgment of the “level” of danger that the firefighters were moving toward would be quite different. It is important to keep in mind the idea that which actions, things, and contextual conditions should be considered salient for the analysis is itself a choice conveying ontological and ethical content and so suggestive of how we should explain Dunham’s actions-in-context. The fact that the U.S. Army and Department of Defense chose to *disregard* certain actions and conditions in the case of Jessica Lynch resulting in a purposeful fabrication about the nature of the war in Iraq and Lynch’s status as a soldier is an example of the import of this idea.

In Dunham’s case I will use distinctions between “danger” and “threat,” “pervasive” and “specific,” and “potential” and actual” to interpret the meanings of the context in which he acted. The purpose is to illuminate the qualities of Dunham’s actions. Dunham’s unit was responding to an area of an Iraqi town in which an ambush had already taken place. Dunham and his unit were not being specifically targeted, but recent history of the area created what might be called a situation of *pervasive danger*. As American Marines Dunham and his unit shared with their ambushed comrades the identity “enemy” in the eyes of Iraqi insurgents. As such, Dunham and his unit were subject to attack delivered in ways ranging from Improvised Explosive Devices (IED’s) to rifle fire from snipers.

The encounter with the line of vehicles changed the context from one of *pervasive danger* to one of *potential threat*. While the mere presence of a line of vehicles is in itself ambiguous, the combination of their linear arrangement and alleyway location *within the vicinity* of a recent ambush created this change in the overall context. Vehicle linearity expressed to the Marines an organizational unity on the part of the as yet unknown drivers and occupants. This meant a group of persons oriented toward some purpose(s). The fact that the vehicles were located in an alley expressed an attempt to hide them and so signaled bad intentions. These two characteristics of the vehicles drew the Marines’ attention.

What was the nature of the *potential threat*? First, the identity and intentions of the persons who lined up the vehicles in the alleyway were unknown. The combination of the recent ambush and linearity of vehicles hidden in an alleyway invited the Marines to suspect the intentions of the persons to be hostile. The threat, then, was the likelihood of deadly force being used against the Marines. But the Marines could not be sure about this suspicion without investigating the vehicles or persons for evidence, even as their uniforms, equipment, organization, and historical actions openly defined or advertised their intentions and capabilities.

Americans value the controlled use of force and violence. Calling for some degree of justification before using force or violence is a way of being principled in their use. Often, the principled use of force is captured in what are known as Rules of Engagement (ROE's) that define when, where, how, and why a soldier can, for example, fire his weapon. ROE's are so critical for the American military that they are included, as I mentioned above, in the U.S. Army's video game, *America's Army 3*.

Ambiguity in this situation favored the (potential) insurgents because it permitted them to act first and in a range of ways, depending on their intentions and purposes. This combination means that American combat infantry, in an insurgency situation like that of Iraq, are morally obligated to maintain a razor thin tension between giving a lethal advantage to the enemy and recognizing and acting on a threat before that advantage can be exercised. We will see in chapter 6 that U.S. Marines call this decision-making process, "flipping (the switch)." Second, the vehicles might themselves be weapons like car bombs, or contain weapons that could be used by an enemy. Adding to the ambiguity and heightening the sense of threat to the Marines were possibilities like a booby-trapped vehicle rigged to go off when a Marine opened a door or actual enemies near or in the vehicles armed to fight.

In moving toward the vehicles to search them, Dunham and his fellow Marines *created* another change in the context, from *potential threat* to *specific threat*. Physical distance is a salient issue. In moving themselves toward the line of vehicles, the Marines were expressing their intention to scrutinize the vehicles and discern, perhaps, the intent of the people who put them there. Decreasing the distance created a specific threat not just to the Marines, but to any possible enemies as well, whose advantage lay in the ambiguity of their organization and intention.

It was in this volatile context, growing more and more dangerous as the Marines pursued their policing duty even as their principled control of force and violence gave their suspected enemy an advantage if fighting were to ensue, that Dunham chose to follow his orders and search the vehicles.⁷ If courage has to do with moving toward danger, combat infantry are unique in that the act of moving toward danger at least *increases* the danger if not *creates* a whole new order of danger exactly because of the presence of intelligent, creative human opponents. This suggests that Dunham and his fellow Marines were acting courageously *even before* any actual fighting broke out.

The description indicates that the Iraqi insurgent acted first, affirming that the Marines, Corporal Dunham in particular, were honoring the American principle of controlling force and violence until their use is justified. This implies a particular kind of action on the part of American combat infantry: the exercise of self-restraint. In this situation, self-restraint expressed the principle of the controlled use of force and violence. Honoring that principle permitted the insurgent enough time to pull the pin on his grenade in preparation for a possible confrontation with the Marines. Dunham and the other Marines *did* have the possibility of approaching the man at gunpoint. It may not have changed the outcome materially, but it may have altered the events to the point that none of Marines were injured. It is unclear if or why Dunham did not approach the man at gunpoint. One possible motivation would be the Marines' attempt to reduce the affront that their policing of Iraqi towns generates when they threaten the use of force *before* seeking to find out the identity and intentions of persons of interest.⁸ I get the sense that the Iraqi was preparing for the worst while hoping that Dunham would not get close enough to reveal the weapons in his truck.

There are three related values here; the exercise of self-restraint to control the use of force and violence until justified reveals a facet of context that I have not discussed yet. When analyzing human action, contexts are not only physical—as a line of vehicles—but moral as well. In fact, they are simultaneous and inseparable aspects of a human social context. The very linearity of a set of vehicles expresses a human choice or series of choices that are embedded in a value framework. The quality of the choice is revealed in the means to end relationship which the choice is serving, for example, the choice to park the vehicles linearly to keep the weapons and persons they contain readily available for the group's purpose of killing others. What we think of that choice—whether we find it good or bad or some combination—depends on the value framework we adopt for assessing the choice. For example, building a car bomb in the context of an insurgency limits the range of plausible meanings for the intended use of the weapon to those centering on destruction of property and persons. The intent to destroy property and persons is a value-based commitment. Whether that destruction is legitimate depends on the value system that frames the commitment. From the insurgent viewpoint, the use of the car bomb to sow discord might be justified even if that use kills persons that Americans would consider beyond the limits of the use of force and violence, such as non-combatant men, women, and children.⁹

With an elaboration of the physical and moral context for Dunham's actions in hand we can (finally) analyze the first of the two important components of the description focusing on Dunham in particular, his hand-to-hand fight with the insurgent. One of the first things to notice about the action is that the Iraqi might not have *meant to kill Dunham immediately*. We can tell by the possible actions the Iraqi *didn't* take. He didn't, for example, toss his grenade out the truck window as Dunham approached, while using the vehicle to protect himself. He didn't use any of the other weapons at his disposal such as the assault rifles or rocket propelled grenade launchers. He didn't, as a suicide bomber might, stuff his pockets with grenades, pull the pin on his grenade and allow Dunham to pull him out of the truck. Instead, the Iraqi grabbed Dunham by the throat, an ambiguous action in light of the other possibilities just named. From the description it seems that the Iraqi continued to hold the grenade, thereby ensuring it would not go off, even as the other Marines moved to help Dunham. The point is important because we don't know whether the Iraqi purposely let the grenade go during the ensuing struggle or, perhaps, was forced to let it go as Dunham's fellow Marines tried to restrain him. I tend to think that the latter was the case given the kind of warning Dunham voiced to his fellow Marines. It is even possible that the Iraqi changed his mind during the fight and was simply waiting for other Marines to aid Dunham until he loosed the grenade, thereby taking with him as many Marines as possible.

The hand-to-hand fight that ensued represents a special kind of fighting, even for combat infantry. The American value framework that informs military action includes, ironically perhaps, the secular value of respect for the individual and the religious value of the sanctity of life. These values underlie the aforementioned value that the use of force and violence ought to be controlled and dependent on justification. They also underwrite American perceptions of appropriate physical and moral distances between persons (e.g., "personal space"). These culminate in a cultural approach to others that, literally, defines being a good person in a social relationship as keeping a certain physical distance in order to honor a required moral distance from others, unless permission to act otherwise is granted.

Close combat not only violates these values, it demands that combat infantry act toward achieving the culturally problematic purpose of killing the other person, whether or not they succeed in that purpose. Viscerally, the use of body-powered weapons like fists, bayonets, and rifle butts in hand-to-hand combat requires combatants to be physically intimate with one another. They can smell, hear, and feel the other's body within the micro-context of personal

space violation and bodily actions designed to kill. These qualities apply to *both* combatants. Nevertheless, there is a kind of ambiguity about fighting hand-to-hand that perhaps occurred in Dunham's case. If I am right about perceiving the ambiguous nature of the Iraqi's throat-grab, coupled with his failure to throw or simply release the grenade at Dunham's approach, then perhaps Dunham *didn't* think the Iraqi was intending to kill him. The generation of an interpretation like this *in the moment* on the part of combat infantry is not only not unusual, it is demanded by ROE's that require Marines have a good reason for killing.

U.S. Marine Sergeant Samuel J. Stevens described just such a split-second judgment as he and his fellow Marines kicked in a door to an Iraqi house in search of a suspected IED maker he describes as "murderous."

I was the second man to crash through the door. The adrenaline was pouring through my veins. The house was as black as the darkness outside. Only our LED's (light emitting diodes) fixed to our rifles pierced the blanket of darkness. My fellow Marines and I had performed this operation enough to be on autopilot. We were simply doing what we rehearsed, only this time we did it with amplified intensity.

I entered a room behind another Marine, both of us performing basic clearing procedures. As I entered I found myself holding my weapon a hair away from a man's face. Before I could act, he grabbed the compensator of my M16A2 [rifle]. What happened in the next heartbeat has been replayed in my mind almost every day of my life since.

"Hostile act equals hostile intent" was part of our rules of engagement. We were required to have this memorized. We learned it, like other portions of our ethos, through maintenance rehearsal. We repeated this phrase and others until we knew them flawlessly.

I remember hearing the phrase in my mind as he snatched at my barrel. The words ran through my vision like a news flash running across a television screen. I was interpreting his reaction as hostile. I ran the situation through my thought process and decided I was justified to shoot this man in his face. It was happening slowing and automatically. I felt my finger curling around the trigger. I can still feel the imperfections in the metal. I had decided to kill him.

Then something else happened. Looking in his eyes, I realized I did not want to kill him. The bill was passed and about to be ratified when I reevaluated the situation. It dawned on me that the man was scared. I had kicked in his door, ran into his house, and put a gun in his face. I reasoned that due to these premises the man was not fighting me but just responding to my actions. This was a scared old man who did not deserve to die, and I did not want to kill him; therefore, I pulled

my rifle away and told him in Arabic to “calm down.” It all took place in the blink of an eye. [Stevens 2008: 20]

I would like to highlight two parts of this example. First, intelligence and decision-making are involved in close quarters combat. Second, both the use of intelligence and the decision to take or spare a life can happen extremely quickly. The combination suggests a *contrary* understanding of combat compared to the popular notion of personal combat as “automatic,” a point made by Stevens himself. But, despite being trained to act automatically, Stevens chose not to follow the training—training that associated “hostile action with hostile intent.” When the Iraqi man grabbed his rifle barrel Stevens had justification for using force and violence, yet he didn’t. We can characterize Stevens’ action then not as “automatic” but as “spontaneous,” as in, “he made a spontaneous decision not to fire.”

I mention Stevens’ example because it is critical to understanding what Dunham did next. It is not clear, at least from the description, exactly how the fight with the Iraqi insurgent progressed. Dunham kned the man in the chest and as his fellow Marines helped, the grenade fell to the ground. Dunham “placed his helmet and body on top of [the grenade] to protect his squadmates.” I can find no manual for, mention of, or practice in training U.S. military infantry to place their helmets and bodies on top of grenades, to shield their comrades or not. The reason and so the quality of the action is, therefore, open to question. In the bio-reductive framework, we can imagine terming the action “instinctive,” and so interpreting the action as an evolved behavior designed to save the lives of other species members. In an agentic framework, we can imagine terming the action “courageous,” and so interpreting the action as a choice by Dunham to save the lives of his comrades. The difference can be captured as well by characterizing the action as either “automatic” or “spontaneous.” Dunham, I think, was acting intelligently and making a life and death decision quickly, just like Stevens. This suggests we can interpret Dunham’s actions agentially, despite the explanatory authority of the bio-reductive framework. This would be in keeping, at least, with the reporter’s sense of the courageous quality of Dunham’s actions.

We can start this explanation by asking what it was about Dunham’s actions that permit and suggest courage? There are three components to the answer. First, his actions in and of themselves expressed culturally prized values. Second, his actions were aligned with or generated further culturally prized values. Finally, his actions occurred in a context of lethal

danger and so came the price of risking his own life. In Dunham's particular example there is a sense of the level of that risk ratcheting upward as he entered the area of the recent ambush, spotted the hidden line of vehicles, approached the vehicles, searched the vehicles, encountered the Iraqi occupant, fought hand-to-hand with the Iraqi, discovered the grenade, and, finally, smothered the grenade. There are three places in this upward spiral of risk that deserve attention. There is a qualitative difference in risk at the point of (1) encountering the Iraqi, (2) fighting hand-to-hand with the Iraqi, and (3) smothering the grenade.

The quality of the risk became more serious when Dunham encountered the Iraqi because the capabilities of a person are qualitatively different than those of a weapon. Simply put, the structure of a weapon like an assault rifle or grenade affords them the capability of projecting bullets or pieces of metal at high speed, but not without being activated by some cause that is internal, external or in some combination, to the weapon. One such combination is a person pulling a trigger that activates a firing pin that in turn ignites a powder charge behind a bullet in a gun's barrel. Another is a person opening a vehicle door that draws a wire attached to the friction igniter in a grenade. The detail here is critical because it reminds us that *some threats are passive and others are active*. Moreover, the intelligence of humans enables creativity, cunning, deception, and a host of other capabilities that, coupled with their realistic knowledge of how things in the world actually work, enable them to make an active threat *look* passive, for example. The presence of an Iraqi with the vehicles, therefore, created a host of new possibilities that expanded the risk-scenarios exponentially. With this expansion came new levels of ambiguity that the Marines had to consider.

When the Iraqi decided to grab Dunham's throat, the range of possibilities diminished, but the risk of death or harm moved from possible to likely. Someone was likely to get killed or hurt given, amongst other factors, the violation of space, the body part grabbed, and the weapons available. I would have thought the odds were against the Iraqi at this point. But, as Stevens' example demonstrates, *likelihood is not identical with certainty*.¹⁰ We cannot tell from the description whether Dunham's knee to the Iraqi's chest was a non-lethal counter to what he thought might be a non-lethal attack, or his best option given his body position, or even an attempt to bring the Iraqi under control given a split-second judgment that killing the Iraqi would release the grenade, or any of a number of alternatives. Again, given Stevens' example, it is

even possible that Dunham and Iraqi understood one another: if Dunham moved to kill him by raising his weapon, the Iraqi would drop the grenade.

It is important to emphasize the obvious (but usually unnoticed for cultural and theoretical reasons such as American radical individualism and its affinity for biological explanations): fighting hand-to-hand is a *social interaction* of a very special kind because of the ostensible purpose—to kill—and context—life and death, where meaning is generated and possibly changed or modified in split seconds. It also illustrates the inextricable combination of physical action with value content. Since we have established the fact that a range of possible actions was open to the Iraqi as noted above, his choice to grab Dunham's throat was a value decision in and of itself. What the Iraqi meant by grabbing Dunham's throat itself is another level of meaning that is ambiguous, ranging from, for example, expression of a deep indecisiveness about whether or not to attack Dunham to an attempt to gather as many Marines around him as possible before losing the grenade. Without speaking to the Iraqi it seems to me impossible to go further than this speculative interpretation.

When the grenade dropped free, the range of possibilities diminished even as the likelihood of death or injury became the probability of death or injury—not certainty since the mechanics of explosions are not necessarily consistent. The explosive could be of an inferior quality or the fuse could be defective. Moreover, the threat of probable death and injury expanded from Dunham and the Iraqi to those in the immediate area. Dunham decided to remove the threat of probable death or injury to his fellow Marines (and the Iraqi in consequence) by limiting the effects of the grenade. In limiting the effects of the weapon Dunham concentrated the force of the blast, pitting the force and shrapnel of the explosive against his helmet, body armor, and body.

The values that Dunham's actions expressed, aligned with, and generated, are many and varied. His last earthly action is, perhaps, the most compelling because of its finality. In smothering the grenade, Dunham *chose* to value others over himself. *Dunham "spoke" with his body, he actualized that value.* The action stands out as well because Dunham likely *knew* the potential effects of explosive blasts, if not from experience in Iraq then from his Marine training. Americans tend to think that knowledge of a threat enhances the quality of an action in the face of that threat. I would suggest that the reason for this tendency is the pervasive sense among Americans that one's interest is "naturally" oriented toward oneself, and not toward others.

Smothering a grenade with one's body is "unnatural" because of the probability of the self-destruction. In this framework, *choosing* self-destruction for the sake of others seems incomprehensible. But, as we have seen, the framework makes all the difference. Choosing self-destruction on behalf of others is quite comprehensible in a value-system that bases self-worth on the quality of life you make possible for others. For U.S. Marines, as I found out in my fieldwork, *everyone else* constitutes "those for whom you are considered responsible," *even the enemy*. This is reflected, as we will see in detail in chapter 6, in physical-moral-character training at the *U.S. Marine Corps Martial Arts Center of Excellence* in Quantico, Virginia.

To summarize, combat infantry operate in a volatile context of pervasive danger and, at times, specific threat, whether as an individual target or as a member of targeted group. The nature of the threats varies widely. Generally, a human opponent generates the highest threat given their capability of using their intelligence creatively to maximize their advantage and effectiveness, if and when they attack. Further, the capability of persons to change intentions or purposes spontaneously generates an even deeper fundamental ambiguity in which combat infantry must act. American cultural values prize life and the sanctity of the individual, but the purpose of combat infantry is to kill. This purpose is, of course, modified by differences in context such as a conventional battle versus an insurgency, the rules of engaging an enemy formalized by the military organization to control killing, as well as individual decisions in the moment (e.g., the actions of Sergeant Stevens and Corporal Dunham). Moreover, combat infantry are expected not only to take ground from the enemy and hold it but also to close with and destroy or disable the enemy. This means that they *must* train for the possibility of fighting hand-to-hand with enemy soldiers. The values that combat infantry embody and seek to honor through their actions are constantly challenged, constantly held in tension. Killing, as a value, is contradicted by the value of the sanctity of the individual. Valuing one's own life is contradicted by the value of living for others. Valuing the safety of a secure area is contradicted by the need to enter the area and risk the possibility of death to create that security. These valuations are primarily embodied, meaning that soldiers use their bodies to generate meaning. *Courage, we can conclude, is a placeholder term that stands for the details of a dynamically embodied way of life instantiating and realizing prized cultural values. Courage, per se, does not exist. It is not a thing (e.g., the reified "will" of free will theory), a quality of an individual (e.g., a combination of radical individualism and instinctivism where a biological trait disposes the individual to*

behave in a certain way) or a state of mind (e.g., a combination of radical individualism and mentalism where a psychological trait disposes the individual to act in a certain way).

Explaining “Courage”

In this section I want to further refine the formulation of courage offered above. The overall purpose is to understand if or how this formulation relates to certain explanations of human social action as it relates to combat infantry on the battlefield. By purporting to explain combat action generally, these accounts necessarily subsume courageous action. I will juxtapose the foregoing description of the actions of U.S. Marine Corporal Jason Dunham against a sampling of explanations of combat action gleaned from scholarly work and service members, the latter emerging from interviews and ethnographic research.

- 1) Courageous action is an “evolved behavior,” that is, a “genetically inherited trait” of “males, who are almost always the warriors in humans,” which “benefits group fitness [for survival],” by increasing “the actor’s group’s probability to resist group extinction (defence), and on the other hand it increases the probability that the actor’s group conquers another group (offence)”
- 2) Courageous action is “in our DNA.”
- 3) Courageous action is the “nonrealization of the danger one is in owing to...a jolt of adrenalin released into the bloodstream by fear or rage.”

The first explanation of “courage” is from biological scientists Laurent Lehmann and Marcus W. Feldman (2008: 2877, 2883). The second is from a combat experienced, active-duty Marine Instructor-Trainer (IT) at the *U.S. Marine Corps Martial Arts Center of Excellence* in Quantico, Virginia. The IT was addressing a training class on “Combat Mindset” held during my field research in 2007. The third is from Pulitzer Prize-winning historian of the U.S. Civil War, James M. McPherson (1997: 39-40).

These explanations are unified around the idea that the source of human behavior is to be found in the action of microscopic biological entities and molecular chemical processes. They emerge from a particular philosophy of biology framework that has taken hold in the United States over the past century. Professor of Biology and Coordinator of Holistic Science at Shumacher College, Devon, UK, Brian Goodwin, describes the framework in this way,

A striking paradox that has emerged from Darwin's way of approaching biological questions is that organisms, which he took to be primary examples of living nature, have faded away to the point where they no longer exist as fundamental and irreducible units of life. Organisms have been replaced by genes and their products as the basic elements of biological reality. [Goodwin 2001: xi]

This framework, as Goodwin points out, is one interpretation of Charles Darwin's characterization of the overarching principle governing the natural world as "survival of the fittest" that connects the operation of genes and gene products with the survival and propagation of species to the 'success' of the organisms carrying the genes. In the logic of the framework, genes are thought to *direct* the development and characteristics of the organism, and so its behavior, in a special way, "If organisms are mere assemblies of the molecular products of their genes, then there is a good case to be made that, despite their extreme complexity, they are basically molecular machines" (Goodwin 2001: 196).

Varela (2009) argues that the machine model (of material and material entities) is both a cause and effect of an *institutionalized philosophical-ontological mistake*. That mistake is that the material world is *inert* and so requires some power to move it (Toulmin 1990). Being inert, matter blindly follows the dictates of forces internal or external to the object under consideration. Human beings are material entities, as their biology clearly shows, and so are thought to be no different, in this regard, from a rock. This conception of matter means that we are *determined* by our biology in all that we are and all that we do. Richard Lewontin, the Alexander Agassiz Research Professor at Harvard University, explicates the major components of the framework in this way

There is the deep commitment to the view that organisms, both in their individual life histories and in their collective evolutionary history, are determined by internal forces, by an inner program of which the actual living beings are only outward manifestations.

Variation between individual organisms, and even between species, is not of interest. On the contrary, such variation is an annoyance and is ignored wherever possible. What is at the center of interest is the set of mechanisms that are common to all individuals and preferably to all species. Developmental biology is not concerned with explaining the extraordinary variation in anatomy and behavior... which enables us to recognize individuals as different.

The concentration on developmental processes that appear to be common to all organisms results in a concentration on those causal elements which are also common. But such common elements must be internal to the organism, part of its fixed essence, rather than coming from the accident and variable forces of the external milieu. That fixed essence is seen as residing in genes. [Lewontin 2001: 9-10]

The impact of this kind of thinking on a conception of human social action can be profound. Responsibility and authorship of personal action can simply disappear. Mark Twain, the 19th century American writer, for example, expresses just this idea through his Old Man in a quote on the ontology of human being. Twain's Old Man argues to the Young Man, "Man the machine—man the impersonal engine. Whatsoever a man is, is due to his **make**, and to the **influences** brought to bear upon it by his heredities, his habitat, his associations. He is moved, directed, **commanded**, by **exterior** influences—**solely**. He **originates** nothing, not even a thought" (Twain 2009: 22).¹¹

In light of this discussion, and in order to remain true to the logic of these bio-reductive explanations, we can say that human beings, both as organisms and as meaning-making persons in socio-cultural contexts are *only mechanical vehicles for the expression of genetic mandates*.¹² As Goodwin (2001) noted, the production of behavior by the genetic material/biochemical process 'engine' is thought to be *mechanical*. This means the relationship between the 'engine' and the behavior is comprised of the following, (1) direct causal linkage between the "engine" and the behavior, (2) automaticity, and (3) mechanical operation describable in physicochemical terms that capture the nature and operation of the material components of the engine. Most often, as Lewontin (2001), researchers committed to the bio-reductive framework invite us to see the 'engine-behavior' relationship as "1-to-1" wherein a single gene produces a single behavior. While this mindset emerges from the inappropriate generalization of "knockout" studies where *atypical* cases such as that exemplified by relationship between a specific gene and the production of sickle cell anemia, are inappropriately generalized and presented as a fundamental principle of the relationship between genes and organisms, the principle is nevertheless applied. The result is that human behavior is not actually under the control of the organism or the person for two interrelated reasons. First, behavior is generated from a biochemical and molecular level, both of which are unavailable for control by the organism or the person. Second, the conception of matter as inert that pervades the framework ensures that the organism and person

can only *receive, not generate, power*. No power, no behavior. (This, perhaps, is the reason that there is no *need* to theorize either the organism or the person—they are considered extensions of molecular biochemical processes.)

According to this view the semiotic or meanings of human actions we normally focus on and live by must be interpreted as primarily aimed at achieving genetic purposes if the logic and meaning of the framework is to be respected. The combination of determinism and Darwinian biological theory as “survival of the fittest” means that Corporal Dunham’s behavior must have been oriented toward survival and reproduction of genetic material. Problematically, however, the organism, the vehicle for genetic material, behaving according to genetic mandate, resulted in the death of the organism! There is a substantial contradiction here. *How can genetically determined behavior result in the death of the organism given that the mandate of the organism’s behavior is survival?* Rhetorically we may ask, “Was there some deficiency in Dunham’s biology?”

The contradiction is deepened if we consider further content from the Wall Street Journal article,

Early this spring, Cpl. Jason Dunham and two other Marines sat in an outpost in Iraq and traded theories on surviving a hand-grenade attack. Second Lt. Brian "Bull" Robinson suggested that if a Marine lay face down on the grenade and held it between his forearms, the ceramic bulletproof plate in his flak vest might be strong enough to protect his vital organs. His arms would shatter, but he might live. Cpl. Dunham had another idea: A Marine's Kevlar helmet held over the grenade might contain the blast. "I'll bet a Kevlar would stop it," he said, according to Second Lt. Robinson. "No, it'll still mess you up," Staff Sgt. John Ferguson recalls saying.

None of the other Marines saw exactly what Cpl. Dunham did, or even saw the grenade. But they believe Cpl. Dunham spotted the grenade -- prompting his warning cry -- and, when it rolled loose, placed his helmet and body on top of it to protect his squadmates.

The scraps of Kevlar found later, scattered across the street, supported their conclusion. The grenade, they think, must have been inside the helmet when it exploded. His fellow Marines believe that *Cpl. Dunham made an instantaneous decision to try out his theory that a helmet might blunt the grenade blast*. "I deeply believe that given the facts and evidence presented he clearly understood the situation and attempted to block the blast of the grenade from his squad members," Lt. Col. Lopez wrote in a May 13 letter recommending Cpl. Dunham for the Medal of Honor, the nation's highest award for military valor. "His

personal action was far beyond the call of duty and saved the lives of his fellow Marines." [Phillips 2004: A1, emphasis added]

The choice of vocabulary and grammar in this description suggests an *agentic* explanatory framework that deeply contradicts the *determinism* of a bio-reductive framework explanation. Adhering strictly to the bio-reductive framework would demand that we eliminate the use of personal pronouns as in “his” helmet and “his” body because genes, not persons, are the source of behavior. Using these pronouns is a scientific mistake from the bio-reductive standpoint. Tellingly, no word, phrase, or sentence directly or indirectly stating something like, “The behavior of his genes was far beyond the call of duty,” is offered by anyone involved. We can assume that the choice of pronouns and grammatical constructions are purposefully tied to their interpretation of the meaning of Dunham’s action as the reporter and his comrades saw it. In doing so they suggest an explanatory framework that directly contradicts the bio-reductive framework *ontologically*.

In an agentic framework, matter is dynamic, not inert. The human organism is a dynamic material entity whose unique bio-physiological structure produces the capabilities and liabilities of being a human person. The human person is a dynamically embodied entity whose socio-cultural milieu emerges from linguistic capabilities providing a vast, but not unlimited, range of possibilities for being certain kinds of person—firefighter or combat infantryman, Muslim or Christian, father or mother. Not only do people exist, *they, not their biology*, are the locus of the generation and management of their own social dynamism in terms of their semiotic practices. All of these concepts are constituted by the Marines’ ascription of “courageous action” to *Dunham the person*, not to his organism (body) or the biochemical processes of his genes. Their implication is that Dunham the person *chose* to use himself and his equipment as a resource to sacrifice himself to save them. Without the ability to choose to move oneself there can be no such thing as “courageous action” as the Marines intend us to understand it in their description. In the bio-reductive schema Lt. Col. Lopez’s recommendation of Dunham for the Medal of Honor would be equivalent to decorating the Marine for an exceptionally well-functioning biochemical process, to use an earlier example, digestion. In this framework, courageous action like moving toward danger or not moving when threatened is constituted by a personal choice to live or die in favor of a culturally prized value, in this case *saving others*.

With the agentic framework in mind, we can see a distinctly cultural character in Dunham's action. Since the deterministic bio-reductive framework does not theorize the organism, the conception of behavior that emerges runs along the lines of "an environmental Stimulus triggers a biochemical Response (resulting in behavior)." This S \Rightarrow R conception reflects the "automaticity" of behavior that must be the case if human behavior is driven by mechanical forces originating in genetic material and delivered through biochemical processes. Dunham's "split second decision" to smother the grenade with his helmet and body would be considered an instance of the operation of the S \Rightarrow R process. Since we have already seen that the description ascribes agency and so decision-making power to Dunham, not his genes, the "automaticity" of his "split-second" decision requires clarification.

Dunham was exercising his *intelligence* as we can see in his *theorizing* about potential actions in response to a grenade attack. In the S \Rightarrow R conception, "intelligence" is a biochemical process beholden to genetic mandates (Richardson 2000). Technically, theorizing should not be occurring. But in an agentic framework, "intelligence" is a much more robust concept that includes the possibility of *holding a stimulus*. Dunham, not his genetic material, was *imagining* a future event and working out a range of possible responses to that event. This means Dunham and his fellow Marines were considering what would count *both* as a stimulus and as a "best" response from an array of possibilities. For example, the grenade would have to land within some certain proximity for it to count in relation to the kind of action (smothering it) that Dunham proposed.

In the classic S \Rightarrow R conception, the stimulus is *given by the environment* not *selected by the organism* (no less the person). Similarly, there is no "best" response in the S \Rightarrow R conception; there is only one response for any given stimulus, and that response is the one that is genetically encoded. Whether it is "best" or not can only be judged on the outcome for the organism in terms of survival! Dunham the person was responsible for using his intelligence to define what counted as a stimulus and a range of possible responses to that stimulus. In doing so he used his capability to hold a stimulus without a response until he decided to execute the response.

The "automaticity" of Dunham's "split second decision" is actually a mistaken characterization. The decision was indeed "split second" but it was not "automatic." Dunham's decision was to follow through on his commitment to one of a range of possible responses to a

grenade attack. Even though Dunham clearly recognized that the grenade dropped from the Iraqi man's grasp, he *could* have changed his mind. He might have *judged* that there was not enough time for him to get his helmet off and also smother the grenade. He might have *decided* that there was no imminent danger to his fellow Marines. And so his decision in the presence of the grenade still remains a decision in the moment. We should instead call his action "spontaneous," not "automatic." His *prior* commitment to the theory of how to best act in a grenade attack and to ensuring his fellow Marines get home safely, not the mere presence of the grenade, offer the appropriate explanation as to why he acted as he did. Dunham's decision, incidentally, *mirrors* Stevens' decision. Stevens chose *not* to follow through on his prior commitment to kill when faced with "hostile act equals hostile intent." Sacrificing oneself for others is an American cultural value emerging from the Judeo-Christian religious tradition. For combat infantry, this cultural value is prominent and real, not secondary and academic as it may be for many Americans. The use of intelligence to commit to living and dying that value is the standard, not the exception, for combat infantry.

We have seen that scholars, Marines, and everyday civilians are familiar with courageous action to different degrees and with differing levels of sophistication. We have also seen that there is a substantial contradiction between descriptions and explanations of courageous action among these groups. I believe that the foregoing analysis demonstrates that there is a serious anthropological problem of understanding what these groups *mean* given that contradiction. Agentic descriptions of socio-cultural values enacted by persons and deterministic explanations of biological mandates functionally behaved by organisms result in a question like, "Is the richness of culturally-based meaning-making through the use the human kind of intelligence some sort of delusion, an evolutionary mistake that interferes with the otherwise primary purpose of the organism to survive as mandated by the biochemical processes of genes?" The question is rhetorical. The Harvard University psychologist Steven Pinker moved us toward an affirmative answer to this question when he wrote, "the apparent evolutionary uselessness of human intelligence is a central problem of psychology, biology, and the scientific worldview" (Richardson 2000: 122).

To further complicate the contradiction at the center of our focus here is not limited to the juxtaposition of descriptions and explanations offered by *different* persons, for example the Marine Instructor-Trainer's explanation of courageous action as "in our DNA" versus Dunham's

fellow Marines' description of courageous action as "a personal choice to live and die for a cultural value." The contradiction, and attendant confusion about meaning, is evident at times *in the same person*. U.S. Marine Sergeant Samuel J. Stevens' explanation for his not shooting the old Iraqi man contradicts his own description of his action. He writes,

I thought about this event for years. I wondered about why I had chosen not to kill him. I am glad that I did not. However, I could not help asking, "I am trained to kill, yet I cognimechanically [sic] chose not to. [Stevens 2008: 20]

Stevens characterizes his choice with an interesting neologism that alerts us to the conceptual framework he is using to try to understand his own behavior: mechanically knowing. The term is not part of the agentic framework of dynamic socio-cultural action but rather the framework of behavior determined by biological processes. The term is a fascinating construction: it appears to refer to "knowing" and "mechanical behavior" as separate but connected. It is *as if Stevens the person is irrelevant* despite his ownership of both processes. The question becomes, how do we understand Stevens' account?

Stevens supports his use of the term by explaining that,

The military uses a number of exercises to train warfighters to kill. Life-like targets are used in shooting drills to practice for combat. When we run, we sing cadence songs about killing. Our environment is filled with stimuli [sic] that prepare us for war by degrading the natural instinct not to kill. Grossman explains the matter in basic psychological terms:

Modern training uses what are essentially B.F. Skinner's Operant Conditioning Techniques to develop a firing behavior in a soldier.... The soldier stands in a [fighting hole]...and man shaped targets pop up briefly in front of him. These are eliciting stimuli that prompt the target behavior of shooting.... Positive reinforcement is given when hits are exchanged for marksmanship badges, which usually have some form of privilege or reward.

Stimuli in one's environment can induce learning that is reinforced by reward. These techniques are used to breed a killing mindset. [Stevens 2008: 20-21]

To try to resolve his own lack of clarity about why he did not shoot the old Iraqi man in the face, Stevens relies on Skinnerian operant conditioning (via another author, former U.S. Army Lt. Col. David Grossman in *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill* (1995).

Interestingly, conditioning is cited as a method of *developing a behavior not given in our genetic material*. Our “natural instinct” is *not* to kill. This directly contradicts the Marine IT noted above you thought that it is in our DNA to fight and kill. While the contradiction is clear, the source is the same bio-reductive framework in both cases. As we have seen the framework predefines *all* human behavior as a function of the biochemical processes of genes. Stevens, like the Marine IT, has merely inserted a favored behavior that appeals to his experience.¹³

Critically, however, the nature of the environment has changed in Sgt. Stevens’s case. The culturally constructed world of ‘military training’ has taken the place of the usual biological conception of the environment as the ‘natural world’ of impersonal entities and forces. This means that *people*, as the authors of military training, have replaced impersonal entities and forces as the source of change in human behavior. People and the training they impose are now against our biologically evolved genetic mandate not to kill. *People, through training, are capable and successful in defying nature*. While this fact contradicts the determinism of the bio-reductive framework, the conception of learning at the center of our putative capability to defy nature *is the deterministic bio-reductive framework’s S⇒R conception* that renders the organism and so the person (and so intelligence) *irrelevant* to the generation of behavior. The explanation of human social action here is incoherent.

The problem is Sgt. Stevens’s uncritical adoption of Skinnerian behaviorism via Lieutenant Colonel Grossman’s work. Varela (2009: 108-119) shows how Skinner was fatally inconsistent in his conception of behavior. For Skinner, the causes of human behavior are external to the individual. The environment determines what behavior individuals *emit* and the kind of behavior it develop into as it is reinforced in operant conditioning. The idea of individuals *emitting behavior* is important because it suggests individual organisms are responsible for originating the behavior. But for Skinner that cannot be the case. The right word would be *elicit* as in “the environment *elicited* the behavior.” Skinner’s theory is a perfect example of the contradiction between agentic and deterministic frameworks we have been encountering.

The impact of this internal contradiction for Stevens in his ethnographic representation of his own actions and his attempt to interpret them is that he uses the same Skinnerian theory simultaneously to explain why he *should have shot* the old Iraqi man *and why he did not shoot* him! He writes,

Atrocity, however, must be avoided. Modern militaries cannot afford to kill the wrong people. Indiscriminate killing is counterproductive. Atrocity serves to embolden the enemy and to turn allies against us. Regardless of what some think, the United States Military, more specifically the Marine Corps, is not blind to the necessity of antiatrocities training.

In recent years, strides have been taken on multiple levels to save as many innocent lives as possible. These strides were evident as I went through my training prior to deployment.

The Marines who went through that training experienced lifelike situations. Participants were required to conduct [military operations] while surrounded by civilians and insurgents (role-players). The environment was that of a real Iraqi city: Mishandling the scenarios with role-players would result in negative marks. Maintaining the pride of our unit and learning how to deal with those situations properly was the reward for performing well in this Marine Corps-style Skinner box.

Through these Skinnerian conditioning processes, Marines are taught to objectively scan their targets. The Marine Corps trains us to kill, but it is taking measures to ensure that we are killing the right people. [Stevens 2008: 21]

Stevens does not tell us *how* precisely his Skinnerian training accounts for his “don’t shoot” decision, only *that* it does. Presumably there were rewards for not shooting civilians while there were rewards for shooting insurgents. But there is no way to understand, either from Stevens’ account or from Skinnerian operant conditioning theory who or what makes the decision when there are multiple, simultaneous, contradictory stimuli! The old Iraqi man’s hand and arm gesture stimulus indicated hostility and a “fire behavior” according to Stevens’ training while his eye and facial gesture indicated fear and anger and so a “don’t fire behavior” according to Stevens’ training. Stevens’ question as to why he chose not to fire over firing cannot be answered using Skinnerian theory because the theory does not permit organisms or persons to choose anything. The environment triggers behavior regardless of what or who is behaving. In using the theory, Stevens has effectively cut himself off from any comprehensible or coherent explanation of why he acted the way he did. By contrast, Stevens’ own discourse—“Why did I choose not to fire?”—illegitimately (in terms of Skinnerian behaviorism) locates decision-making power over his actions with *him*. We are left without any way to understand what Stevens means by his article since his description and his explanation contradict one another in

an article that *mixes* vocabulary and grammar from the contradictory frameworks thereby sowing confusion, not clarity.

We should pause to note the moral lesson of this situation. By choosing to use Skinnerian theory as an authoritative framework for explaining human social action, Stevens *rejects* his own description of the event, which I take to be the plausible source of his actions. That description places responsibility for not acting as he was trained to act on his own spontaneous re-assessment of the intentions of the old man in light of an imagined context. Stevens took the social role of the other (the Iraqi man) whose home was being invaded and interpreted a facial gesture centered on the old man's eyes as expressing fear and perhaps anger, but not hostility, despite the man's arm gesture of grabbing the muzzle of Stevens' rifle. (We can speculate that Stevens chose to believe his own interpretation of the old man's face/eye gesture *over* his arm/hand gesture based on the American cultural emphasis on the eyes as "windows on the soul" and so windows on truth).

For Stevens there *must* be something more than, or, more precisely, something *other than him* that accounts for his expertise and professionalism! In my view this self-deprecating attitude is a measure of the extent to which the determinist bio-reductive framework, and positivism, has appealed to Americans. It is also the extent to which Stevens undermines himself in making the following statements,

The generic stereotype of an American fighting man is one of ignorance. Frequently, modern warriors are depicted as knuckle-dragging thugs. Everyone acknowledges the bravery of our troops and often supports them despite political views. The generic typecast of a ground pounder is, however, often that of an unintelligent robotic killer walking the battlefield. Through my trials and studies I have firmly concluded that there is no such thing as a dumb grunt.

Our military took numerous steps to ensure that I was not a senseless killer. This training saved an old man's life. Through the study of basic psychological principles I have finally been able to learn why the most important half-second of my life did not end horribly. [Stevens 2008: 21]

If "courage" is an example of an $S \Rightarrow R$ relationship, Stevens has no grounds for protesting the generic stereotype of American warriors. The relationship *precludes* the use of intelligence. If, somehow, intelligence *is* used, it should be considered a mistake of some sort—perhaps the mistake of culture intruding detrimentally on the otherwise smooth functioning of unintelligent biology.

Figures

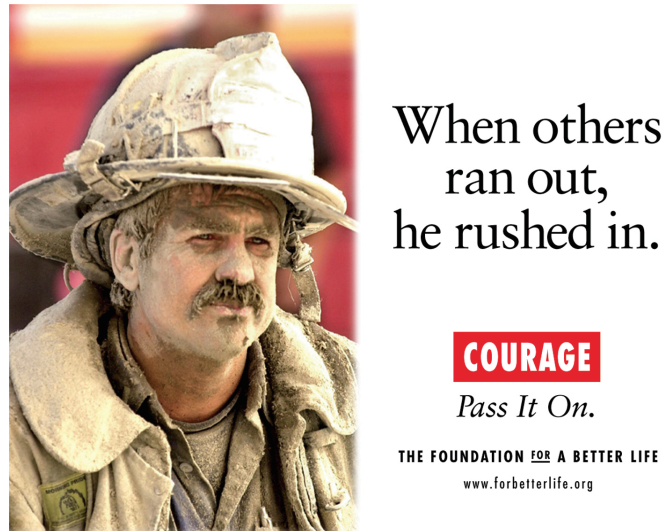


Figure 1: The Foundation for a Better Life billboard posted across the United States

¹ This does not mean that infantry are not called upon to do other things, like “breach” an obstacle, “construct” a position, “occupy” a location, “police” a neighborhood, or “gather” intelligence.

² Americans are not the only socio-cultural group to attempt to politicize people through realistic computer simulations. Dan Costa of PC Magazine reported that,

This past summer Hezbollah, the Lebanese-based Islamist paramilitary group, released Special Force 2, a first-person shooter [the perspective of the real player is “first-person” so that in viewing the computer screen the gamer sees what his or her virtual character sees] based on its pointless 34-day war with Israel in 2006. In the game, players are asked to destroy Israeli tanks and launch Katyusha rockets at Israeli towns. In the game, the more Israeli soldiers you kill, the more weapons and points you get. [2007:54]

³ There are of course, reasons why I chose an analogy and Giuliani’s in particular. Perhaps most important is that the full extent of the research so far has led me to think that courage is a way of moving one’s body, not a state of one’s mind, or a behavior necessitated by a biological mechanism triggered by some internal or external environmental stimulus. I also chose the analogy because of the near perfect complement to it found in the Foundation for a Better Life billboard, which, I think, makes the analysis more clear.

⁴ The actions of combat infantry and of storms can never be more than a family resemblance: combat infantry (human beings) and storms are qualitatively different kinds of things. For example, there is no such thing as a “context of danger” *for* a storm. A context of danger can exist for human beings and it substantively modifies the meaning and status of their actions, as in, “The beach was blanketed by a perfect hail of gunfire. The Captain simply walked along the beach encouraging the men.” Human beings, unlike storms, live culturally as a function of the kind of *agency* permitted to them by their unique bio-physiological structure and their various, linguistically-tied cultural conventions.

⁵ Though constructed from everyday civilian analogies, we will see that this conception is *shared* not only by military personnel but by combat veterans as well.

⁶ Some Americans might characterize the actions as “stupid” or “foolish,” or even use them in combination with “courageous.” These possible interpretive outcomes serve to illuminate the existence of what I take to be a distinctive American ethic that generates our form of courage and places the action of combat infantry at the top of a moral hierarchy. “Stupid” and “foolish” seem to me to be part of a *different moral hierarchy based on contrary social values* that requires further analysis. Charging a machine gun nest, for example, might be foolish to a soldier’s father who values the life of his son preeminently *over* his son’s comrades.

⁷ I consider the act of Dunham following his orders a choice because the idea of military personnel, especially Marines, *robotically* following orders is based on two different kinds of mistakes. First, there is an American penchant for advancing the wrong-headed ontological claim that persons are really biological machines that can be programmed as computers are programmed. Second, Americans have encountered examples of some military personnel (as well as civilians) using the notion above as a vision for living their lives *as if* they were machines. “As if” does not constitute an identity relationship however (see fn 12 below). This is a theme explored extensively in American films portraying “cold” and “heartless” military personas such as *The Great Santini* (1979).

⁸ Former Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld’s insistence on “shock and awe” tactics for policing Iraqi population centers might be characterized as “break and enter” where soldiers and Marines kicked in the doors to Iraqi dwellings in order to achieve the advantage of surprise and cow any possible resistors into submission with the surprise threat of overwhelming force. The damage to relations to American-Iraqi relations was substantive and inestimable given the need in an insurgency to cut off insurgents from popular support if control is to be established. Tactics were switched to what Marines called “knock and cordon” where the target dwelling was surrounded and the troops knocked instead of kicking in the door. In Dunham’s case, he may have been utilizing a characteristic posture of keeping his weapon low to show some sign of respect. It is possible that Dunham was doing this *despite* the context that I elaborated, relying instead on a judgment that he could act appropriately if necessary.

⁹ These value frameworks can of course change over time. The Official Irish Republican Army, for example, developed a value framework that gradually de-legitimated the use of force and violence despite a long history of their use to advance the cause of Irish independence from British rule.

¹⁰ “Likelihood” captures the contingency that characterizes human socio-cultural action. “Certainty” would mischaracterize human socio-cultural action in terms of absolutes and necessity.

¹¹ Dr. Charles Varela brought this quote to my attention.

¹² The mechanical model that is pervasive in many scientific enterprises comes from the philosophy of the 16th century French thinker Rene Descartes. Richard Lewontin writes, “The entire body of modern science rests on Descartes’ metaphor of the world as a machine, which he introduced in Part V of the *Discourse on Method* as a way of understanding organisms but then generalized as a way of thinking about the entire universe. ‘I have hitherto described this earth and generally the whole visible world, as if it were merely a machine in which there was nothing at all to consider except the shapes and motions of its parts’

(*Principles of Philosophy, IV*)” (2001:3-4). Importantly, Lewontin goes on to say that, “While we cannot dispense with metaphors in thinking about nature, there is great risk of confusing the metaphor with the thing of real interest. We cease to see the world *as if* it were *like* a machine and take it to *be* a machine. The result is that the properties we ascribe to our object of interest and the questions we ask about it reinforce the original metaphorical image and we miss the aspects of the system that do not fit the metaphorical approximation” (2001:4).

¹³ In so doing Stevens *opposes* another Marine who, during my fieldwork in July of 2007, told me that killing is an “aggressive behavior” that is “instinctive.” There is of course a substantive difference between “killing” and “aggression” but for this Marine, the underlying and explanatory concept for killing was aggression. So, for one Marine it is instinctive not to kill while for a fellow Marine it is instinctive to be aggressive and so to kill. Which Marine should we take to be “right” as informants about Marine and perhaps human culture?

CHAPTER 3

IN SEARCH OF A SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM OF CONTRADICTION: ANTHROPOLOGICAL RESOURCES

In this chapter I intend on exploring the potential resources for solving the problem of contradiction from within Western anthropology. At stake is the critical anthropological assumption of human agency. I use the term “assumption” because it has yet to be grounded in any legitimate and plausible theoretical framework. As a consequence, we may be forced into the position of having to argue that there is no way in principle to decide between agentic descriptions and deterministic explanations of human social action. Should this turn out to be the case, we would have to relegate some culturally important, value-oriented actions of combat infantry normally recognized as conveying lessons in being ethically good as, instead, incomprehensible. Cultural celebrations of the enactment of prized values in, for example, the award of a Congressional Medal of Honor, would have to be termed illusory at best, self-delusional at worst.

This exploration will force us into to get clear about the relationship between ethnographic perception and conception, as well as learning. I will show that not only are both required for any legitimate and plausible explanation of human social action, but that the nature of each activity needs to be formulated properly. To do so will require delving into the actual bio-physiology of *homo sapiens sapiens*, specifically the structure of the specie’s nervous system, in pursuit of what human biology permits and prohibits in both the human organism and the human person. This endeavor will lead to a sustained critique of the bio-reductive framework and to its dismissal as a pseudo-scientific fantasy. As the critique emerges, we will see a surprising commonality of idealistic thinking in both bio-reductive and *anti*-bio-reductive approaches to human social action. That commonality requires attention since it presents a trap for researchers seeking a respectful representation of cultural members based on judgments about what constitutes ethnographic reality for those members. With the bio-reductive framework dismissed, I will identify the characteristics necessary for a plausible and legitimate engagement with the problem of contradiction with a special focus on why a proper understanding of science

is also necessary. I then review present literature in the Anthropology of Warfare to assess its fruitfulness as a source for the required resources for resolving the contradiction. Finally I note some intersections between the theoretical issues under discussion in this study and the position of anthropologists relative to warfare and combat.

Defining the Problem and Its Effects

We have seen that agentic descriptions of courageous action contradict deterministic bio-reductive explanations of human behavior. Contradiction is not unusual in the lives of persons, and it appears routine for people to hold diametrically opposed and so incoherent ideas simultaneously. U.S. Marine Sergeant Samuel J. Stevens is an example. But the contradiction should give social scientists like anthropologists pause: How would anthropologists explain, in any non-trivial way, what is going on amongst American combat infantry engaged in describing and explaining courageous action to an interested group of, say, Balinese? Or, in a less speculative light, suppose a senior Pentagon official is charged with assessing applications for a recent U.S. Office of the Secretary of Defense Small Business Innovation Research grant program worth hundreds of thousands if not millions of dollars that states

In a world full of sophisticated weapons, forces who can more accurately forecast human behavior and use that data to make wise decisions will have a significant edge over their competition. Today in DoD, this analysis is conducted by anthropological experts, known to carry their own bias, which often leads to faulty recommendations and inaccurate behavioral forecasting and take a significant amount of time to develop, in large part due to the rapid expansion of information produced from any given target population over the past decade. Alternative approaches, which significantly reduce or remove altogether this bias, while at the same time automating the overall analysis method, would provide a significant improvement over this status quo.

Methods like genetic algorithmic modeling of human behavior are becoming increasingly prevalent inside marketing and advertising industries and have been shown to provide effective communication and marketing strategies. At the same time, the development of modeling and simulation software has produced more accurate forecast and analysis capabilities of target population behavior such as economics, decision making and identification of key influencers (human or other) within groups.

Despite this progress, these tools have not been developed to support command-level military decision making processes in regard to troop movement, offensive / defensive strategy, or message communication which would help

create a favorable environment for our deployed forces. A technology that would exploit these recent trends to enable accurate forecasting of a given populations' potential responses to military relevant events would provide military decision makers with a powerful tool to more effectively use their limited resources to the greatest benefit possible. This tool could be used to facilitate or to replicate wholly or in part many of the tasks that a human anthropological consultation would provide such as, counter-insurgency, reconstruction or support operations, allowing faster and more accurate development of social-cultural behaviors. [<http://www.dodsbir.net/solicitation/sbir092/osd092.htm>]

Let's say that the senior Pentagon official is especially concerned because in trying to formulate a standard for assessing the applications she comes across these two positions on human warfare.

“War is an art and as such is not susceptible of explanation by fixed formula” – U.S. Army Major (later General) George S. Patton Jr. (1926)

“[War] is the domain of an unchanging human nature and thus subject to predictable lessons that transcend time and space” – Military Historian and Senior Fellow in Residence, Hoover Institution, Stanford University Victor Davis Hanson (2007)

If the official thinks to ask an anthropologist for suggestions on how to formulate the standard, how should, better yet, how *could* we provide the requested guidance without formulating a position on the nature of human social action: *is* human social behavior susceptible to “forecasting” as the U.S. Secretary of Defense's Office seems to think, and so available for “automated understanding”?

To answer this last question in any coherent way depends on the realization that the difference between Patton and Hanson is not one of opinion but of ontology. They are conflicting claims about what is “really real” in human social action. On the one hand is the existence of Patton's art, meaning the generation of genuine novelty. On the other hand is the existence of Hanson's universal, non-material (transcending time and space) structure that systematically produces formulaic, predictable results. For Patton, people are not predictable because they can and do generate novelty in their actions. For Hanson, people are not the point. Rather, the point is the operation of a transcendental, that is, *super-natural*, force that operates *through* people. So how could we answer the interested Balinese or the hypothetical Pentagon official?

Our task is not made any simpler by some important outcomes of the contradiction that we saw in U.S. Marine Sergeant Samuel J. Stevens's self-analysis. First, deploying contradictory ontologies creates incoherence; we cannot explain to our Balinese friends what these American combat infantry mean by courageous action in any way that coherently meshes their descriptions and explanations. The social world of combat infantry as it relates to courage is, in short, *unintelligible*. Similarly, we cannot explain to the senior Pentagon official how to resolve the contradiction with the theoretical and discursive resources at hand: there is no non-arbitrary—meaning plausible basis in what really exists—for deciding whether we should believe Patton or Hanson or even discard both in favor of a third, unnamed option. This problem is primarily a matter of philosophy and science.

Second, and even more disturbing is that the contradiction renders assessment of the outcomes of either ontological schema impossible. Without clarity and precision of meaning, how could we know whether the advice given to combat commanders on the basis of “forecasted” human behavior was actually sound? How would we know whether or not we are surreptitiously importing concepts and data considered inappropriate to either ontological position in the assessment process? A critical understanding of self as researcher and self as combat infantryman is not possible amidst such contradiction. Without a way to critically assess oneself (whether researcher or combat infantryman), monitoring and adjusting one's actions in light of preferred values and goals becomes problematic: self-talk can capture a sense of inevitability that suggests resignation or submission to a prevailing course of action, not command or control of it.¹ We saw a species of this in the argument of Twain's Old Man in chapter 2. Without new theoretical resources and a plausible scientific choice of ontological commitments we will not move further than the Geertzian/Sahlinsian position of identifying a problem.

Some contemporary anthropologists and historians might counsel us to “let the subjects speak for themselves,” but if so, the contradiction is merely reiterated, not resolved or even explained. The approach assumes that the way people talk and act is self-explanatory, that there are no serious questions of interpretation to be faced and decided upon. Taking the logic of this viewpoint seriously makes it impossible to distinguish between a Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropologist and a tape recorder. What, then, should be done?

It might be tempting to choose, by fiat, one framework over the other. While arbitrary decisions are risky there are many examples of successful and powerful scientific inquiries that emerge without knowledge of the actual ontological schema underlying the phenomena being observed. We have seen that the bio-reductive framework carries the authority of a natural scientific explanation because it posits the existence of causal entities and processes.² In the Platonic tradition that underwrites Western science, these biological mechanisms are the reality behind the appearances of culture. Insofar as descriptions posit the existence of persons as nothing more than the vehicle of hidden mechanisms that produce human social action like *moving toward danger*, we must consider those descriptions illusory. In fact, at least one scholar promotes this point of view and hence challenges the very idea that we as persons are capable of choosing our interpretations or frameworks, even arbitrarily! Dean's Professor in the Sciences of Uncertainty at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Nassim Taleb is the author of the New York Times Bestseller *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable* (2007). Taleb contends that the behavior of split-brain patients (people who have no connection between the left and right sides of the brain due to surgery for epilepsy or other serious diseases)

give us convincing physical—that is, biological—evidence of *the automatic aspect of the act of interpretation*. There appears to be *a sense-making organ in us*—though it may not be easy to zoom in on it with any precision. [Taleb 2007: 65, emphasis added]

I want to offer my position on three claims made by Taleb. First, we are built to interpret. I agree with this claim. Second, it is not the person, but an organ within the person that generates interpretations. I disagree with this claim. Third, in being generated by an impersonal organ within the person, the *content* of an interpretation is pre-determined *for* the person, not *by* the person. I disagree with this last claim as well.

If Taleb is right, our perception of a “choice” between frameworks must be an illusion. Our sense of having a choice in how we act in the world is simply mistaken. If interpretations underlie our actions in the world, and interpretations are *given* by an “organ” that automates the generation of those interpretations, then all our actions are pre-determined not by us, but by that organ. The very important consequence of Taleb's viewpoint is that there is no way to take seriously the idea of having a choice in our interpretations. This means that we would have to explain to the Balinese that American combat infantry discourses of and about courage, like

“choosing to smother a grenade to save fellow Marines,” or “not firing because I’m facing a scared old man, not a hostile insurgent,” are mistaken explanations of human action. To persist in the mistake and actually honor a soldier for choosing to act courageously through the cultural ritual of awarding a decoration like the Congressional Medal of Honor is self-delusion.

Assessing Taleb’s viewpoint against the bio-reductive framework, however, we encounter a substantial problem. If, as some scholars like ethologist Irenaus Eibl-Eibesfeldt (1979) have claimed, culture is an adaptation to the environment in the same way that a chameleon’s ability to change color is an adaptation, it is unclear why humans should be generating multiple interpretations, no less contradictory ones. It is difficult to imagine what species survival function “self-delusion” has served in our genetic past. If, nevertheless, we remain committed to a bio-reductive framework, a disciplinary and methodological consequence follows: we should investigate discourses of and about courage using neurobiology and physiology, perhaps in the attempt to discover some malfunction or unfinished evolutionary process in our “sense-making organ.” We should, at the very least, be in search of this mysterious organ and its operation in order to understand what we otherwise think of as culturally based semiotic practices like courageous action. Strangely, Taleb (2007) himself seems unconcerned with “finding” this organ.³ It is tempting to speculate about a reason for Taleb’s lack of concern. If Taleb took his own viewpoint seriously, wouldn’t he have to agree to have his “organ” cited as the author of his book?⁴

The question of human self-delusion evokes more than mere puzzlement when considered against the human record of practical achievement in the world. Though not without mistakes and disasters, humans have acted successfully in many kinds of endeavors ranging from the mundane activity of staying warm in cold environments to space flight. That record of practical success implies a highly developed capacity to generate accurate, not delusional interpretations of and in the world. It is important to notice, moreover, that practical success *presumes* socio-cultural success since interpretations are mediated in and through language use. Solutions to the practical problems of space flight are achieved *through* the socio-cultural realm of collaborative semiotic practices of persons. In the first instance of space flight, the intersubjective development of scientific principles by which calculations of the differing effects of the moon’s gravity were successfully mitigated using a mathematical language developed not genetically, but socio-culturally. The effects of the moon’s gravity had never been experienced

and so could not have made their way into any evolved genetic structure. This means that socio-cultural practices *cannot* legitimately be reduced to the automated functioning of genetic material. The question of whether or not people delude themselves when awarding medals for the tangible enactment of intangible socio-cultural values itself, therefore, legitimately cannot be posed based on the assumption of an evolutionarily automated biological process. These considerations actually reveal something quite telling about the bio-reductive model: it is grounded in the logic of a positivist metaphysic, which holds that the only authentic knowledge is that of the senses (Grene and Depew 2004). If the results of such a metaphysic include the illegitimate elimination of the reality of human socio-cultural interaction as seen the historical fact of practical scientific success, then it is clearly the wrong metaphysic upon which to ground a putative scientific explanation of human social action.

The radical incompatibility between the language used to explain human behavior using the bio-reductive framework and the language used to explain their socio-cultural lives is symptomatic of the deeply flawed ontology of human being emerging from an impoverished understanding of the natural world. The bio-reductive framework does not resolve the contradiction between explanation and description as much as illegitimately eliminate it by using a flawed metaphysic supported by veneer of pseudo-science. The flaw is at two levels. First, it instantiates the fundamental mistake of presuming that, generally, matter is inert—passive—and so yields a view of nature as a world of physical and biological patients and not agents. Second, it limits knowledge to the senses and in so doing destroys the very possibility of scientific inquiry based on the use of intangible, socio-cultural concepts to achieve practical success in the world. Insofar as the bio-reductive framework is maintained, we are offered an incoherent picture of the various forms of natural activity that we see in the world every day, including the natural activity of persons being social and using intangible concepts. To the extent that the bio-reductive framework is ascribed the authority of an authentic and so legitimate science, we are force to view the semiotic practices of interacting dynamically embodied persons as an illusion, with the reality being that they are patient robots awaiting the instructions and motive forces of evolved genetic mechanisms.

“Being on the Ground with Our Informants”: A Successful Anthropological Resource for Resolving the Contradiction?

Though not advanced in the same way, I think Distinguished Professor of Anthropology at UCLA Sherry Ortner appreciates our cultural capabilities and uses that appreciation to underwrite her claim that the practice of anthropology provides insight into the source of human action as (inter)personal agency (versus the operation of impersonal systemic forces).⁵ Ortner contends that “it is [anthropologists’] position ‘on the ground’ that puts us in a position to see people not simply as passive reactors...some ‘system,’ but as active agents...in their own history” (1984: 143). In contending that persons, not “sense-making organs” or genetic material or protein reactions, are the source of human action Ortner positions herself in the agentic, not the bio-reductive, framework. Though I don’t think Ortner recognized it, her contention is first and foremost an ontological claim about the existential status of social human beings. On what basis does Ortner’s stake her claim? Apparently, it is something like this: anthropologists’ literal (and perhaps figurative) position among their target subjects yields a certain kind of insight into the source of human action. Since Ortner does not qualify her contention, we are invited to see her advancing a conception that can be expressed as a sort of simple formula: Position=Insight. To get more precise: Position (on the ground) + Seeing (what is *really* going on) = Insight (persons generate history). Is it possible that the “counter” to the bio-reductive framework’s explanatory hegemony is simply to be with others and so see their enactment of semiotic practices as dynamically embodied agents?

It does not take much reflection to realize that this formula is entirely inadequate as either an account or defense of putative anthropological perceptions of agency. We can appreciate this inadequacy through a challenge to theories of knowledge based on human perceptions (empiricism) from the past. In the 18th century the philosopher David Hume argued that humans neither see nor experience causal relationships in the world. How does he reach this startling conclusion? Hume thought the world was composed of discrete, atomistic components that behave just like billiard balls. Billiard balls are inert until an external force moves them. Then, when two balls collide, we see one contacting the other and the other moving away. In short,

two separate events are occurring in succession. Our psychology then generates the *illusion* of a dynamic, causal interaction, much like flipping through a series of still photographs over time of a moving object that makes that object look as though it is moving in the pictures. The *continuity* we *seem* to perceive in, say, a candle melting, is simply an overlay on the world provided by human psychology. Our claim that the candle's flame is an agentic entity that *causes* the melting is therefore an ungrounded assumption prompted by the operation of our psychology. *Continuity, and therefore causality, or agency, is an illusion.* In Hume's conception then, one's position—on the ground or not—is *irrelevant* since what we think we see beyond ourselves is really just a construct of our psychology. Hume's idea undermines Ortner's contention by offering an account of human perception that renders our sense of seeing causal activity in the world illusory. Since Hume's account is of *human* psychology, not just his, even anthropologists are susceptible to his argument. It is interesting to note in this regard that we could think of Taleb's "sense-making organ" as a biological structure that grounds Hume's idea.

In the same vein as Hume, but more recently, the anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss offered a conceptualization of his own experience that amounts to a direct challenge to Ortner's claim. He reports

I never had, and still do not have, the perception of feeling my personal identity. I appear as the place where something is going on, but there is no "I," no "me." Each of us is a kind of crossroads where things happen. The crossroad is purely passive; something happens there. There is no choice, there is just a matter of chance. [Levi-Strauss 1979: 3-4]

Taking himself as a social 'other' under observation, what Levi-Strauss *sees* (on the ground as it were) is not an active agent in his own history, but a "crossroad where things happen." Levi-Strauss characterizes the metaphorical meaning of being a crossroads as being "purely passive." What he seems to actually mean, however, is *inert*. "Passive" characterizes the agency of an entity as *only contingently held in abeyance*. That the entity *can* act in some way but happens not to at the moment is a matter of the local conditions, not a matter of the possession of such capability in the entity itself. A "crossroads," upon reflection, is not the type of entity that is structurally capable of agency. Just as firefighters do not "storm" buildings, crossroads are not simply "passive," they are "inert." As with Giuliani's analogy, we are up against another

imprecise and so misleading metaphorical construction, but one that is nevertheless provocative and important.

My interpretive decision is to see Levi-Strauss constructing himself as not merely passive but inert since, in the last sentence of the quotation, he states categorically, “there is no choice.” For Levi-Strauss, his being is determined by chance, not choice.⁶ We might ask what possible recourse Ortner would have in an encounter, anthropologist to anthropologist, with Levi-Strauss? Picture it: both of them, standing there, on the ground (as it were) together, with Ortner seeing him as the source of his own history and Levi-Strauss seeing himself as an inert locus of intersecting external forces impinging on him by chance! The only result possible is impasse, the kind we have seen for many years in American social sciences in the Science-Humanism debate. The same kind of impasse that, I think, underwrote the fragmentation of some anthropology departments in the recent past.

The stark simplicity and unqualified surety of Ortner’s contention suggests that she somehow missed the philosophical (ontology, what exists) and so the scientific (causation) challenge to her position from the past presented by Hume as well as the more recent version presented by Levi-Strauss.⁷ Hume directly challenges Ortner’s contention by arguing that what is sensed is not agency or even determinism, but mere successions of events we record and run together as a function of our psychology (as we would by flipping through the series of still photographs) to generate the illusion of causal relationships in the world. Levi-Strauss directly challenges Ortner’s contention by arguing that what he sees is random determinative forces impacting an inert space-time locus, not the agency of a person. These challenges strike at the heart of Ortner’s claim and expose the need for her to ground her claim in something other than a bald identification of anthropologists’ positioning *in situ*.

This situation arises because Ortner confuses and equates perception with insight (knowledge) in a naïvely empiricist way. Empiricism is a version of idealism because it artificially limits real knowledge to that which is experienced.⁸ Ortner’s claim, quite simply, tells us nothing about how cultural conceptions—those products of language in use by interacting, dynamically embodied persons—relate to human perceptions, which is a *necessity* given the challenges by Hume, Taleb, and Levi-Strauss. This is not a new problem: theories of human perception seeking to understand the problematic relationship of humans to the natural world and each other are evident in the writings of the ancient Greek philosophers. In the 18th

century the philosopher Immanuel Kant alerted us, in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, to the idea that perception without conception is blind. In the 20th century the anthropologist Clifford Geertz argued that

Rather than culture acting only to supplement, develop, and extend organically based capacities logically and genetically prior to it, it would seem to be ingredient to those capacities themselves. A cultureless human being would probably turn out to be not an intrinsically talented though unfulfilled ape, but a wholly mindless and consequently unworkable monstrosity. Like the cabbage it so much resembles, the *Homo sapiens* brain, having arisen within the framework of human culture, would not be viable outside of it. [1973: 68]

Ortner has either missed or dismissed these warnings that demonstrate perception, conception, and knowledge are *not* identical. If they are not, knowledge claims based on perception *require* a theory of what exists and how it works. We should note in passing Geertz's affirming sensitivity to the absurdity of simply ignoring or subsuming human "culture" based on a claim that the primary motive reality for us is genetic material and biochemical processes.

To illustrate the reality of the need for conceptual resources in human social action, including perception, consider this empirical and ethnographic example: on January 15, 2009, US Airways Flight 1549 struck a flock of birds after taking off from an airport in New York City resulting in both of its engines failing. The plane was expertly landed on the Hudson River between New York City and the State of New Jersey. The television news program *The Situation Room* featured a live interview with an ordinary citizen eyewitness named Joe Harrington. Harrington was asked to describe what he saw. He replied, "You don't think to look for a plane in Manhattan no less at that altitude. I don't think I even recognized it as a plane at first." I contend that Harrington didn't *see* the plane *as a plane* because the novelty of the situation defied his conception of where planes, as planes, ought to be, given how they work in relation to "cityscapes" and "airports," both of which, in turn, are socio-cultural conceptions. In short, though Harrington detected *something* in his perceptual field, he did not understand *what* that something was until he adjusted his conceptual resources. We might call this the use of intelligence in understanding.

This kind of example is not limited to the natural scientific world of the operation of mechanical objects like planes. It includes the socio-cultural world of the actions of persons as

well. During World War II, U.S. Marine Sergeant O.J. Marion issued the following report after observing a Japanese patrol on the island of Guadalcanal,

We were observing and were carefully camouflaged. We heard a little sound and then saw two Japs crawl by about 7 feet away from us. These Japs were unarmed. We started to shoot them, but did not do so as we remembered our mission. Then, 15 yards later came 8 armed Japs. They were walking slowly and carefully. ... When I got back, we had a lot of discussion as to why the two Japs in front were not armed ... I believe they were the point of the patrol and were unarmed so they could crawl better (*In Poole 2001: 50-51*).

In this case, the cultural conception of the action of “patrolling” differs between U.S. Marines and the Japanese Army. The Marines did not recognize the two unarmed, crawling Japanese as (part of) an organized patrol because being unarmed and crawling were not in the Marines’ cultural conception of how a combat patrol on a battlefield works! Specifically, it has long been doctrinal among U.S. Marines that being unarmed on a battlefield is tantamount to suicide and so an affront to the deep obligation among Marines to protect their fellow Marines by being able and willing to fight. Being unarmed while patrolling was not part of the Marines’ cultural conception of ‘how to be’ on a battlefield.

Besides the doctrinal expression of what constitutes being a ‘good’ Marine (being properly armed) on a battlefield, I want support this interpretation using the following analysis. The Marines at first were tempted to shoot the two Japanese. According to Marion they did not shoot *because* they re-minded themselves of the rules for engaging the enemy expressed in their mission orders. We can tell by Marion’s report that his mission was to observe, not to engage, the enemy. Given this mission—and the obvious self-discipline of the Marines who permitted enemy soldiers to get within feet of them without doing anything—it seems to me that no such temptation to shoot the Japanese soldiers would have occurred *if* the Marines had immediately perceived them as (1) part of an organized grouping of soldiers unified under the purpose of ‘patrolling’ and (2) members of the class ‘enemy’. The Marines, in short, were genuinely perplexed by what they were seeing and so they did not kill the Japanese. Marion reports that it was only *later, after* discussion about what he perceived, that he concluded that the two unarmed, crawling Japanese were the “point” (meaning the soldiers out in front) of a patrol. We should not forget either, that the report itself is important since its very existence demonstrates

Marion's sense of being unsure of what he saw. Importantly, were we to use the bio-reductive framework to analyze this ethnographic situation, we would have been led to expect an *automatic behavior* by the Marines in the presence of a stimulus on a battlefield. But any sense of an automatic behavior is, simply, missing. We might ask if it is missing because of some interfering process like, "culture," that prevents the otherwise automatic operation of biochemical processes, or if it is missing because the Americans *chose* to act by observation rather than gunfire? Rhetorically, we can ask the further question, "Which of these two options are more plausible from a scientific point of view?"

In sum, Harrington and Marion present the rather common occurrence of having perceived *something*, but not *knowing* what it was and how it worked until later, *after conceptual clarification*. Their relative actions—or *inactions* if viewed using the bio-reductive framework—were based on an encounter with novelty that required the use of intelligence to generate a conceptual and interpretative formulation. This formulation, in turn depended, in Marion's case, on complex cultural constructions such as "(how do 'we' properly conduct) warfare," "(the right way to) patrol," "(what counts as) mission fulfillment," as well as a host of other necessary but culturally dependent conceptions. I suggest that this host of conceptions even includes a basic understanding of "(what counts as a) person" to underwrite the categories "enemy" and "combatant" and so make them available for use in potential social action—like shooting and killing.

This means that action was consciously and sub-consciously delayed until understanding was achieved in both cases. Harrington didn't dial 911 to report the plane's emergency landing in the river until he understood what he had seen. Marion and his fellow Marines didn't shoot the unarmed, crawling Japanese soldiers (and in this case delayed action indefinitely) because they were unsure of what they were seeing. Taleb's notion of "automatic" interpretation on the part of a putative internal organ is flatly contradicted by these empirical and ethnographic examples. More importantly, there is good *scientific* reason to think that Taleb's notion is simply wrong. Experimental biologist Donald O. Hebb (1958) and Nobel Prize-winning neurophysiologist John C. Eccles (1989) show us that the biophysical construction and functioning of our human nervous system permits us to not only to hold a stimulus indefinitely, but also to recall it or provide one of our own, sometimes imaginative, choosing!⁹ The relationship between the person and the uniquely structured brain and nervous system is itself

dynamic but, when functioning properly, remains under the control of the person: *the person uses the capabilities provided by her biology, not the other way around*. This leads to the insight that the human nervous system, including the brain, materially and functionally *alters* the relationship between genetic material or biochemical processes and the behavior of the organism. This insight is either ignored in the bio-reductive framework, or, assumed—*a la* Taleb’s notion of an “interpreting organ in the brain”—to be another cog, albeit complex, in an otherwise mechanical causal system. It is in examining the actual structure and functioning of the human nervous system through the work of Hebb and Eccles that we find a scientifically plausible account of human agency in its biological *and* social forms. This plausible account spells the end of the bio-reductive framework.

The End of the Bio-Reductive Framework: The Concept of Mechanical Determinism is Scientifically Implausible in Relation to Human Biology and Human Persons

We can begin by taking seriously the idea that the attempt to explain a complex organic entity like a human being in terms of its parts is susceptible to an ontological requirement expressed by the Director of the Center for Philosophy Natural Science and Social Science at the London School of Economics, Rom Harré, that “The part-whole relation is *useless* unless we can also invoke the cause-effect relation to link the properties of parts with those of wholes (and of course vice-versa)” (1986: 40, emphasis added). Such a causal linkage relevant to this discussion is found in the work of Donald O. Hebb on the systematic distinction between kinds of animals, for instance spiders, whose instinctive behavior is specie-specific and kinds of animals, for instance, *homo sapiens sapiens*, whose intelligent behavior is specie-specific. Hebb’s distinction between say a *spider’s web-building* and a *person “smothering a grenade”* rests on the different ratio of association cortex (thought process) to sensory-motor cortex (perception-behavior). In instinctive species the ratio shows a significantly greater amount of sensory-motor cortex to association cortex—an *s/a* ratio. Conversely, in *Homo sapiens sapiens* the reverse ratio holds: we have a significantly greater amount of association cortex to sensory-motor cortex—an *a/s* ratio. This very important neurological distinction between the *s/a* ratio of instinctive species and the *a/s* ratio of intelligent species demonstrates that human beings *are literally not built to operate mechanistically*.

The lesson of Hebb's work is echoed that of Marc Hauser, Professor of Psychology, Organismic & Evolutionary Biology and Biological Anthropology at Harvard University. Dr. Hauser writes, "Humans have a number of brain features in common with other species. Where we differ from them is in the relative size of particular regions of the cortex and how these regions connect, differences that give rise to thoughts having no analogue elsewhere in the animal kingdom" (2009: 48). Humans have the unique ability to generate the kind of language and culture that result in space flight, skyscrapers, theoretical physics, Van Gogh's *Starry Night*, Beethoven's 9th *Symphony*, and Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. This ability is an *affordance* of their bio-physiology and how it functions. Realistic and plausible scientific studies of the structure and functional capabilities of human biology ground this view.

The philosopher of social science, Charles R. Varela, puts it this way,

There is a difference in natural kind between, say, instinctive ants and intelligent Homo sapiens. An automatic reaction is called an S-R reaction: a stimulus immediately and directly elicits a response, without any intervening cognitive activity. For example, seeing food, you salivate; you don't think about it first in order to salivate. An important feature of instinctive behavior is that it is automaticity of a special kind. When the behavior is an R elicited by an S, the responding system is robotic. However, if the critical features of a complex habit system are not innate rigidity, fixation, and compulsivity, then *automaticity is not roboticism*. Thus, in the kind of automaticity we can attribute to Homo sapiens, the learned formation of complex habits that can then function as skills, is functionally compatible with *autonomy*—the freedom to think of other things and even do other things, while on "cruise control," so to speak. It is the perfection of this kind of learned automaticity in sports and dance, or reading and writing, for example, that makes the foundation for and the instrument of the freedom and creativity of human action. [Varela 2003: 111]

Importantly, "freedom" here is not *political*, but *ontological*. Varela is referring to the bio-physiological structure of the human species as enabling us to be free of the kind of whole-body instinctive behavior characteristic of species with the opposite relationship between association cortex and sensory-motor cortex. It is exactly this resulting conception of freedom and automaticity that U.S. Marine Sergeant Samuel J. Stevens *misses* in relying on the work of Lieutenant Colonel Grossman, who bases his understanding of human social action on Skinnerian operant-conditioning.

As we saw, Skinner, using theoretical legerdemain akin to that employed by proponents of artificial intelligence, argues that human beings are merely organic systems whose behavior can be modified by external forces influencing the organism itself without regard for the agency of the organism. Stevens thought his fire/don't fire training influenced something "inside" of him, as if he was being programmed with an instinct and so had to act according to that pattern *despite his own decision-making ability*. In so thinking, Stevens offers us an incoherent and so a mistaken understanding of his own actions in not firing on the old Iraqi man because he has the wrong version of *automaticity*, one that contradicts his own description. In that description, we saw Stevens alert us to his use of his own intelligence to interrupt his trained response to "hostile action means hostile intent." In passing we should note how deeply influential the bio-reductive framework has been for Americans—a trained response can become beyond one's control as if the programmer—Skinner, *et Al.*—were somehow immune to just that kind of training themselves. After all, Skinner's version of science permits, if not demands, a biological entity like Taleb's interpretation organ, and so we can justifiably ask Skinner how he could ever know that he was not programmed himself to believe in a certain interpretive schema that makes the world appear mechanical when in fact it is agentic. Of course given the logic of the bio-reductive schema and Taleb's interpretation organ, Skinner would have no choice but to answer that, first, he not know, and second, even if he did know, he could not properly claim that knowledge since its author is the organ, not him!

If instinctive species—like ants and spiders—are the classic examples of mechanistic determinism generally and of biological determinism specifically, then their use as models for understanding human social action is a scientific failure. Doctrinal prescriptions for understanding human social action based on them can be dismissed legitimately, secured by the plausible scientific ontology of human being offered by Hebb, Eccles, and Varela. On the basis of his clarification of the meaning of concepts like "automaticity" based on a scientifically plausible rendition of the actual bio-physiology of human beings, Varela concludes, "It just isn't human nature to behave instinctively" (2003: 115).

But, it might be objected, there are clear causal relationships between human action and genes and brains. Parkinson's Disease and Sickle Cell Anemia are good examples of this fact. We can meet this objection by pointing out that the premise of the objection is wrong. These diseases alter, obstruct, or limit behavioral capacities, sometimes radically or fatally, *but they do*

not determine which actions are taken. So, for example, an analogy between whole-organism behaviors, like *a spider's web building* and *a person smothering a grenade* is an illegitimate analogy. While spiders are limited to web-building behavior by their particular kind of nervous system, human beings instead are *capable of an indefinite range* of actions. In fact, it can be said that our biology *mandates* that we function autonomously from our biology. To be clear on this point, there are indeed both biological and sociological limits. This is not an argument for “free will” or any other such super-natural conception. Biologically, we cannot perform the action “space flight” because of the liabilities afforded by our specie-specific bio-physiology. Again, this is a matter of *ontological* freedom. *Socio-culturally*, in the United States, we cannot perform the action “arrest that woman for not wearing a *hijab*” without altering our cultural conventions and values because of the capabilities and liabilities we afford ourselves through our cultural conventions and values. This is a matter of *political* freedom. Neither of these behavioral limits, however, is the result of an instinctivist design of our nervous system. Both limits are capable of modification due to our capabilities of intelligent action: space flight can be achieved through prosthetic devices and arresting a woman for not wearing a *hijab* can be achieved through passing a new law.

This view is founded on the Hebbian understanding that the brain of the human organism is dynamic—*naturally agentic*—rather than mechanical—*naturally determined*. I now want to claim this view entitles us to believe that we in anthropology (and in sociology) have been right in our Geertzian/Sahlinsian conviction that the link between the human brain and human behavior is *functionally discontinuous*. In other words, Geertz and Sahlins have separately argued for the proposition that cultural is *grounded in but not determined by* biology. The natural agency of intelligent brains provides the complex capacities presumed by sociologist Emile Durkheim's theory of enculturation through socialization in primary and secondary institutions (family, community, peer-relations, schools, and work). That theory posits the *transformation* of human organisms (biological individuals) into human beings (persons). In short, persons are culturally agentic not because Ortner thinks anthropologists see them as such in virtue of their position *in situ* but because they must be by virtue of their biology, specifically their unique nervous system.

In *The Selfish Gene* (1976) Richard Dawkins gives us a deep evolutionary insight into this anthropological proposition of functional autonomy: genetics is the *general* mechanism by

which evolution provides for the reproduction of species, while culture is the novel *specific* mechanism by which cultures reproduce themselves historically. With this joint understanding from Hebb and Dawkins that, on the one hand, biology (brain) and culture (behavior) in humans are functionally discontinuous, and that, on the other hand, culture is therefore functionally autonomous, it is possible to directly challenge the assumption within the bio-reductive framework that the human nervous system—meaning, the brain—operates mechanistically.

The mechanistic “cause-effect” link is both broken and clarified in this idea: genes afford us the structure of our brains, but that structure is modifiable and dynamic, not fixed and mechanistic. The operation of the brain affords persons the ability to function autonomously in a social world generated through dynamically embodied language use. If the scientific conception of the way biology works in terms of the relationship of genes to behavior in humans is wrong-headed, that is, definitive scientific evidence demonstrates that human biology is dynamic (intelligent species), not mechanistic (instinctive species), we can pose the question of “what, exactly, is ‘carrying the weight’ of the bio-reductive framework’s sense of mechanical, deterministic causality?” I suggest that it is the notion of determinism itself, a notion that is derived from the mistaken idea that all matter is inert and that action, generally, is conceived mechanistically. We now know that there is nothing in human biological nature that fits this conception!

This knowledge reverses the burden of proof. For anyone, ranging from scholars like the evolutionary psychologist Steven Pinker in *The Language Instinct* (1994) to combat infantry like the U.S. Marine Martial Arts Instructor-Trainer who stated, “It’s in our DNA,” to continue to talk *as if* the locus of control of human behavior is in our genetic material and expressed by instinctive behavior *they must show us how Hebb is wrong*. That is, they must (1) show us how, exactly, the parts control the whole, which means (2) showing us, exactly, how our biology is structured to generate functional continuity and so determine behavior *despite* Hebb’s demonstration that we are built in a way that maximizes our agency through functional discontinuity. Since no such demonstrations of an alternative bio-physical structures for human beings are on offer (because they don’t exist), we are justified not only in dismissing the bio-reductive framework as scientifically implausible, but also understanding putative explanations of human behavior emerging from it in discourse like “it’s in our DNA” as, simply, wrong.

Similarly, we are prepared to refute former Assistant Secretary of Defense and Marine Vietnam veteran F.J. Bing West's idea that American combat infantry possess a "natural instinct" for decisive battle—for closing with and destroying the enemy (2006: 4). His claim is that American combat infantry are built in such a way that, when left without proper leadership, they prefer, over any other type of fighting, to engage in close combat. This must simply be wrong. This kind of reductive discourse, therefore, must be doing something other than explaining the behavior of American combat infantry! What that "something other" is would be a matter of ethnographic investigation using discourse analysis and interpretations of meaning and context. Some possibilities include the discourse functioning as a justification or motivation of preferred ways of acting.

Some Lessons From the Failed Bio-Reductive Framework: Clarifying Necessary Anthropological Resources

In our examination of the bio-reductive framework we encountered serious problems for the theory in its portrayal of human perception and conception as well as the relationship between these activities. I now want to use those problems as a way to refine our sense of just what sort of anthropological resources are necessary to move forward with a scientifically legitimate ethnographic project. An effective way to do so is by focusing on the human action of "learning" since we saw truly bizarre results emerge from applying the bio-reductive framework to situations where humans encounter novelty. Human learning is a personal action, an engagement with concepts and experience that prompts or permits the person to modify his concepts and actions. Due to our bio-physiology, our ability to learn is maximized among the species of the natural world. In the logic and mechanical determinism of the bio-reductive framework, however, we are forced to assume not only that knowledge is *impersonal* but also that all the knowledge we need is contained in our evolved genetic material. Our brain and nervous system, contra Hebb, Eccles, Hauser, and Varela, are merely extensions of the deterministic operation of genes. This requirement emerges from the tenet of the bio-reductive model that every behavior is to be understood in terms of its survival function, a tenet that artificially and arbitrarily limits the interpretation of human action to concepts with a family-resemblance to the master concepts of "function" and "survival." This is a superb example of

discursive hegemony. “Learning” in the bio-reductive framework is only ever ‘discovery’ or ‘realization’ of what is supposedly already present.¹⁰

There are at least three serious problems with this updated version of Plato’s notion that, before we were born we knew everything, but in being born we forget, so learning is simply remembering what we already know. First, since it is clearly not genes or biochemical processes that are doing the discovering or the realizing, the framework must be surreptitiously assuming the existence and power of the organism/entity as the reference for discovering or realizing what is already present (e.g., Taleb’s interpreting organ). Second, the framework again positions culture as some sort of evolutionarily dysfunctional overlay that occludes the (surreptitiously assumed) organism/person’s ability to “see the obvious,” that is, discover or realize what is already there! Finally, by ignoring or theorizing out of existence both the organism/person and culture the framework precludes any plausible explanation of learning in the sense of either self-regulation or creativity in the face of novelty. This means that in cases of genuine cultural novelty, such as the first time Joe Harrington witnessed a plane being landed on the Hudson River, or the first time American Marines witnessed a Japanese army patrol on Guadalcanal, we must assume that somehow Harrington’s and the Marines’ perceptions were not only temporarily disabled (perhaps by intelligence or culture) but that their behavior (as a response in the face of that novelty as a stimulus) was *pre-coded* into their genetic material. How, we might ask, is this possible?

A Skinnerian bio-reductionist might offer us an account where, in cases of novelty, most organisms delay a response or respond by not engaging or retreating from the novelty until, over time, the “right” response is conditioned. So, where a situation does not fit a pre-established template, the organism delays or retreats automatically as a function of the organism’s biological make-up. Three important questions arise in light of this hypothetical account. First, how is learning possible? What I mean is, how would *any* organism *ever* engage situations of novelty if all organisms were genetically programmed (mechanically determined) to delay or retreat should the pre-programmed behavior template not fire? In the same vein we may ask whom or what is assessing the situation in terms of its “fit” with the template, and on what basis? Is it Taleb’s interpreting organ?

Let us entertain Taleb’s scientifically implausible construction for the sake of the discussion of the interpretive consequences of applying the bio-reductive framework to the

situation of U.S. Marines in World War II “learning” in the face of novelty. The long history of human warfare and fighting may perhaps suggest, *prima facie*, that we give some credence to a genetically based behavior template bred into us over time. But, what of unique human endeavors like flight? Though he had been practicing in simulators, the actions of the pilot of US Airways Flight 1549 were *unique*. As we will see in chapter 7, there is a substantive difference between training and “real” situations. No simulator or amount of simulation time could prepare the pilot for the unique atmospheric conditions, in that area, along that flight path, on the day of the incident, or for the particular weight of the plane and its contents, the plane’s attitude at time of failure, or a host of other variables, for example. Similarly, the first human in space, the Soviet astronaut Yuri Gagarin, got it right the very first time.¹¹ No training, and, more importantly, nothing in past human history could have prepared either pilot for the unique issues facing him. In short, the evolution or the conditioning of an instinct was *impossible*.

Finally, in what sense are we to understand the *organism* as responsible for any behavior? It would be more in line with the bio-reductive framework to conclude that genetic material is somehow using the organism to learn, but that makes no sense: genes might “mutate,” “produce,” “generate,” “cause,” “divide,” “get spliced,” but they don’t “*learn*.” Simply, genes do not possess the capability to learn in any plausible way because they are not structured to learn. Even the notion that genes are liable to have information “coded” into them by the environment is wrong since that notion suggests genes are the passive receptors of consequences of the operation of an external force or entity. The work of biologists like Brian Goodwin (1994) and Richard Lewontin (1998) ground these claims.

This discussion of the implausible science underlying the bio-reductive framework which leads to untenable understandings of human perception, conception, and learning is a model for what Ortner would have to explain prior to making her claim about anthropological positioning on the ground: until she gives us a plausible account of how perception and insight are simultaneous and unproblematic Ortner’s formulation cannot be a factual claim about the results of the interpersonal positioning on the ground of socio-cultural anthropologists. Instead, we should regard it as a mere *expression of faith* in the existence and primacy of human agency as against human behavior as the result of a mechanically deterministic system. This does not resolve the contradiction between explanation and description so much as ignore it by fiat, which, of course, plays right into the hands of our “interpretive organ” proponent Nassim Taleb.

Ortner's claim about human agency is in danger of being hijacked by Taleb's determinism. Ironically, too, we can see Ortner as having engaged in her own version of reductionism, despite her intention to honor rather than ignore or demote human semiotic practices.

By way of comparison the bio-reductive framework neatly sidesteps the issue of perception in any of three ways. We have seen that culture is seen variously as an evolutionary mistake that gets in the way of a truer or more real animal perception of the world, as an unexplained mystery to be ignored, and as an impersonal behavioral response to environmental stimuli originating in the evolutionary assemblage of our genetic code.¹² In this last construction, human behavior is the automated response to perceptions that happened hundreds of thousands if not millions of years ago. It is quite important to realize, however, that Ortner's claim is a form of *idealism* while the bio-reductive framework is *realist* in that it presents an ontology of real entities and processes that are (supposed to be) the means of the actualizing the behaviors encoded in our genetic material, entities such as "interpretation organs" and "genetic material," and processes like "chemical reactions of proteins."

To be clear, none of this is to say that either Hume or Levi-Strauss is, contra Ortner, a realist. Hume's idealism reveals itself in his notion that knowledge of the external world is impossible because it is really a construction of our psychology. Levi-Strauss could be understood as a realist insofar as Durkheim's social fact and Freud's unconscious informed his fundamental theoretical thinking. He posits the existence of real forces operating randomly on his inert space-time location, but his conclusions are, like Ortner's, based on sense perceptions. Such perceptions are subject to Hume's objection: claims to knowledge based on what one sees, or feels, or smells, or tastes, or hears are all automatic productions of our psychology. In this all three authors share a common heritage with sociologist and philosopher Jean Baudrillard (cf. chapter 2). Given the impact of idealist and realist thinking on the issue of representation of human social action, it is important to delve into these two very different ways for researchers to think, analyze, and interpret.

Idealism Versus Realism

To highlight the nature of the problem posed by subscribing to idealism, consider sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) concept of the *habitus*. The linguistic and socio-cultural

anthropologist Brenda Farnell (2000: 407) identifies it as “a socially constituted system of cognitive and motivating structures” that acts on the body, but not the mind. In positing the existence of real “social structures” that determine human behavior, Bourdieu offers a realist theory of causal entities and processes just as the bio-reductive framework offers a realist theory based on internal “genetic structures” and chemical reactions of proteins. We might call Bourdieu’s theory a social-reductive framework since human behavior is determined by social structures instead of genes or protein reactions. Without Bourdieu, Levi-Strauss is as much an idealist as Ortner and therein lays the source of the impasse in their hypothetical meeting, on the ground. There is no conversation possible because neither has any conception of the ontology and causality that might support their respective claims.¹³

We can now deepen our understanding of why Ortner’s contention is simply a matter of faith, a bald claim: it is *indistinguishable* from a diverse array of similar *idealist* perspectives (Hume and Levi-Strauss). In being an idealist position, it is susceptible to being undermined by at least two *realist* theories of human behavior (Lehmann and Feldman’s bio-reductive framework we encountered in chapter 2 and Bourdieu’s social-reductive framework just mentioned). The real value of Ortner’s contention, then, is in alerting us to the necessity of finding or developing *realist* anthropological resources in order to resolve the problem of contradiction between descriptive and explanatory discourses among Americans in general and soldiers in particular. Failure to do so ensures that we are both susceptible to misrepresenting the social action and meaning of our target cultural members as well as to being undermined by putatively deeper levels of analysis that “really” explain our target cultural members.

Though I would speculate that Ortner never intended it, we should note that her contention is not only ineffectual either as a resolution of the explanation and description contradiction or a realistic response to the bio-reductive framework, it is as imperialistic as the bio-reductive framework in dismissing a whole category of what seems to be a fundamental component of human being. What I mean is that Ortner’s contention, in effect, *erases* the ethnographic fact of a substantive contradiction between description and explanation of “courageous action” among combat infantry and civilians by collapsing insight (knowledge) into perception (empiricism) and so explanation into description. As such, there can be no recognition of a problem between the two as found in the daily discourse of military personnel and Americans generally. Ironically, then, Ortner’s conception brings us to rest in exactly the

same place as the bio-reductive framework: the problem of the contradiction between description and explanation of “courageous action” simply doesn’t exist. Indeed, it *can’t* exist. Adopting Ortner’s position would require us simply to ignore the contradictory deterministic explanations of “courageous action” in favor of the agentic descriptions among combat infantry and civilians. Meanwhile, adopting the bio-reductive (or social-reductive) framework would require us simply to ignore the contradictory agentic descriptions of “courageous action” in favor of the deterministic explanations among combat infantry and civilians. Though I, like Ortner, clearly fall on the side of the agentic framework, delineating the *grounds* of this choice is not just important, it is mandatory, if we are to avoid the charge of propagating an ungrounded idealism emerging from the failure to give a properly scientific account of human action. This amounts to the production of ideology, not anthropological knowledge.

By now it should be apparent that there is a fundamental and complex problem underlying the conversations about the source of human social action, whether those conversations are among combat infantry or between biological and socio-cultural anthropologists, which requires special theoretical resources to address. The problem can be formulated through two questions. First, “what is a plausible, realist ontology of the source of human action?” and second, “what does a plausible, realist scientific account of how that ontology works look like?” These questions are primarily philosophical (ontology, what exists) and scientific (causation, how the world works). To be more precise, from the standpoint of a proper philosophy of science that demonstrates and respects how science actually operates, the questions of philosophy and science are internally related in this way: there is philosophy in science where theory (science) is a conceptual answer to an ontological (philosophical) question. The physicist Max Born illustrates this idea with his simple statement that “I am convinced that theoretical physics is actual philosophy” (1968: 48).

As we have seen through the examination of Ortner’s claim, neither of these questions can be answered empirically since what exactly constitutes appropriate data as well as what the data means, differs radically according to the conceptual framework that informs one’s vision. To reiterate the philosopher Immanuel Kant’s insight, perception without conception is blind while the converse, conception without perception, is empty. Moreover, a plausible, realist ontology coupled with a plausible, realist account of how that ontology works must take into account the uniquely human capabilities (and liabilities) for learning based on an appropriate

conception of the relationship between perception and conception. The philosopher of science Rom Harré (1986) brings to the fore the importance of realism in the development of theoretical resources. The choice of theoretical resources is an important *moral issue*.

To be a realist is to acknowledge an ‘aboutness’ in one’s discourse, a referential tie to something other than one’s own states. But for a scientific realist that something must include a realm of active beings both independent of oneself and partially known. For the physical sciences this other is the natural world. [Harré 1986: 145]

This point speaks to Hume’s radical empiricism (idealism) where discourse is only ever from, and so about, one’s psychology. There is no agency in the world, deterministic or not, because there is no such thing as a realm of active beings independent of ourselves and partially known, whether those beings are black holes, ants, molecules or trees. Harré goes on to write,

For the human sciences the other is more complex, since people live not only within a physical but also within a symbolic universe, the conversations of mankind. In the end one’s adherence to scientific realism is an act of moral commitment rather than a wholly rationally grounded realization of some inescapable conclusion from incorrigible premises. That idea is part of the myth of the strict system. The actual ideal system is a network of human exchanges and practices based on a morality of trust. [Harré 1986: 145]

Harré shares with Ortner a rejection of human being as a “system.” There are no “first principles” or “foundations” from which an investigator can gain a radically objective point of view, thereby rendering human social action susceptible to deductions or predictions of future states and behavior. The morality of the commitment to realism centers in what comes next, which, incidentally, is what is missing from Ortner’s claim:

But it must also be grounded in a genuine and interpersonal experience of such aspects of the natural world as our evolutionary heritage has fitted us to take account of. *The defense of scientific realism must in the end be based on a realist theory of perception.* We cannot escape the obligation to delve into the metaphysics of human experience. [Harré 1986: 145, emphasis added]

This is not a call for a retreat into subjectivity. In fact, “subjectivity” fails as a philosophy for understanding human beings in the same way that “objectivity” does—both are idealist conceptions that demote or ignore the realism required for a morally appropriate approach to

human beings. Human beings are built to interact with *both* the physical natural world and the physical-symbolic, socio-cultural world of persons. Note that Harré has distinguished these as two different *kinds* of worlds. The critical issue revolves on how we are to understand the relationship between our evolved physicality and our lived symbolic, semiotic sociality. This is another formulation of the biology-culture divide.

Harré presumes the reality *and primacy* of the symbolic, semiotic world in the lives of human beings. That primacy depends for its existence on the further existence of a bio-physical realm. This means that, first, as Kant and Geertz maintained, our perception is mediated by our conceptions, which are conventions we develop together through our discursive and embodied interactions with each other and with the world. Second, *we have a choice as to which symbolic, semiotic constructions will we use and on what grounds we proffer them*. Experience, or subjectivity, alone can never tell us all there is to know, nor even what there is that we should know. This is why the entire issue is metaphysical—above the physical, in the conceptual realm of what we take to exist and how what we take to exist actually works—and not simply empirical. As such, our frameworks are choices and so inherently carry a moral component.

Searching for New Realist Theoretical Resources in Anthropology

Unless we are ready to adopt the fatalistic view that the daily lives of Americans in general and combat infantry in particular are, in important ways, unintelligible, we need to resolve the contradiction between description and explanation as it relates to human social action, namely the enactment of courageous action. This is *why* we should proceed. *How* to do so emerges from the preceding sections, which have offered a number of required concepts and changes in ontology. The prevalent American cultural preoccupation with explanatory resources that implausibly and illegitimately reduce human social action to the operation of genetic material and biochemical processes means that an a plausible scientific conception of how human social action is grounded and generated must be offered as a corrective. In short, while a new ontology and new understanding of causality are required, the seductiveness of the prevalent ideological approaches to explaining human action stands in opposition.

While the bulk of the last two chapters have been devoted to exposing the these requirements from the standpoint of the internal logic, ontology, causal conceptions, and

consequences of the bio-reductive framework, a deeper appreciation of the uniqueness and necessity of acknowledging these requirements can be seen in the remarks of historian Doayne Dawson, who notes,

Clearly the debate between nature and nurture, perhaps the longest-running controversy in the history of science, is still vigorous. Its two main battlegrounds have always been warfare and gender, two closely related subjects that raise so many interesting questions about human nature that to take a scientific position on these issues is usually thought to imply a political agenda: the authors of the Seville Statement take it for granted that to say warfare is in human nature is "to justify violence and war," while to call these products of human nurture is to suggest they can and should be easily controlled. The issue is complicated by the fact that in the twentieth century it has tended to become a war of the faculties, with biologists, including many biological anthropologists, on the side of nature and cultural and social anthropologists flocking to the banners of nurture. Much of it is a dismal story of inconclusive and repetitious rounds between passionately held half-truths. [1996: 2]

The point here is that "taking a scientific position on these issues" is absolutely necessary in order to break the theoretical deadlock in anthropological thinking about human social action. What *is* political is the idea that "science" is identical to inhuman and inhumane "positivism" when substantial, readily available evidence demonstrates that the identity is groundless (Manicas 1987). Though different in content, purpose, and effect, collapsing all science into positivism is formally the same idealist mistake that Ortner makes, along with Caspi et. Al.

The consequences for these idealist approaches can be quite unprofessional and unscholarly. One outcome—an inability to communicate meaning and have that meaning appreciated, if not accepted—is exactly what is at risk in remaining theoretically agnostic about the biology-culture divide exemplified in the contradictory ways of explaining and describing "courageous action" among combat infantry. Indicative of the severity of the problem of theoretical agnosticism is not only the ongoing deadlock within anthropology mentioned by Dawson, but the lack of disciplinary leaders in anthropology focusing on this issue as an issue in appropriately theoretical terminology without being directed at other concerns (e.g., gender). The last disciplinary leaders to do so were Clifford Geertz and Marshall Sahlins in the 1970's.

Geertz and Sahlins began a prematurely short-lived disciplinary dialogue about human culture with Geertz arguing that, "Man is to be defined neither by his innate capacities alone...nor by his actual behaviors alone, as much of contemporary social science seeks to do,

but rather by the link between them, by the way in which the first is transformed into the second” (1973: 52). For Geertz “culture” was that link. Geertz claimed that the bald fact of the wonderful diversity of human cultures and behavior doomed the pursuit of a universal, general concept of “Man” based on any of these categories. While our biology, for example, is necessarily related to our cultural actions, it could not determine it. Ultimately, Geertz’s position, much like Ortner’s, rested on the “obviousness” of the empirical data demonstrating human social action to be cultural and agentic, while remaining agnostic on the specification of the nature of the connection between culture and bio-psycho-sociological processes:

There is no serious attempt here to apply the concepts and theories of biology, psychology, or even sociology to the analysis of culture (and, of course, not even a suggestion of the reverse exchange) but merely a placing of supposed facts from the cultural and subcultural levels side by side so as to induce a vague sense that some kind of relationship between them...obtains. [1973: 42]

Marshall Sahlins (1976) joined Geertz in framing out a position against, especially, the biological forms of determinism. Responding to the sociobiological program emerging the early to mid-‘70’s, he argued that the problem with biological determinism is, “The isomorphism between [human biological and social properties] required by the sociobiological thesis does not exist” (1976: 12-13). It does not exist because “...while [biology] is an absolutely necessary condition for culture, [it] is equally and absolutely insufficient; it is completely unable to specify the cultural properties of human behavior or their variations from one human group to another (1976: xi). Like Geertz, Sahlins’s position rested on the “obviousness” of the empirical data of humanity’s vast variation in cultural meaning making despite a shared biological structure. Like Geertz, Sahlins saw the issue, ultimately, as theoretical. He contended that “a theory of the nature and dynamics of culture as a meaningful system” is required to fill the gap between biology and culture” (1976: 16). Again, like Geertz, Sahlins does not specify the nature of the relationship because a plausible ontology of human being is missing, despite Sahlins’ direct focus on what exists and what does not in bio-cultural relationships.

Sahlins himself *inadvertently* identified both the natural scientific and anthropological problem if the relationship between biology and culture is not specified theoretically:

Now the notion of a secret wisdom of [genes disposing kin relationships among humans], together with an unconscious system of algebra [proposed by

sociobiologists as the cost-benefit calculation for individual reproductive success based on DNA's program of self-maximization and so the basis of human behaviors like kin selection] ... makes it extremely difficult to argue the point of kin selection anthropologically. The most careful demonstration of the lack of correspondence between degrees of genealogical relatedness and a given society's classifications of kinship can only hope to meet the reception that the anthropologist has been mystified by the same self-deceptions as the people concerned, that something else (biological) is really going on. *There is really some hidden, disarticulated structure of genetic self-interest. We thus arrive at a point of argument where there is no appeal but to the facts. I have to insist from the outset—taking my stand on the whole of the ethnographic record—that the actual systems of kinship and concepts of heredity in human societies, though they never conform to biological coefficients of relationship, are true models of and for social action.* [1976: 25, emphasis added]

Sahlins recognized that the sociobiological process of “genetic self-maximization” was being advanced *as* a theory of the relationship between biology and culture: humans behave socially in the ways they do because DNA operates the organism for its own ends. The natural scientific problem Sahlins identified *inadvertently* was whether or not DNA *actually had* the power to operate the organism for its own ends. Insofar as sociobiology is a natural scientific theory, it is a *disguised ontology* (Harré 1986). This means that the deeper natural scientific problem, *for Sahlins and sociobiologists and now us*, was and is that of specifying the actual structure and powers of DNA so as to specify the causal relationship between the unobservable operation of DNA and observable results—human social behavior.

Neither Sahlins *nor sociobiologists* engaged the relationship at this level. To the extent that neither party did is the extent to which both operated on, at best, a promissory note, and at worst, simple faith. Ultimately Sahlins' position is indeed a matter of faith. In the context of theory as a disguised ontology and the ethnographic record as the supposed effect of DNA powers, variability in the data (the ethnographic record) can only be a symptom of, never a solution to, a problem with the imagined deep structure and powers of an in-principle unobservable entity. Sahlins, then, attempted to shore up his interpretation of ethnographic data not with a better specification of the biology-culture relationship than the one advanced by sociobiologists, but with an expression of faith. It was exactly on the basis of a lack of engagement with the natural scientific problem underlying sociobiology that the biologist Eric L. Charnov stated of Sahlins's position, “If biologists may be rightfully accused of claiming too much for sociobiology as applied to humans, Sahlins is clearly open to the criticism of

misunderstanding how sociobiology applies to *biology*. ...I found this book unconvincing” (1977: 329). Here we have the foundation for the anthropological deadlock and the roots of the disintegration of Stanford’s anthropology department. To the extent that Sahlins’ strategy of faith remains in use by socio-cultural anthropologists, socio-cultural anthropology is rendered irrelevant not only to the nature-nurture debate but to explanations of human social action generally.

The evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould stood with Geertz and Sahlins when he wrote that “human sociobiology...is invalid not because biology is irrelevant and human behavior only reflects a disembodied culture, but because human *biology* suggests a different and less constraining role for genetics in the analysis of human nature” (1981: 326). Unlike Geertz and Sahlins, Gould does not rest his position on the *suggestion* of grounding human behavior in culture rather than in genes provided by ethnographic data. In identifying the problem with sociobiological theory as, “One of the most common errors of reasoning: discovering an analogy and inferring a genetic similarity,” Gould centered on a critical problem within the natural science of sociobiologists (1981: 328). He wrote, “Analogies [e.g., lions hunt herbivores and humans hunt herbivores] are useful but limited; they may reflect common constraints, but not common causes” (1981: 328). The “cause” of human behavior is not genes but the *capabilities of our brain* according to Gould. The human capacity for intelligent, flexible behavior is biologically grounded in but not identical to the structural design of the human brain. Furthermore, natural selection “may set some deeply recessed generating rules; but specific behaviors are epiphenomena of the rules, not objects of Darwinian attention in their own right” (Gould 1981: 329).

Gould’s “brain-rules” theory of the relationship of biology and culture offered the structure, organization, and operation of the human brain, not the operation of DNA, as the key biological entity to focus upon in trying to understand the causes of human social behavior.¹⁴ In arguing explicitly that a different kind of biological structure existed as the source of human behavior, Gould highlighted the central conceptual difference between his position and that of Geertz and Sahlins: his theory offered a competing ontology of the biological basis of human behavior and so offered a better specification of the relationship of biology and culture. While Gould’s theory was a step in the right direction, it did not go far enough: His “brain-rules” theory

and the sociobiologists's "gene-behavior" theory were in competition with no in-principle way to decide amongst them.

Geertz and Sahlins argued anthropologically, if unconvincingly, in terms of natural science, for the need to specify the biology-culture relationship. Gould argued more convincingly in the natural scientific realm for the same need, though not definitively. Collectively, these arguments offer a "state of the art" look at both historical *and current* thought on the nature-nurture debate within anthropology. This claim rests on the following proposition: Postmodernism, specifically the idealism inherent in the radical social constructionism of, for example, the anthropologically influential authors Barry Barnes (1972), Michel Foucault (1972), David Bloor (1976), and Steve Woolgar and Bruno Latour (1979) *derailed* the investigation into the natural scientific questions underlying culture theory. These thinkers justified anew the long humanist tradition of de-legitimizing and rejecting science by supposedly demonstrating that science was just another language game amongst many (Harré 1998, Varela 2009).

While idealism has helped illuminate an important concern with social power and politics, it has also permitted, if not required, redefinition of natural scientific questions as *merely* those of social power and politics. Scientific discourse is not about anything *real*, especially if what is under consideration is unobservable in principle, like a quasar or a subatomic particle; rather, science is about the use of language itself as an expression of power. This position inappropriately restricts the notion of human freedom to something like "the political power of persons." It is inappropriate because it excludes and therefore hides the notion of human freedom as "the natural powers of human organisms and persons." *The former is a political issue while the latter is a scientific issue.* But without the ability to talk about real, existing things that is inherent in natural science, theoretical resources grounding but not reducing the social activity of persons in the biological activity of the human organism are impossible.

This is why Geertz and Sahlins' positions are sensitizing but not viable as arguments against the bio-reductive framework. A plausible theory of social action is therefore also impossible. It is this lack of a plausible theory of social action that leads to Sahlins' frustrated "insistence" on the ethnographic record as the only available counter to sociobiology. Problematically, Sahlins' profession of faith looks just like the kind of ungrounded faith rejected during the Scientific Revolution but adopted by Ortner, and so would not be convincing to many

natural scientists, no less sociobiologists. Sahlins and Geertz could not remain empirical because empirical arguments in the social sciences are notoriously unconvincing: answers to deep philosophical and scientific issues are *assumed*, not foregrounded, argued, and explained. The anthropologist Franz Boas' empirical "solution" to racism in the early 20th century is an example.

The possibility of convincing resolutions to these types of problems is located in the ontology of the theoretical framework researchers adopt—implicitly or explicitly. After all, the case could be easily made—and has been made in many natural scientific cases—that simple refinement in the present theory or more computing power is all that is required to explain those apparently contradictory empirical cases. While even these efforts will not convince dogmatic ideologues, they will certainly highlight the implausibility of their beliefs and the groundless components of their arguments. On the positive side, exposition of theoretical commitments and attention to their plausibility empowers other serious, critical scholars to critique, change, or build on the work already accomplished.

¹ Among Americans, the conception of one's life as pre-determined by some impersonal force suggests the consequence of "resignation" or "submission." As with "courage" it is a common enough theme that it is broadcast in popular music. Consider, for example, Anna Nalick's pop song "Breathe (2 A.M.)" (2006):

'Cause you can't jump the track, we're like cars on a cable
And life's like an hourglass, glued to the table
No one can find the rewind button, girl.
So cradle your head in your hands
And breathe... just breathe,
Oh breathe, just breathe

Another example is Bonnie Raitt's pop song "Luck of the Draw" (1991):

These things we do to keep the flame burnin'
And write our fire in the sky
Another day to see the world turnin'
Another avenue to try

It's in the luck of the draw, baby
The natural law
Forget those movies you saw, little baby
It's in the luck of the draw, baby
The natural law
(Flame keep on burnin')
Forget those movies you saw, little baby
(Wheel ever turnin')

² I am not implying that the *authority* of a scientific explanation is identical with the *quality* of a scientific explanation. There are explanations in science that are wrong because the powerful entity or causal process thought to produce the phenomena under investigation simply doesn't exist. For example the 18th century theory positing "phlogiston" as an element released during combustion or oxidation.

³ Taleb writes, "All I am trying to show is the biological basis of this tendency toward causality, not its precise location [on a neural] map" (2007:66).

⁴ After all, everything is fair in love and war: one can go on to suggest that, perhaps, Taleb's lack of concern is a way of avoiding a legal battle over royalties from his book—a court of law could conceivably order a fund originated to hold the royalties in trust until the "organ," as the real author of the interpretations expressed in the book, could be found. If Taleb and others subscribing to the bio-reductive framework were not actually serious in their promotion of such viewpoints in order to advance their careers, we could easily conclude that my comments were quite silly.

⁵ For what follows, I am indebted to Charles R. Varela's introduction and discussion of examples from Ortner and Levi-Strauss' work in *Science for Humanism: The Recovery of Human Agency* (2009).

⁶ Levi-Strauss's conception provides the anthropological, phenomenological counterpart to Bonnie Raitt's conception in popular music (see endnote 1 above).

⁷ My interpretation of Ortner being unaware or dismissive of these challenges is supported by her suggestion in the same paper that "we might even see the whole sociobiology movement as part of this general trend [to reintroduce human agency into otherwise sterile structures determinative of human behavior], insofar as it shifts the evolutionary mechanism from random mutation to intentional choice on the part of actors seeking to maximize reproductive success" (1984:146). In sociobiological theory, however, the overarching goal of "maximizing reproductive success" is simply given in our DNA and so it is conceived as an *unconscious mandate that is exactly not open for modification by the organism*. The primary theorist of sociobiology, E.O. Wilson, wrote, "In a Darwinist sense the organism does not live for itself. Its primary function is not even to reproduce other organisms; it reproduces genes, and it serves as their temporary carrier" (2000:3). Wilson's formulation suggests that the term "intention" can only mark an automated attempt to realize a pre-given, fixed goal, and "choice" is simply the wrong word to use. In short, if there is either "intention" or "choice" in sociobiology, they are concepts evacuated of any of the sense of agency that gives them their usual meaning. The bald contradiction of Ortner's understanding of sociobiology by Wilson's remarks could be due to Wilson and other sociobiologists' tendency to talk out of both sides of their theoretical mouths when it comes to human culture (they import concepts that are otherwise logically excluded from the bio-reductive framework in order to get the theory to work). That Ortner neither alerts us to this possibility nor explains how she comes to her suggestive conclusion about

sociobiology given the bald contradiction in Wilson's work affirms at least an unawareness of the complexity and sophistication of the issues at hand.

⁸ We will never experience (see, hear, taste, touch, or smell) a black hole but we know not only that such an entity exists, what it is, and how it behaves.

⁹ See also Charles R. Varela *Biological Structure and Embodied Human Agency: The Problem of Instinctivism* (2003).

¹⁰ If proponents of the bio-reductive framework were to remain true to the logic of their chosen conceptual schema, they would define learning in a very different way, using language like that found in G.W. Flake's *The Computational Beauty of Nature: Computer Explorations of Fractals, Chaos, Complex Systems and Adaptation* (2002): "A process of adaptation by which synapses, weights of neural network's, classifier strengths, or some other set of adjustable parameters is automatically modified so that some objective is more readily achieved" (<http://mitpress.mit.edu/books/FLAOH/cbnhtml/glossary-L.html>).

¹¹ Things look even bleaker for a bio-reductive explanation of space flight when viewed in evolutionary rather than Skinnerian learning terms. When in the evolutionary past have humans expressed the behaviors necessary for space flight? More specifically, when in human history have some human organisms produced the random genetic variations that resulted in successful space flight behaviors that then permitted them, as vehicles for the necessary genetic profile, to be selected by the environment?

¹² See also R. Paul Shaw and Yuwa Wong's *Genetic Seeds of Warfare: Evolution, Nationalism, and Patriotism* (1989) where they claim that their theory of the genetically-required behaviors of humans shows "why existing peace initiatives are inept. [The book] is not a political agenda, however. It is the result of scientific inquiry. We avoid moralizing, seeking only to communicate 'what is,' not 'what ought to be' about human nature. *The only moral we would advocate is that behaviors and institutions that are outfoxing humanity's efforts to prevent nuclear annihilation be abandoned*" (1989:xi, emphasis added). Again, the bio-reductive framework has no place for culture other than at best a benign mistake to be ignored, or, as in this worst case, a positive obstacle to us that could drive our species to extinction.

¹³ Our *responsibility* as scholars is to reveal the ontological and therefore conceptual grounding of our worldview. This is the basis for our interpretations no matter what framework is utilized. During my first-year graduate seminar at the University of Illinois I asked one of the socio-cultural anthropologists teaching the course about the literature on agency in the discipline as against the literature on power discourses or subjectivity. His blunt response was, "I don't believe it." The problem of contradictory frameworks for interpretive focus was not simply dropped but denied. As a first-year graduate student, what I would have wanted to know, *what I was owed*, was what this professor *conceived*—a statement of the grounding of his view—not what he *believed*—a statement of his faith in a view. Such idealist, *ex cathedra* pronouncements extinguish dialogue and are symptomatic of the kind of imperialism for which Western social scientists are often criticized. Strangely enough this professor's own work centers on the experience of sub-cultures whose voices have been suppressed or marginalized due to religious and sexual orientation. Incidentally, the other two professors in the team-taught seminar, from biological anthropology and archaeology respectively, said nothing.

¹⁴ I should note that Gould's specific argument in context seeks to show that, *given an interest in seeking biological entities and processes*, it is scientifically unwarranted to focus on genes. In my view, and I think in Gould's view as well, the biological organism *as a whole* in environmental context (with human beings this includes the socio-cultural as well as natural world) is the most important biological entity to focus upon.

CHAPTER 4

THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF WARFARE

In this chapter I apply the profile developed in chapter 3 to review literature found in the Anthropology of Warfare and assess its applicability to the problem of contradiction. I argue that the literature exhibits three trends. First, an early 20th century trend toward utilizing the ethnographic record as a way to argue against the inevitability of war; second, a multi-century realist trend toward explaining war as a function of impersonal biological or social forces; and third, a late 20th and early 21st century idealist trend that assumes warfare is a cultural convention while hoping for its demise through a covert appeal to a common humanity through ethnographic descriptions of the experience of warfare. I proceed in a roughly chronological fashion. Ultimately I will argue that traditional and contemporary realist and idealist approaches to warfare are ineffectual as theoretical frameworks for understanding warfare and modern combat infantry. At certain points I will name what I think are the distinctive qualities of this study compared to those being examined.

Clarifying the Relationship of Biology and Culture?

Given Dawson's identification of warfare as one site for the ongoing nature-nurture argument, it would be wise to review and assess the Anthropology of Warfare literature in terms of potential resources for resolving the contradiction between description and explanation found in combat infantry discourse. For the purposes of this study, I will concentrate on the conception of human social action held by the various authors. The pursuit of "the primitive" emerges as a thread in the work on warfare by anthropologists ranging from the nineteenth through the early 21st century. Being more simple or closer to nature primitive societies are thought to reveal true principles that organize the otherwise widely varying qualities of human social life. The focus is on discovering systematic, necessary, non-personal forces that control human behavior. Because of this preferred focus on forces rather than persons most of these anthropological studies of warfare *never get to soldiers, qua soldiers*. Such studies ignore informants' meanings or imply

that informants' meanings are epiphenomena of some deeper reality to which the social scientist is privy, but not the informants.

In response to this realist but reductive approach to studying war some anthropologists simply insisted that the variability of the ethnographic record factually demonstrated the failure of the reductionist approach. As we found in the last chapter, however, this approach is idealistic in that it fails to provide a plausible, causal explanation of the source of human social action. An outgrowth of the idealistic reliance on the ethnographic record as obvious and convincing appears in the work of some anthropologists during the late 20th and early 21st century. This work is characterized by a focus on describing the experience of participants in warfare as a way to appeal to a (supposed) common human(e) feeling that would otherwise undermine willingness to engage in warfare. I want to turn now to selected anthropologists and the works that exemplify these trends.

The earliest anthropological work on American warfare and American combat soldiers that I have been able to locate is Ralph Linton's short essay, *Totemism and the A.E.F* (1924). Linton's paper was an addition to the conversation prevalent at the time centering on the question of the relationship between "uncivilized" and "civilized" cultures. He suggests that a "totemic complex" characteristic of uncivilized peoples was evident in the American Expeditionary Forces in World War One. A veteran of the 42nd Division, Linton observed that the American army had, by the end of the war, divided itself into groups, each of which used totemic devices to represent itself. The military unit generated a "crystallization point" for the "same social and supernatural tendencies" that produced totemism in uncivilized peoples and this then precluded the development of marriage regulations. In "primitive" groups, these tendencies usually crystallized through a clan or gentile system, and the marriage regulation features of this system became incorporated into the complex. Despite major differences between military units and clans, for example, single versus dual gender social organization, Linton's argument implies that the key scientific metaphor of "crystallization" is the primary explanation of the development of marriage regulations. "Crystallization" *works regardless of the content of an organization*. For Linton, then, "marriage" and "marriage regulations" appear to have been mere symptoms of the operation of impersonal forces that were operating through, not enacted by, persons.

It appears that Linton's paper was colored by a conception of biological and cultural evolutionary progression that had been deployed by some of anthropology's founders. Herbert Spencer in *Principles of Psychology* (1853), Edward Burnett Tylor in *Primitive Culture* (1871) and by Lewis Henry Morgan in *Ancient Society* (1877), all aimed to defeat the religious basis of theories of human culture as degenerating in a downward spiral as a consequence of the Biblical fall from grace. Linton's reference to marriage and the "gentile system" lead back directly to Morgan's (1877) work on kinship as the impersonal organizing force of human culture. For Morgan, that principle operated—it is difficult to characterize clearly—either without regard for, or by co-opting, interpersonal semiotic practices as we might view personal activity today.

More specifically, Morgan advanced a conceptualization of human societal evolution as a series of progressive steps along a linear path from lower to higher and from savage to civil. He wrote, "...the institutions of mankind have sprung up in a progressive, connected series, each of which represents the result of unconscious reformatory movements to extricate society from existing evils...mankind have advanced under a necessary law of development." The means of cultural advancement is not through interpersonal semiotic practices in value-rich social contexts. Rather, it is through incremental advances in human biology—the brain to be specific:

Out of a few germs of thought, conceived in the early ages, have been evolved all the principal institutions of mankind. Beginning their growth in the period of savagery, fermenting through the period of barbarism, they have continued their advancement through the period of civilization. The evolution of these germs of thought has been guided by a natural logic, which formed an essential attribute of the brain itself. So unerringly has this principle performed its functions in all conditions of experience, and in all periods of time, that its results are uniform, coherent and traceable in their courses. [Morgan 1907: 59-60]

Whatever people do and say overtly is beside the point for Morgan. Here human behavior is merely a symbol of some sort of "unconscious reformatory movement" proceeding not only of necessity, but of necessity in stages from evil to goodness, from simple to complex. The functioning of this movement or force appears to preclude any sort of consideration of persons, no less of culturally conformed conceptions of beings in terms like 'men' and 'women.' Persons do not exist except as vehicles for the teleological development of the movement. In fact, we might question how any sense of morality, good, or evil might be understood as pertinent to human activity since Morgan's conception precludes the attribution of agency to persons!

In fact, Morgan, as with Spencer, advances the notion of Lamarckian inheritance of acquired characteristics. While scientifically discredited, the idea of a Lamarckian inheritance may have given Morgan leave to write of the idea of a pertinent human moral realm that has somehow been worked into the natural structure of humans. In this case, however, morality and the meaning of moral action is a *given*, not *chosen*. Linton and his predecessors would never have recognized (and in fact did not recognize), for example, important socio-cultural concepts like ‘gender’ and ‘race’ as categories marking semiotic practices generating personal and cultural identity. A conventional value orientation like ‘masculinity’ simply did not exist as a focus of theoretical interest.¹

One of the earliest American efforts to understand warfare *without reducing it to the operation of impersonal forces* was prompted by anthropologists seeking to understand World War II. Margaret Mead’s *Warfare is Only an Invention—Not a Biological Necessity* (1940) represents an attempt to find room for meaningful personal experience as against a systematic, necessary, non-personal force. In her paper, Mead thinks it is a mistake to assume that warfare is a characteristic of humanity as a species simply because, like marriage, simply because it appears to be found universally in human cultures. Thinking that warfare is caused by human instincts that in turn produce aggression, or, by social structures that in turn produce power struggles, miss the point in her estimation. Instead, Mead argues that

Warfare is just an invention known to the majority of human societies by which they permit their young men either to accumulate prestige or avenge their honor or acquire loot or wives or slaves or sago lands or cattle or appease the blood lust of their gods or the restless souls of the recently dead. [Mead 1968: 420]

Mead’s focus is on those cultural conventions, those values, which different cultures honor through engaging in warfare. She deepens her argument by offering numerous ethnographic examples of cultures, such as the Eskimo, who do not have the idea of warfare. For her the idea of warfare is essential to practicing warfare in the same way that an alphabet is essential to writing. Without the idea of it, warfare is impossible. In her presentation of the Eskimo as “turbulent” and “troublesome” people who “fight” and “steal wives” she indicates that the usual markers of a personality traditionally associated with motivation to warfare is present, but does not result—as she thinks it otherwise necessarily should—in actual warfare.

We can read in Mead's argument three important implications. First, the conscious use of intelligence in the generation and management of ideas upsets the supposedly linear path from biological or social structure to behavior: persons and their ideas are between the structure and the behavior. Second, the variation in ethnographic data suggests that the fact of possessing the idea of warfare does not deterministically mandate the practice. Finally, meaning is generated through cultural conventions, not given by biological or sociological structures. While these are important implications, we have already seen that the presentation of ethnographic examples does not engage either ontology or scientific plausibility, both of which, as I have argued, are the critical arenas for understanding the relationship of biology to culture. In this case the issue can be appreciated in the form of the question, "Do impersonal biological or sociological entities or processes have the power to determine the form and content of human semiotic practices?"

Mead's central focus on ethnographic examples to counter the notion that the operation of systematic, necessary, non-personal forces make people behave represents a very different theoretical orientation compared with, say, Linton. The upshot of ethnographic data for Mead is that "the tie-up between proving oneself a man and proving this by success in organized killing is due to a definition which many societies have made of manliness." And even then, Mead indicates, killing was not necessarily the goal. Plains Indian cultures demonstrated as much by valuing the act of touching a live opponent with a coup-stick more highly than bringing in a scalp from a dead opponent.² By accepting ethnographic evidence as relevant and the main point Mead takes the theoretical position that people in their social interactions create what only *appear* to be unconscious, deterministic forces. This is an interesting reversal of the bio-reductive framework's Platonic commitments. In that framework, as we have seen, the social world of varied, semiotic practices of dynamically embodied persons is the *appearance* while unconscious, deterministic forces are the *reality*. Such non-personal forces are really people acting in accordance to a value-position to which they are committed and which is often out of focal awareness, but not "unconscious" in a Freudian sense.

Mead is responding to a hegemonic narrative whose historical development and lodgment in foundational Western social scientific thought is traced by philosopher Peter T. Manicas in *A History and Philosophy of the Social Sciences* (1987). Her paper is an attempt to disconnect ethnographic data from being *given* its meaning by the master narrative about human social behavior propagated by the bio-reductive framework and identified by Lewontin (1998) and

Goodwin (1996). It is an attempt to re-center anthropological and popular thinking about warfare (and about masculinity) on the meaning-making activity of persons in social interaction with one another. Mead, in effect, was trying to switch the ontology from impersonal biosocial forces to personal interactions of agents. People, not structures, are responsible for semiotic practices. Apparently, however, what seems to be a well-supported, strong argument in favor of concentrating on what people mean did not convince other anthropologists pursuing the primitive.

For Mead, those who think warfare is a biological necessity exhibit a brand of commitment to a belief that appears to be secularly religious: the depth of commitment suggests a religious-like confidence in the truth of the belief. Only this sort of true belief would prevent the critical self-reflection on basic assumptions about the world that would then block the appreciation of the meaning of ethnographic evidence—perhaps today some anthropologists would term this sort of commitment a ‘fetishization’. She writes that, “A form of behavior [like warfare] becomes out of date only when something else takes its place, and, in order to invent forms of behavior which will make war obsolete, it is first a requirement to believe that an invention is possible” (1990: 220). I will not risk psychologizing the problem of belief by using a Marxist or Freudian concept like “fetish,” however attenuated that concept may have become, because the issue is not psychological, it is ontological.

Mead recognized the problem that mechanically deterministic systems have in producing change and accounting for variation. If human culture is run by a biological or sociological determinism, not persons, and that determinism is mechanical and necessary in its operation, how can new effects ever arise from the same causes? Read generously, Mead’s question is a natural scientific, not simply a psychological, one and so the import of her call is multi-leveled.³ Such deterministic systems, on one level, cannot account for the social change that history demonstrates and, on another level, perhaps the more important one for her, such systems cannot account for the human inventiveness evident in the ethnographic record. I do not think Mead realized that her call could have a scientific reference as much as a psychological one.⁴ In fact, Mead *could not* have realized this scientific reference given that the theoretical and scientific resources about causal relationships in both the natural and social worlds were unavailable to her (and to everyone else) until the 1970’s.⁵

As a point of comparison, Malinowski in his *An Anthropological Analysis of War* (1941) asserts a viewpoint similar to Mead's. He too considers warfare a cultural phenomenon, not a "psychological or biological destiny" (1941: 521). His approach is also like Mead's in that he is responding to deterministic master narratives. But what Malinowski means by "cultural" is not at all what Mead meant. His approach differs fundamentally because he posits the reality of a biologically necessary and universal nature for individual human organisms. He contends that "animal psychological" and "biological determinism of aggressiveness" in humans is (positively) correlated with examples from pre-human behavior. Birds, dogs, apes, baboons all fight over food, and spatial or territorial rights. Malinowski thinks that humans are in fact animals, and inherit such aggressiveness as a matter of their biological connection with pre-human animals. Moreover, he asserts that Freud had conclusively shown that aggressive impulses are characteristic of human family life. Interestingly, Malinowski writes that, "Impulses to beat a wife or husband or to thrash children are personally known to everybody and ethnographically universal. Nor are partners in work or in business ever free of the temptation to take each other by the throat, whether primitive or civilized" (1941: 530). Human beings share a universal biological basis for behavior, but not *all* behavior.

For Malinowski the biologically necessary is mediated by the development of cooperative, concerted activities into larger-scale *institutions*. Like Freud's attempt to root family life in sex, Malinowski argues that cooperative, concerted activities like family life and clans are rooted in the biologically necessary. But at the level of institutions, relationships among groups of persons are governed by culturally convened rules, not by biological impulses, thus implying a difference in kind, not a difference in degree, between the personal and familial, and the impersonal and lawful. According to Malinowski, the regulation of force and violence by authority—law, custom, ethics—is the "very essence of the social organization of an institutionalized group." As a result, *inter-familial*, *inter-clan*, and *inter-local* group fighting is always conventional and cultural, not determined and biological. As such, the human "psychological fact of pugnacity" can be "transformed through cultural factors into any possible or even improbably channels," it is "infinitely plastic" and "can be linked with an indefinitely wide range of cultural motives" (1941: 533).

In a way, Malinowski is claiming that we 'behave like (a-cultural, biologically-driven) animals' only in the most intimate of settings, like family life or clans. At the level of

institutions, we are culturally conventional and political, and our biological impulse of pugnacity is transformed into a collective format that in turn leads to organized, ordered fighting. The transformation in social ordering prevents us from being spontaneously reactive according to our physiology in inter-group relationships. Malinowski's question then becomes, what are the historical steps taken through which intra-group relationships became inter-group relationships? How did humans get from individual biology determining interaction to rule-governed cultural sociality? Malinowski offers a speculative stage plan reminiscent of the work of Morgan and other early anthropologists. The plan's details are not the point because Malinowski's approach fails to reject the idea of systematic, necessary, non-personal forces. It is in the acceptance of the reality of such forces that Malinowski differs fundamentally with Mead, at least in reference to warfare.

The relevance of a theoretical orientation toward interpretation emerges here. Writing at nearly the same time as Mead, and with access to nearly the same data, Malinowski sees evidence for the universality of human biological aggressiveness *in the ethnographic data* rather than evidence of the groundlessness of that claim as Mead discerned. As with the hypothetical confrontation between Ortner and Levi-Strauss discussed in the last chapter, Mead and Malinowski interpret the same ethnographic data in contradictory ways thus reminding us again that the root issue is not empirical but theoretical. From what theoretical perspective (meaning what ontological model of human social action) is the data being a) considered data at all, and b) interpreted using the kinds of predicates provided by the theory? Apparently, in the forty years between the hypothetical Mead/Malinowski confrontation and the hypothetical Ortner/Levi-Strauss confrontation, American anthropology as a discipline has generally failed to recognize the ontological and scientific questions underlying interpretation of ethnographic data. Between the early 1980's and today, the need for specification of the relationship between biology and culture called for by Geertz and Sahlins has all but disappeared from mainstream socio-cultural anthropological concern, largely under the influence of the post-modernist rejection of science as necessarily positivist and so inhuman(e).

In 1968, anthropologists Morton Fried, Marvin Harris, and Robert Murphy edited *War: the Anthropology of Armed Conflict and Aggression*. They are perhaps the first anthropologists studying warfare who sought to break with the positivist search for impersonal forces through reflexive assessment of how anthropology is written. The interesting way in which they do so

ushers in the third trend identified above. The authors first note that in the ethnographic tradition of the discipline, “Fieldworkers have been encouraged to present their data as if the colonial wars, labor recruitment, taxation, indirect rule, forced migration, missionization, and other post-contact phenomena did not exist” (1968: ix). This observation echoes Mead’s contention that cultural issues emerging from the interaction of persons (vs. impersonal forces) fundamentally change the *meaning* of the lives of primitive people. For Morton, et al., semiotic practices *per se* were not only legitimate data they were the primary kind of data. Moreover, the authors state unequivocally that they “reject the idea that any socio-cultural phenomena can be pursued without political consequences.” On the other hand, the authors also state that, “those who seek political justification for subordination of science to politics will find it at their peril. The greatest danger confronting any political movement is for it to permit its analysis of reality to be contaminated by its own rhetoric” (1968: xii). The authors, in their time, saw the danger of rejecting science in order to pursue the political or ideological purposes of the researcher. Problematically, however, and as with Geertz and Sahlins who followed them, the authors did not pursue a research agenda that in any way focused on natural scientific literature, whether philosophical or empirical, in terms of trying to get clear about the relevance or irrelevance of science to the study of human social action. This, it seems to me, at least invited if not promoted the ensuing inattention to the relationship between natural and social science, between biology and culture.

The authors do capture the sense of disengagement produced by the search for the primitive (and, I would add the phrase “forces putatively controlling human beings” as a necessary corollary). Such a search “automatically legitimizes study of that which may be irrelevant or inconsequential for the contemporary world” (1968: ix). At the very least we can read this warning as referring to the idea of studying social and cultural issues as if they were disconnected from people. The result is, as the authors note, a wholesale rejection of socio-cultural phenomena like colonial warfare, which, of course, would mean that one of the most disturbing issues of their day—the Vietnam War—could likewise be deemed irrelevant.

Within Morton, et Al.’s edited volume, however, anthropologist Andrew Vayda’s *Hypotheses about the Functions of War* (1968) is an attempt

to explicate various hypotheses which attribute to war life-sustaining functional consequences when war is considered as a component of homeostatic systems.

Such systems relate human populations to their ecological matrix, and are functional in the narrow sense of acting to maintain or restore an evolutionarily selected equilibrium. [*In* Morton, et. Al.1968: xvi]

For Vayda, war is “a counteracting response made by a *system when a variable or activity within the system has been disturbed* from its proper, desired, or accepted state” (1968: 85, emphasis added). With this kind of anthropological work going on, it is no wonder that Morton, et. Al. were concerned with the relevance of the study of the primitive to the contemporary. I suggest that the irrelevance of system equilibrium explanations to the Vietnam War matches the irrelevance of genetic explanations to U.S. Marine Corporal Jason Dunham’s actions: in both cases the wrong ontology leads to ungrounded dismissal of critical socio-cultural data and what socio-cultural data is admitted is disastrously limited by pre-definition to the meanings prescribed by the theory.

This last point is aptly demonstrated by a respondent to Vayda’s paper, the anthropologist Alexander Lesser, who calls the whole examination into question on the basis of a lack of appreciation of the lived meaning of the persons involved.

Because of its exclusive concern with abstract hypotheses about its functions from the standpoint of equilibrium theory, Vayda’s discussion offers little that is concrete about what actually happens in armed conflict among primitives: raiding for horses had nothing to do with equalizing the distribution of horses in the Plains. Individuals raided for horses because...a horse was the only trade item with which a man could acquire a gun. Individuals, not tribes, gained prestige as they became wealthy in horses. Raiding among pastoral peoples does not function to reduce inequalities in ownership. The Ruwala Badawin camel breeders of Africa demonstrate that raiders from strong tribes preyed on weaker tribes, not the reverse. [*In* Morton, et. Al. 1968: 93-94]

In essence, Lesser is asking Vayda, “where are the *people* in your analysis?” “Where are their intentions and motivations, *their meanings*, whether instrumental or not?” But Vayda is not to be put off. His response to Lesser is that

systems are collections of variables, not warring groups or societies. What can constitute such a collection are the size of the group, whether it is fighting or not, its rate of population increase, its degree of population dispersion, its level of anxiety, its efficiency of land use, the number of offenses committed against it, and so forth... Judgments about whether the occurrence of war is functional in such systems can be based simply on extensive observation or measurement of

pre-war, war, and post-war values of the systemic variable. [In Morton, et. Al. 1968: 103]

In Vayda's understanding, warfare is not really about fighting, it is about the *function* of that human behavior in redressing systemic imbalances. The point of this kind of anthropological analysis then is not people, but a system that supposedly operates the people. This is the same kind of deterministic approach found in the bio-reductive framework in which genetic material and biochemical processes operate people.

Perhaps more importantly, Vayda seems immune to Lesser's objection. In fact, he *co-opts* Lesser's objection. Vayda argues that "when Professor Lesser makes a point of noting that Plains Indians traded horses for guns, I see the possibility that he too is talking about functional relations but with guns rather than horses per tribe as the variable being maintained within a range of values" (1968: 103). It seems important here to return to what I take to be the deep meaning of Mead's 1940 paper. The problem with and for Vayda *and for Lesser* is the scientific issue of whether or not such systems are real and have the power to determine human behavior in the way Vayda claims. Vayda clearly believes in his chosen theoretical stance, and that stance permits him to read the socio-cultural content out of, and bio-systemic function into, Lesser's objection. The only chance Lesser might have of closing off the possibility of this discursive move is to provide a scientific critique of the evolutionary schema Vayda has adopted.

The conversation between Vayda and Lesser characterizes the ontological issues facing American anthropology into the late 20th century. The pursuit of impersonal entities, processes, or forces that move otherwise inert matter in anthropological talk about warfare continues straight into the late 1980's. At an advanced seminar at the School of American Research in 1986 another group of anthropologists gathered to discuss the causes of both war and peace in pre-state societies. The resulting volume was edited by Jonathan Haas and titled *The Anthropology of War* (1990). As with Morgan in 1877, Linton in 1924, Malinowski in 1941, and Vayda in 1968, the pursuit of the primitive was the major focus of the anthropological engagement with culture. Haas writes, "the goal of the seminar was to arrive at a better understanding of the causes of both war and peace in pre-state societies and the impact of war on the evolution of those societies" (1990: xi). Given Haas' goal statement, it appears that the Malinowskian view of warfare as a (generative) force in the evolution of culture had been, by

1986, institutionalized. That culture *should* be thought of in terms of evolutionary concepts was also an unmarked value position.

Brian Ferguson in his paper from the seminar, *Explaining War* (1990), continues Vayda's discursive move of co-opting what ethnographers might otherwise identify as value positions generated by dynamically embodied persons. Ferguson disconnects the causes of (pre-state) war—which he views as material in nature, for example, land, water, food, and trade goods—from how war is practiced. He argues that

individual military accomplishment may be a prerequisite for achieving adulthood; and is reinforced for adults by shame for cowards, and prestige for accomplished warriors. Shame and prestige do not stand alone, however. They often have very tangible correlates, in marriages, in resources, in influence. All these within-group reinforcements will be backed up by the threat that war will “select out” groups which have not sufficiently motivated their fighters... Expectably, individuals will express the cultural values as their motives in war, so emic accounts will often be at variance from the material gain view. Evaluation of the material motivation proposition is still possible, however, by investigating whether it—in contrast to other motivational premises—can explain actual military behavior. [1990: 46-47]

Ferguson's questioning attitude toward “material motivation” is rhetorical. His suggestion is that in fact actual military behavior *is* explained by material causes. And he clearly delineates the notion that somehow personal discourse, and what that discourse is about—issues like shame and prestige—are best understood as code-words for ensuring human organisms perform the behaviors that will thereby ensure the survival of the (fittest) group. Natural selection is the force operating behind and above persons in social interaction. Value and meaning are illusions while impersonal forces are the reality.

This trend of anthropological theorizing culminates, at least in reference to the Anthropology of War literature, in S.P. Reyna and R.E. Downs's *Studying War: Anthropological Perspectives* (1994). Reyna and Downs alert their readers to this fact when they state that, “Studies emphasizing cultural hermeneutics are not represented in this volume.” By this time, the distinction between a cultural hermeneutics approach and what may be thought of as a bio(social) structural approach to accounting for human social life is obvious enough to permit a clear statement. The authors define the difference when they argue that

Structures matter: scientific realism is the thesis that objects of scientific inquiry exist independently of peoples' consciousness of them. Structural realism might be said to be a doctrine that the forms occurring in human populations exist independently of individuals' consciousness of these forms. In different ways the contributions to this volume suggest the appropriateness of a structural realist position when studying war. [1994: xx]

We've encountered this thinking before: the bio-reductive model is a realist formulation. In contrast, Ortner's ungrounded collapse of conception into perception is a form of idealism. While realism is the only way to retain a connection to a scientific approach to generating a plausible ontology to ground human social action, *we have seen that there are implausible ontologies, despite their realism*. Reyna and Downs claim that the power over peoples' behavior they think they are referencing is grounded in a real, existent structure. But, they neither name nor explicate that structure! What could these "forms occurring in human populations" possibly be? If they are real, where are they? In our bio-physiology? In our genetic material? In biochemical processes? Reyna and Downs never tell us, instead relying on the different papers within their volume to make the case. None of those papers, however, propose any robust understanding the location of these forms.

As it stands, Reyna and Downs's argument asks us to think that what really matters is not persons interacting and generating semiotic practices through their use of language and culturally convened meanings of that language and its use, but the supposed structures that generate powers that control peoples' behavior. As a result studying war is not about studying persons interacting in terms of values like 'courage,' experiences like 'suffering,' meanings like 'being a man' worked out through cultural conventions about sex roles, or the enactment of violence. Rather, studying war is about "understanding the causes and consequences of the evolution of social forms" and since "structure matters for the understanding of war," the idea is to study *structures* in order to understand war (1994: xx).

What I hope to have brought out in this examination of selections from two of the three trends I have identified in the Anthropology of Warfare literature is that contemporary explanations of warfare have not progressed in sophistication for over a hundred and fourteen years. Rather than presenting alternative theoretical resources for clarifying the relationship between biology and culture, they simply repeat the reductionist argument. Like those who propagate the bio-reductive framework, anthropologists like Ferguson, Reyna, and Vayda offer

simple variations on what is essentially nineteenth century anthropological thinking. Consider Morgan's notion, for example, that "the institutions of mankind have sprung up in a progressive, connected series, each of which represents the result of unconscious reformatory movements to extricate society from existing evils...mankind have advanced under a necessary law of development" (1907: 58). Morgan's idea that what matters in the study of human social action are forces emanating from real, powerful, but somehow undefined structures or forces (whether progressive or not) operating on persons shows up in the bio-reductive framework still informs the bio-reductive framework and the positions of Ferguson, Reyna, and Vayda. Arguments to the effect that human populations are homologous to organic systems that require equilibrium or that warfare is a way for humans to reset chance perturbations to their intra-group dynamics offer a realist account of human social action. Human semiotic practices are at best ciphers for the operation of impersonal structures and forces that determine those practices in not only form but content as well. The realism of evolutionary theory permits anthropologists like Ferguson, Reyna, and Vayda to simply and convincingly 'explain' ethnographic data by reducing it to a result of the operation of these structures and forces.

Anthropologists who perceive semiotic practices as a primary reality of human social action risk having their data simply and convincingly co-opted by reductionist claims. Warnings like that offered by Fried, Harris, and Murphy are unconvincing in the face of the explanatory power of a realist approach that holds up as long as one does not push too hard on its philosophical and scientific underpinnings. Meanwhile, an Ortnerian idealism is simply a non-starter. Consider, for example, Shaw and Wong's contention in *The Genetic Seeds of Warfare* (1989) that, "Specific differences in warfare, its forms and historical conditions surrounding the outbreak of war, are of secondary importance. The most important, yet unresolved question [is] why warfare exists at all" (Shaw and Wong 1989: 2). Supposedly, this is a scientific outlook on data supported by the notion that there exist universal laws or forces that render individual variations irrelevant. Consequentially, if the historical particulars of the tremendous varieties of ways people, groups, and states fight is irrelevant, then we must assume that the people doing the fighting and the warring are not important since *variety is the expression of human agency using socio-cultural resources*. They are not important because they are not the cause. They are not the cause because they have no agency. They have no agency because the supposedly deterministic operation of genetic material ensures the universality of their behavior.

Compare this supposedly scientific outlook on data with Lewontin's notion that "A central problem of [non-developmental] biology, not only for biological scientists but for the general public, is the question of the origin of similarities and differences between individual organisms" (Lewontin 1998: 4). What matters for Lewontin the natural scientist is how and why we are the same and different as individuals embedded in historical actions and processes exactly because we are not the result of putative universal, deterministic laws or forces that render us each individually flawed approximations to be ignored. The difference in focus between Shaw and Wong and Lewontin is not to be accounted for by noting their different analytical foci, but by realizing that their different analytical foci emerge due to fundamental differences in their respective ontological commitments. If anthropologists who value personal meaning as real, versus illusory, wish to prevent the product of their ethnographic research from being co-opted by an established master narrative, then a *plausible scientific* response is required—one that addresses head on the plausibility and reality of bio-psycho-social forces that are systemic, necessary, and non-personal as they relate to human social life.

"Missing Persons" in the Anthropological Study of Modern Combat

The socio-cultural anthropologist Anna Simons reviews the anthropological literature on warfare in *War: Back to the Future* (1999). Simons focuses on anthropology and related disciplines that use the concept of "culture" in writing about war. In a section entitled "The Absent," she argues that "no one has systematically studied cross-cultural encounters via combat" and so actual ethnographic data on modern warfare and battle is simply missing from the ethnographic record. Simons drives the point of her statement deeper when she notes that there is little agreement in the literature on what "combat" means to individuals since "only a handful of anthropologists have studied the military and the mechanics of soldiering. And when anthropologists have studied particular military units, they have generally done so in the safety of the rear and/or during peacetime" (1999: 89).

Although she does not mention any of the handful by name, she supports her point with a reference to anthropologists working for the Army Research Institute and the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research. She terms the purpose of their work "practical," but not "academic," implying that their relevance to understanding the cultural aspects of soldiering is secondary to enhancing the actual practice of soldiering for soldiers. Moving upward in scope, Simons names

thirty-six different authors writing in fields ranging from anthropology to non-fiction military history from 1961 through 1997, *but she notes that their topical areas are not the semiotic practice of combat or training for combat.*⁶ Her conclusion supports my argument that both bio-reductive and idealistic anthropological approaches fail to utilize appropriate theoretical resources to underpin ethnography, at least in the realm of the study of warfare. We have seen the reasons for the failure of the bio-reductive approach. Humanist anthropologists, on the other hand, have failed to ground their ethnographic studies of war in any plausible ontological and scientific theory of human social action. These anthropologists are left with little more than the option of insisting that others adopting their viewpoint directly or indirectly.⁷

Between 1997 (Simons' summary) and today there emerges another strain of idealism in the anthropology of warfare. These anthropological works on warfare appear to follow a general template that constitutes the third trend I mentioned above. An avowed horror at the conduct and pointlessness of warfare and its terrible effects on people generally is usually expressed. From this position of moral indignation proceeds a blanket rejection of any engagement with *soldiers themselves, especially modern American soldiers*, in favor of other theoretical or political concerns. For example, socio-cultural anthropologist Alisse Waterston states in *War: Views from the Frontline* (2009), "My goal in putting together this collection is to undermine war" (2009: 14). She describes her work as a "plea—desperate, frantic, anxious" (2009: 14).

Waterston's goal, apparently, is to collect evidence to support her pre-determined moral assessment. It is not to generate an analysis in order to understand and then propose an argument supporting an assessment. This approach suggests that her moral judgment is unproblematic and obvious. In her presentation of her moral assessment as obviousness, Waterston implies that all of us *should have* the same conclusion about warfare scholarly argument. In the last chapter, Sherry Ortner presented a similar approach to the perception of agency in everyday life. But there is a new twist here. The subject matter is not what we *ought to see* in the world, but how *we should judge the actions of others*. But, the suggested standard is an unsupported moral claim, not, as in Ortner's claim, an unsupported theoretical argument that offers the possibility of being examined and contradicted or corrected. Waterston's approach in this regard presents her as closed to the possibility of discovering something other than her own conclusion about warfare and the attendant agenda of undermining, rather than understanding, warfare.

While Waterston, like most humanist anthropologists, seems to have laudable motives, the lack of grounds for her moral assessment is fatal to her plea because it results in a blanket rejection of soldiers, who, we might otherwise assume, ought to be at the center of any attempt to theorize warfare. She writes,

I am indebted to Ellen Weinstein for so generously allowing us to use her artwork for the cover of this book. Artist Mark Vallen describes *Camouflage* as “a close-up portrait of an American soldier.... Such images are always tragically the same, a gallant warrior in uniform imbued with the virtues of service and self-sacrifice....But Weinstein’s artwork looks beyond facile patriotism to expose an unsettling reality. The soldier’s portrait...and the American flag back-drop are entirely composed of snippets of tabloid press reports trumpeting ... inconsequential celebrities.... Does the camouflage hide a thoroughly narcissistic and debauched society—or does a manufactured culture of distraction mask a deep-rooted militarism?” (Foreign Policy in Focus Web site, 12 March 2008). *Camouflage* visually captures both the anthropological approach to understanding war and a key mechanism that makes war possible. [2009: ix]

In her selective and favorable quotation of Vallen’s interpretation, Waterston subsumes the soldierly values Vallen identifies—gallantry, service, and self-sacrifice—under “facile patriotism.” Intentional or not, Waterston’s presentation denigrates soldiers by implying that the values that comprise their professional identity are simply *affectations* assumed for political expedience or indulgence in power trips with lethal consequences. She does so without any ground except her own ideological stance on warfare, which she terms “insanity” (2009: 14). The further implication is that that soldiers are the kind of person who engages in insane behavior. We may ask if this attitude is not its own form of imperialism. Is it not the case here that Waterston *erases* the semiotic practices of soldiers and so soldiers themselves from the ethnographic record by imposing her own ideological viewpoint about warfare?

For soldiers who, as we will see, are willing to die for cultural values, war may be insane, *but that is not the point*. In fact, personal or subjective experience is not the point. At their best, soldiers engage in warfare *despite* the horror of death, moral outrage, psychological damage, destruction of friends, civilians, and property, moral turpitude, profiteering, and political grandstanding. They endure these terrible outcomes and contexts because they choose to honor values *greater than their own experience*.⁸ The quality of those values and what they mean thus become of primary importance if a researcher wants to understand modern American warfare. I take the position that only *after* we find out who soldiers are, and exactly how their values are

constructed in relation to the employment of violence, are we entitled to offer a judgment as to the meaning of their lives.

Summarily, Waterston's approach to understanding war appears to consist in, on the one hand, simply discounting the fundamental anthropological requirement of understanding a primary constituency—American soldiers—and yet, on the other hand, justifying such discounting based on the simple fact of her own subjective feelings and political position about warfare. Unfortunately, she may be right when she claims that this template captures the current approach of the discipline towards this subject. Socio-cultural anthropologist Antonius C.G.M. Robben's *Iraq at a Distance: What Anthropologists Can Teach Us About the War* (2010) writes that, "This book arose from three pressing concerns in mid-2005: a moral outrage against the Iraq War, the absence of an anthropological voice in professional and public debates, and the similarities with previous armed conflicts worldwide" (2010: vii).

If personal, unexplained moral outrage and other types of subjective experience are now a legitimate *substitute for* scholarly participant-observation with primary constituencies rather than a means to reflexive self-criticism, then is it any wonder that both Waterston and Robben continue the (at least) forty-year-old lament that anthropological voices are nowhere to be found in the political or military discourses of the United States or other Western nations?⁹ This should be no surprise to American anthropologists, however, since Waterston's erasure of soldiers in her work is complemented by the American Anthropological Association's publication of statements against involvement of anthropologists with the military that appear to be based on similarly subjective, unexplained moral grounds. Apparently anthropologists and their professional association in America think that war can be understood without knowing who soldiers are and what they mean, just as we found to be the case for proponents of the bio-reductive framework. As with that framework, this idealistic approach is not so much a grounded resolution of the contradiction between description and explanation or biology and culture as it is a choice to assume that the contradiction does not exist and has no bearing on present anthropological inquiry.

We find a similar approach in the anthropological literature on masculinity and the state, which some might count as anthropology of warfare. A popular Western conflation holds that masculinity and aggressiveness are interchangeable, and constitute resources to be marshaled in the service of a national agenda that includes warfare. One instance of this conflation is

analyzed in Catherine Lutz's *Homefront: A Military City and the American 20th Century* (2001). Of a Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) informant, she writes,

He emphatically wanted to join as a 'traditional' combat GI, not a 'humanitarian soldier'. When he eventually goes overseas with the Army, he said, "I don't really want to do that... You go to some Third World country, you baby-sit poor people. I wouldn't be worried about getting in a fire-fight... You worry about somebody parking a U-Haul truck outside of your barracks and blowing you to smithereens when you are sleeping." His choice of imagery is common: A baby-sitter is female, and she cares for the childish. Prestige inside the army, he knew... would come through manly combat and arms, not personnel management, water purification detail, or the finance department, all tasks that required less strength or courage. And like any reasonably attuned person in Fayetteville, he has heard that becoming a man through military service can begin with violence at the hands of other soldiers at Fort Bragg. In initiation rites, soldiers are sometimes shocked with electricity, made to sit on garbage, have their necks hung with dead fish, and—to symbolize the gender they must never be—smeared with lipstick as camouflage paint. [2001: 219-220]

Lutz's analysis focuses on the use of gendered discourse *per se* as a way to imply a negative assessment of the soldier's interest in humanitarian missions with the attendant implication that the soldier himself is inhumane as a function of his allegiance to masculinist values. But I would argue that the soldier is *using* gendered discourses to express a deeply-held Western moral and tactical principle: the best defense is a good offense. Passivity in a context of threatened or actual violence is often an invitation to the actualization or more violence. In short, the soldier is objecting to being rendered passive and so vulnerable.¹⁰ He uses stereotypic constructions of the feminine as passive and the masculine as active as tools to express a larger meaning that, in itself, appears *gender-less*. Though the larger meaning—soldiers are active—may be expressed through the citation of a stereotypic masculinist discourse, this alone does not mean we are permitted to ignore or denigrate the larger meaning. Yet, Lutz's approach achieves just this while missing the larger meaning being expressed by the soldier.

In this study, moreover, I will demonstrate that *enduring* violence and personal harm in the name of being a soldier and a man is a *different* matter than the simple (mindless?) enactment of stereotypic gender discourses, a difference that Lutz misses. Smearing a proto-soldier with lipstick is *not only* an enforcement of gender divisions, but also an act that *trades on* gender divisions. The point of initiation rites is to ensure that potential group member will choose to suffer in the name of, and for, the group. The group is powerfully testing the proto-soldier's

willingness to bear humiliation *for* the group by initiation that requires humiliation *from* the group. We will see below in some detail how stereotypic, gendered discourses are used to *promote* selflessness for the common good. This makes the ethnographic situation much more complex, fascinating, and perhaps surprising than we gather from Lutz's presentation, especially since the implication is that gendered discourse is now the beginning, not the end, of the analysis.

Lutz's work is one of a number of studies that have emerged in the late 20th and early 21st century that present a distinctive and interesting broadening of what counts as Anthropology of Warfare. Research such as Cynthia Enloe's *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives* (2000) and Francine D'Amico and Laurie Weinstein's *Gender Camouflage: Women and the U.S. Military* (1999) exemplify this expansion while taking up the spirit of Margaret Mead's work. Both books concern the fundamentally important roles women play, by choice, by mandate, and by cultural training, in a militarized world that downplays, ignores or disguises those roles. Compared to this study, however, works such as these focus more on the impact of masculine values on women than on the generation or expression of those values in a combat or training-for-combat context. This is not hairsplitting: Enloe herself draws a similar type of distinction when she claims that men are not "naturally" desirous of being soldiers, "Many men may be loathe to *admit* that they want to avoid soldiering. That, however, is a different matter, a contingent story of individual men negotiating with society over the norms of masculinity" (2000: 235). I want to use Enloe's model to argue that discourses by men and women *in and about combat* are of a different sort than discourses by men and women *about military service* more generally.

Similarly, outside of anthropology, in the field of International Relations, Joshua Goldstein's *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa* (2001) provides an excellent cross-cultural survey of gender relations in warfare that focuses on U.S. combat troops. Likewise, freelance journalist Stephanie Gutmann's *The Kinder, Gentler Military: Can America's Gender-Neutral Fighting Force Still Win Wars?* (2000) addresses the question of women's participation in the infantry from the standpoint of the soldiers themselves. But the point is the politics of inclusion, not the enactment of violence in combat. Like the works by Enloe and D'Amico and Weinstein, Goldstein and Gutmann's studies do not focus on combat or combat training through the discourse of combatants.

In this study I do not replicate the any of the trends outlined above, nor do I assume that it is somehow more penetrating, politically effective, and/or powerful to focus on the phenomena of experience or the subjectivity of any constituency involved in warfare. If as anthropologists we wish to get the military or politicians to think differently about warfare, soldiers' actions in warfare, and the politics and consequences of warfare for civilian and military populations, then simply recounting the experience of those participants (willing or not) is a dead end. What needs to be examined, first and foremost from a realist and grounded perspective, is who soldiers are *from their point of view*. To be perfectly clear about my own personal anthropology as it affects this study, I am not a warmonger, nor am I a political hawk. Nevertheless, I see in the ethnographic record that, sadly, there are people in the world (including some Americans both in and out of the military) who can and will commit themselves to their values absolutely. In the clash of cultures and values sometimes there are cases in which *no respectful discourse is possible*. In such cases, lethal violence can and often does ensue.

The Anthropology of Warfare literature in its different variations, realistic or idealistic, reductive or ideological, renders the actual semiotic practices of persons irrelevant. Failing to heed Morton et. Al.'s warning not to advance a political approach without a scientific grounding, opponents to the long-standing reductive tradition have lately begun to rely on phenomenology and focus on descriptions of subjective experience. The result, at least in this literature, is the imposition of the ideological view of researchers rather than the exposition of the meaning of consultants. As Simons argues, modern combat infantry are simply absent or have their identities defined for them. If we are after new realist theoretical resources that are plausible and scientific to advance the project of resolving the contradiction between description and explanation and between biology and culture in informants' discourse about courageous action, they will not be found in this literature.

¹ There is a relevant philosophical tradition at work here that posits that what people do, overtly, is never actually what is meant and therefore is never actually important. It is the Platonic tradition that locates the source of reality in a realm not accessible to (average) persons.

² See Frank B. Linderman, *Plenty-Coups: Chief of the Crows* (1930).

³ There is a radical difference between science and positivism. Most humanist anthropology appears to react to positivism—as well it should—as debilitating and simply wrong-headed. Recently, Toulmin (1990) has delineated the historical picture of when and how positivism was adopted into the heart of the social sciences even as it was rejected by natural science. What I refer to, therefore, is the idea that natural scientific work and theorizing as it has been actually practiced is non-positivist and could be used productively to push Mead’s critique in a productive direction that she could never have realized.

⁴ In 1968 Mead took part in another anthropological caucus on warfare. In her later offering, *Alternatives to War* (1968), she still maintains that warfare is not biologically based and criticizes ethological data using ethnographic data—particularly the notion that the habitual use of weapons by women has rarely been given social sanction. She attempts to turn the tables on ethology by taking a fundamental ethological principle seriously: if humans are indeed to be regarded as just one of the animals, then what ethological theory can or does account for the ethnographic fact that women have rarely been given social sanction to habitually use weaponry? She notes that this ethnographic fact has not been “sufficiently integrated” into ethological discussions. She then adds that it is significant that when Lorenz (1966) broaches human aggression, “all consideration of females disappears.”

⁵ It is significant that Mead uses the term “replacement” to characterize changes in invented ideas over time. “Replacement” is a Humean term that, I would speculate, was Mead’s best option for avoiding the notion of causality as ideal mechanism. There is no such thing as agentic change in such a system since cause and effect are linearly unified. Although the Humean idea of causality is a failure because it too is a version of idealism, not realism, at the time, the immaterial basis of the notion may have attracted Mead. It may have appeared to be an appropriate model for dealing with human thought where, quite spontaneously, one (immaterial) idea could be replaced by another. The use of the term is therefore indicative of the lack of conceptual resources that offer an appropriately scientific account of social change over time.

⁶ Another of Simons’ works, *The Company They Keep: Life Inside the U.S. Army Special Forces* (1997) appears to try to remedy this situation. It is a novel-like narrative about an elite army team during training. Simons concentrates on personality profiles, personal interactions, relationships between her target team and other teams, and the “cohesion” of the unit. Although the study foregrounds the notion of “cohesion,” it fails to analyze the actual vocal and embodied discursive practices that generate such a concept of collective action as does the study I present here. Without this analytical element, Simons’ descriptive work seems superficial and so unsatisfying.

⁷ One phrase in particular has caught my attention for its ubiquity in late 20th century anthropological works, “As <insert name of anthropologist> insists...”. This catch-phrase often appears in exactly those places where hard theoretical and analytical work is required to connect a bold or critical claim to some substantive grounding. It serves to alleviate the author from engaging in actually explaining the connection between a bold or critical claim and a rational ground by inserting what might be called “the voice of the master.”

⁸ This is definitely a double-edged sword: a soldier honoring his or her own moral outrage could be a way to do the right thing, rather than the wrong thing. Antoine Fugua’s film *Tears of the Sun* (2003) presents this issue explicitly in the moral choice facing a Navy SEAL played by Bruce Willis. By obeying orders, Willis’s character would leave innocent civilians to die at the hands of genocidal soldiers in Nigera. The same issue is explicitly presented as a personal reality in General Romeo Dallaire’s book *Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda* (2003). These two works illuminate a radical difference in approach between Waterston and the soldiers she erases. As I will demonstrate in later chapters, soldiers often think deeply and wrestle with the moral judgments in situations of fundamental ambiguity, often under incredible time pressure.

⁹ Anthropologists Morton Fried, Marvin Harris and Robert Murphy voiced exactly the same concern in their 1968 volume *War: The Anthropology of Armed Conflict and Aggression* focused on the Vietnam War.

¹⁰ Interestingly, this tactical-moral principle can be seen expressed in on-line, “first-person shooter” video games in which players combat one another in a variety of worlds and landscapes. One such popular game, *Call of Duty II*, is set in World War II and can include up to 64 players on two separate teams competing for various goals. A common “objection” seen in in-game chat amongst players occurs when a player hides in a corner and waits until an enemy passes by only to be easily and quickly gunned down. This is called “camping” and it can be the topic of intense, visceral debate: the “camper” claims the action indicates good defense, the objector claims the action indicates cowardice or unfair play. The intense frustration demonstrated by the “victimized” objector, especially in light of the powerlessness of the objector to do anything else but type out a vociferous and often profanity-strewn ad hominem attack on the camper, is often itself the subject of gleeful or annoyed responses from still other players. Objectors often make it a point to hunt down and kill the camper when the game “re-spawns” (brings back to playability) the dead virtual soldier. On the other hand, the passivity of campers is a risk: *Call of Duty II* permits the virtual soldier to “bash” an opponent with a weapon (versus shooting the opponent from a distance). Getting bashed is often taken as a sign of poor player skills as it denotes the player’s inability to prevent an enemy from closing in to the point that a bash is possible. To formulate the tactical-moral prescription then, one must: move around actively and confront a similarly moving

enemy at a “reasonable” distance in a mutual test of dexterous operation of a virtual soldier (aiming, shooting, running, crouching, jumping, leaning). Snipers, by the way, are both part of the game and often the subject of scorn: they kill from a distance.

CHAPTER 5

A SCIENTIFICALLY PLAUSIBLE ONTOLOGY FOR STUDYING HUMAN SOCIAL ACTION: SEMASIOLOGY

In human freedom in the philosophical sense I am definitely a disbeliever. Everybody acts not only under external compulsion but also in accordance with inner necessity. Schopenhauer's saying, that "a man can do as he will, but not will as he will," has been an inspiration to me... This feeling mercifully mitigates the sense of responsibility which so easily becomes paralyzing, and it prevents us from taking ourselves and other people too seriously.
-- Albert Einstein, 1931

In the previous chapter I argued that realist but reductive frameworks as well as some idealist frameworks found in the Anthropology of Warfare literature are the wrong resources for interpreting human social action because they are fatally flawed in their ontology of human being and the causal source of human social action. Hence, an insistence on their continued use (without the requisite explanation of how Hebb and Eccles are wrong in their understanding of human bio-physiology) would amount to a failure of ethical integrity in scholarship.

In contrast, a coherent and scientifically plausible ontological schema for studying human social action within anthropology does exist. It is found in *semasiology*, an approach to a broadly conceived 'anthropology of human movement' created by socio-cultural anthropologist Drid Williams (1975). *Semasiology* was inspired by concepts from the semiology of Ferdinand de Saussure and grounded in Harré's casual powers theory. I will highlight key concepts in semasiological theory as it relates to the interpretation of human embodied social action and to understanding military movement. Movement, we learned in chapter 2, is a primary modality for expressing courageous action. The path I will take leads through (1) a brief review of the realist, scientific roots of semasiology and the consequences drawn from those roots and (2) a careful semasiological consideration of some ethnographic and ethno-historic military movements. I will end the chapter with an outline review of these key concepts in preparation for analysis of my fieldwork with U.S. Marines.

Semasiology: A Realist Conception of Human Agency

Semasiology is an anthropological theory of human social action conceived by socio-cultural anthropologist Drid Williams (1982, 1991, 1995, 1996, 1999), elaborated by socio-cultural/linguistic anthropologist Brenda Farnell (1994, 1995, 1996a, 1996b, 1999, 2000, 2001) and systematically placed in appropriate philosophical, scientific and historical contexts by philosopher of social science Charles R. Varela (1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1999, 2003).

Semasiology is distinguished from other approaches to human movement in its conception of the relationship between biology and culture.¹ *Semasiology* specifies that relationship according to the resources of the aforementioned new realist meta-narrative, called critical realism.² In semasiology the individual human organism (biology) and the embodied person (culture) are understood as *one naturally occurring, unified entity*. From a scientific point of view, this unity is the only appropriately structured and so only plausible entity capable of producing the variable and rich ethnographic record so powerfully illustrative of human agency for anthropologists like Mead, Geertz, Sahlins, and Ortner. This understanding helps the researcher guard against reifying inappropriate entities, like “social structure,” “language,” or “genes,” when representing persons anthropologically.

On this point, Harré (1984) and Varela (1993) argue that while there is a unity in the embodied person, there is also a hierarchical relationship between the two: culture is primary and biology is secondary. This reversal of the bio-reductive standpoint is rooted in the biological science of Hebb, Eccles, and Hauser that we encountered in the last chapter. The human organism, our biology, is transformed into a culturally defined and socially constructed body through the mechanism of language-in-use (understood as speech and other sensory-semiotic resources): the human organism becomes *functionally subordinated* to the embodied person (Varela 1993). This is an ontological, not a psychological or biological, transformation.

To the ontology of human being as possessing both biophysical and socio-cultural components simultaneously and inseparably, semasiology adds the critical concept that human beings are *structured to move*. They are not inert: active being is moving being (Varela 2009). This is the scientific principle of *agency*. In this context, attributing agency to human beings claims for them the status of being genuinely and naturally causal, *contra* the bio-reductive

framework. The dynamic movement of persons *is* the actualization of potential power in *both* the physical and socio-cultural sense (Varela 1993). The means by which persons generate their socio-cultural worlds is through language. We are built biologically to use it, but we are not built to use it *in particular ways at particular times to mean particular things*. Through the use of language, persons become “efficient causes of their own actions” in their socio-cultural worlds, according to Williams (2003: 2). It is on this basis that Farnell and Varela contend that, “all human action is the discursive practice of persons” (2008: 217). To be clear, action is not merely vocalization. Williams states, “In a living, moving human being, the verbal and actions are one” (2003: 5).³

Semasiology's understanding of the relationship between biology and culture is expressed in the novel conception of the human body as the “semasiological body” or “signifying body” (Williams 1975, 2003). Since people are active agents, that is, *dynamically embodied*, and that the cultural subsumes the biological in the human socio-cultural world as we master the use of language in our locality, the ways people move express their conceptions of and value in living and being.

Does this conception mean that if all people move, and all movement is meaningful, then all people mean the same thing when they move? The answer is no. Williams (2003) distinguishes two levels of theoretical interest: (1) “structural invariants,” which refer to the fact that human bodies are material entities limited by their physical structure to moving in a finite number of ways and directions (human legs do not bend like bird legs); and (2) “semantic variance,” which refers to the idea that cultures and sub-cultures generate conventions that pick out from that finite number of ways of moving what counts as being semantically important by assigning meaning to them. *The same movement does not necessarily mean the same thing* within a culture, across cultures, or even through time.

Semasiology: Dynamic Embodiment and The Action-Sign

Semasiology recognizes the agency of persons through the concept of dynamic embodiment. People move themselves and can move others both physically and linguistically. This idea brings up the question of how exactly we are to understand that body movement constitutes language-in-use. Since culture in the form of language subsumes the physical, our

moving in space and time is a) *always cultural* and b) *signifying*. Semasiology captures these ideas in the central concept of the *action-sign* defined by Farnell this way

Action signs are units of human body movement that take their meaning(s) from their place within a system of signs. Like spoken languages, action-sign systems are open-ended semantic systems, and encompass all human uses of the medium of bodily movement. They range from the unmarked (i.e. ordinary) uses of manual and facial gestures, sign languages, posture, skills, and locomotion to highly marked deliberate choreographies of the kind that occur in rituals, ceremonies, dances, theatre, the martial arts, and sports. [Farnell 2000: fn.11]

Even a relatively innocuous military action-sign, like a “salute” carries linguistic, that is semiotic, depth and complexity. The salute of the U.S. Marine Corporal Casey Owens in Figure 2 (in Figures section at end of this chapter) is an action-sign—an embodied movement phrase or utterance. Following the Saussurian concept of the linguistic sign, an action sign is comprised of two inseparable elements, signifier and signified: that is, movement(s) is connected to meanings. The signifiers of this action sign—the movements and positions of the arm relative to the body and head—are his upright posture, his serious facial expression, the forward “directedness” of his sight-line, the use of his right, not his left, arm, the rigidity or held tension of his bent arm, the extension of his hand and fingers, the alignment of his fingers, and the positioning of his right index finger touching the brim of his cap. Williams (2003) calls the collected movements and body position a *kineseme*, a whole bodily ‘gesture’ or action sign that constitutes a meaningful whole within a semantic realm (a system of signs) in this case the realm of “American military action.” *Kineseme* is further refined by the concept of the *kineme*, an analytic unit that identifies smaller constituent parts of an action sign, such as, in this case, the extended fingers or the upright, extended and rigidly held spine.

The signified component of the action sign of a salute picks out or indexes a value position within the larger system of “American military action.” The meanings attached to this action sign when used in a socio-cultural context *can be*, but are not normally, expressed in vocal terms perhaps related to the word “respect;” something like, “I recognize and respect your place in our organization, our common allegiance to a code of arms, and the duties that code obliges us to perform, including this salute.” During my fieldwork with the U.S. Marines I came to realize that while a gesture or action sign such as this might be considered *analytically* equivalent to a vocal expression given a scholarly context in which the spoken and written word is valorized, in

a military context, the action sign *means more* than a vocal expression. That is, the sub-cultural rules for enacting “respect” demand an embodied, that is, a gestural, not a vocal, modality. To translate the salute into a vocal rather than gestural utterance would be to disregard the social conventions and rules for proper action in the military sub-culture. It would be an insult.

Studying embodied utterances semasiologically can include more familiar categories of anthropological study such as ‘identity’ and ‘context’. Semasiology takes these categories into account through the “system of signs” Farnell mentions.⁴ In the United States, and in the military, one identity-generating sign is in fact the performance of a salute. A few times during my fieldwork with the U.S. Marines, junior Marines—those on the lower end of the hierarchical scale of ranks such as privates and lance corporals—saluted me as they passed by (see Appendix B). I noticed that this kind of event started after I adopted a regulation haircut and was provided with desert tan and forest green digital camouflage uniforms. I noticed that I was not saluted all the time, but when I was, it occurred exclusively when I wore a “cover” (which in U.S. Marine Corps nomenclature means a hat) and my uniform “blouse” (meaning the button-down shirt) despite my having no markers of rank or nametag as is required by the regulations that all Marines are expected to know intimately. Regulations oblige Marines to salute superiors when they are “under cover and buttoned up.”

A Marine sergeant explained that the young Marines were practicing a “better safe than sorry” approach: salute, just in case... I saluted them in turn. The first time this happened, I was startled by the event but acted anyway, based on my understanding and appreciation of military practices through pictures, books, and movies. I was startled because of the dissonance between my own understanding of my identity and my audience’s. It can be argued that I should have disabused these Marines of their misconception. In one sense I agree, since I was not *actually* a Marine. At best I was a temporary or honorary Marine, and certainly not a legitimate superior commissioned officer. I decided, however, that disrupting the ritual of respect would be more trouble than it was worth at that moment, especially since the Marines had already passed on into the distance.

On reflection I thought that if and when such a mistake happened again, I could simply stop the Marines and ask them why they saluted me given that I had no proper rank or name markers, but I decided against this course of action. I did not think checking the sergeant’s explanation against the Marines’ explanation of their actions was a substantive enough point to

disrupt the ritual or help them realize their mistake. But, I was thinking from the perspective of myself as a researcher, not as a proto-member of the U.S. Marine Corps. If I had adopted the latter identity more fully, intervening could have made better Marines of the individuals either by drawing their attention to details they missed in the form of missing rank and name markers or by encouraging them to act on details they recognized. This would have been in line with the strong principle of communal identity and valuing of teamwork that I encountered with the Marines. Marine Captain and Public Affairs Officer Teresa Ovalle illustrated the depth and seriousness of the Marine commitment to this principle and value. She explained to me that any Marine is *obligated* to approach another Marine who isn't following regulations, even if the wrongdoer is a superior officer. She provided the hypothetical example of a colonel or general who is not wearing his cover in a setting requiring it to be worn. A private would be obligated to bring the mistake to the attention of the colonel or general.

This discussion opens up the question of what a salute *indexes*, that is, what does it “point at” as the target of respect. Who or what is it respecting? The answer is not always clear. There is a U.S. military adage that a salute respects the rank and uniform, not the man or woman wearing it. But in my case, I think the young Marines were guessing that I was a superior of some sort *because of my appearance*. I suspect they recognized the signs of *age* (I was 42 years old at the time I started my fieldwork) in my face, meaning that they equated age with rank. Of course this assumes that I pulled off *dressing like a Marine and walking like a Marine* well enough to pass the young Marines' cursory inspection. Such appearance and way of walking would be yet another example of an embodied utterance. I learned too that at Marine Corp Base Quantico (MCBQ), it is not unusual for rank markers to be removed from “cammies” or “utes” (digital camouflage utility uniform) for training purposes since they are metal and can seriously injure the wearer or another trainee. This may have encouraged the “better safe than sorry” approach. A salute's respect, then, can be “aimed” not at a particular individual recipient, but at the uniform itself as a tangible symbol of the intangible values constitutive of the military way of life. But does it hit its mark? Not in all cases and not with the intended implications, as my fieldwork experience demonstrates.

Returning to the point of a semasiological understanding of a salute, we can say that Corporal Owens (Figure 2) is talking with his body, or, embodying a value as a way to index his commitment to still other values. It is important to note that, as Williams (2003) points out, we

often perceive *what* is signified (i.e. the meaning), but not the embodied movement—the *signifier* that achieves the action sign. Perhaps the “properly attired whole body movement” of my presentation of “(possible) superior Marine” to the young Marines is what prevented them from recognizing or acting on missing details. The import of this concept is that, in a case like Corporal Owens’s, the action-sign does not represent respect, as traditional theories of epistemology might have us believe, it *is* respect, at least when performed properly. In this sense too, I was “Marine” to the young Marines, though I technically did not deserve the respect they rendered.

As this example shows, in semasiology, unlike in the bio-reductive framework, a “unit of movement...always refer[s] to a recognizable pattern established by the agents’ (performers’) modes of specification for the whole dance, rite, ceremony—whatever kind of system that is under examination” (Williams 2003: 100). Achieving understanding depends fundamentally on the standpoint of the actor or actors. This means that, as researchers, we must take seriously *the actors’ explanation of their actions and what they mean*. This does not require, however, that we take their explanation as correct, true, or universally applicable. Sometimes consultants get it wrong, but the point is that their explanations should be granted serious weight in generating an interpretive understanding of them prior to an ethnographic representation. In the bio-reductive framework, we saw that the content of theoretical categories like “survival value,” or “instinct” *impose the explanation of and so the meaning* of action. Explaining the salute semasiologically as an action-sign (in light of Farnell’s “system of signs”) then, means understanding the historical and cultural ascription of meaning to the action, if possible. For example, The U.S. Army Quartermaster Center and School states that the originating association of meaning with this action sign is not clear.⁵ The supposition is that the modern hand salute emerges from a historical practice of demonstrating one was disarmed upon approaching another with peaceful intentions. The right hand was traditionally considered “the weapon-hand.” Opening the palm and holding it up for inspection accomplished the goal. Another, compatible explanation focuses on requirements in the British Army of the 18th and 19th century requiring juniors to remove headgear in the presence of superiors. This practice changed over time into grasping, and then simply touching, the visor. The Quartermaster School and Center website also notes evidence of left-handed and dual-handed salutes.

The following consideration of subtle details and changes over time in the purpose and meaning of the kinemes (parts of an action sign) that constitute a ‘salute’ alert us that the meaning of a salute is not obvious, even if salutes are integral to all modern, Western militaries. Even in the case of a very close cultural and linguistic relationship between the United States and Great Britain exemplified in a long tradition of shared military principles and training the ethnographic situation remains complex.⁶ Compare the American and British salutes in Figure 3 (in Figures section at the end of this chapter). At the level of modern military salutes both variations of the action sign *mean the same*: they are gestures of respect. Each also conveys, however, a unique meaning compared to the other when considered on the level of kinemic details, the component parts of the utterance. *These details can be likened to an “accent” in a vocal modality*. I will concentrate on four of them. First, the palm of each soldier is oriented differently. Owens’ palm faces down, the hand being aligned on a horizontal plane while Sanders’s palm faces forward, with the hand aligned on a vertical plane. Second, the last or pinky finger of each soldier is oriented differently. Owens’s is flush against his fourth or ring finger while Sanders’ is slightly apart from the others. Third, the elbow of each soldier is oriented differently. Owens’s is in front of his body, creating a three dimensional triangle among his shoulder, elbow, and cap visor. Sanders’s elbow is nearly flush with his body, creating a two dimensional triangle among his shoulder, elbow and cap visor. Finally, and unobservable in the static photographic image shown here, Owens’s arm movement took a relatively direct line upward from the side of his torso to deliver his hand to his cap visor. Sanders’s arm movement inscribed an arc oriented outward from the right side of his body. The movements and differences in final position captured in each picture *are cultural* and convey the meanings “American” and “British” respectively. Of course if we adopted a strictly bio-functional interpretive framework, these differences would be irrelevant to the interpretation of “respecting and maintaining hierarchy” when explaining a modern military salute. But in a semasiological framework, these seemingly minor differences are the constitutive elements of cultural being and identity.

Pictures are effective for appreciating dynamically embodied semiotic practices but only to a point. They capture a *position* not a *movement*. A better way to “record” and appreciate distinctive gestural utterances is through Labanotation (see Figure 4 in Figures section at the end of this chapter). The vertical axis represents time, so movement through time and space occurs

from bottom to top. The horizontal axis represents simultaneous movements in time and space. The symbols used indicate speed of motion, direction of motion, parts of bodies, and interaction among body parts. A Labanotated version of the American and British versions of the kineseme “salute” enables us to be more precise in our analysis of the different cultural conceptions of this gestural utterance.⁷

Action-signs, as a modality of communication, do not simply convey information, they convey meaning. The cultural quality of the difference between an American and British salute is critical because in enacting it, rather than some other formulation of a salute, the soldier is *generating identity and providing context for further action*. It would be just as strange and provocative, if not angering, for a U.S. Marine to use a British salute as it would be if she did not salute at all when circumstances required it.

Action-Signs: Understanding Military Movement Culturally

This comparison of American and British salutes and the ways in which they constitute cultural being (as well as identity and context) lead us to the semasiological realization that, just like spoken phrases, gestural utterances *require translation*. Semasiologically, dynamic bodily movements are taken to be “agentic, semiotic practices that are shared expressive resources which require translation from one culture to another” (Farnell and Graham 1998: 433).

This concept has important implications for the anthropological study of the military as two historical examples from the 19th century American Indian Wars demonstrate. With these examples we will, see the cultural richness of bodies in motion. The U.S. Seventh Cavalry was defeated at the Battle of the Little Bighorn in 1876 and its commander, Lieutenant Colonel George A. Custer, a popular American Civil War hero, was killed. In the aftermath, his second in command, Major Marcus A. Reno was denounced as having failed in his responsibilities as an officer resulting in the defeat and Custer’s death. Reno’s actions were later subjected to a military court of inquiry. While some witnesses reported him to have acted “coolly” and competently at different points during the battle, others claimed he was “demoralized” or “unhinged,” especially after his Arikara scout, Bloody Knife, was shot in the head and killed within a few feet of him.⁸ The day afterward, a witness claimed to have asked Reno if he remembered Bloody Knife being killed, and Reno reputedly said, “Yes, and his blood and brains

spattered over me...” (In Reno 1997: 182). The witness opined that he “Thought at the time it demoralized him [Reno] a great deal...” (In Reno 1997: 182). The implication being offered by some of Reno’s accusers was that a *psychological* failure translated into a failure in command and control that resulted in the battle’s loss and Custer’s death.

Compared to this psychological account, a semasiological account of Major Reno’s actions lead us to very different considerations and conclusions that demonstrate the cultural nature of dynamic embodiment. Given our earlier encounters with explanations of human social action that located the cause of action somewhere other than with the person, we have reason immediately to be suspicious of the psychological account. Psychologist James R. Averill (1996) notes that the West has developed a tradition of *associating* emotions with physiology based on preferred ethical symbolism rather than on science. For example the tradition of radically distinguishing between passion and reason dating back to the ancient Greeks leads to a conception of passion being located in “lower” organs while reason is located in “higher” organs. Such a hierarchy of organs has no proper scientific basis. As a consequence, the roles of cognition and society in shaping emotional behavior have been obscured. Averill’s position is that

Most emotional reactions are social constructions. On this assumption, the experience of passivity may be treated as a kind of illusion. Emotions are not something which just happen to an individual; rather, they are acts which a person performs. In the case of an emotion, however, the individual is unwilling or unable to accept responsibility for his actions; the initiation of the response is therefore dissociated from consciousness. [Averill 1996: 224]

Using Averill’s work, we can surmise that the psychological explanation of Major Reno’s actions has to do with the West’s cultural conventions about how one *could and should* act under stressful circumstances. The idea that the relationship between event and emotion is not automatic and necessary resonates with the agentic viewpoint of semasiology. Using semasiology, I suggest that we view “demoralized” and “unhinged” as *preferred Western action signs* associated with seeing another person shot in the head at close range. They are cultural conventions about how one *could and should* act under stressful circumstances. Their performance is an ethical matter of publicly recognizing the violation of the bodily integrity necessary for a valued other to exist and be a part of one’s life. Today we are familiar with these

performances being accompanied by still other conventional performances, such as facial expressions of horror and revulsion.

All these performances are traditionally based in the bio-reductive framework's conception of mechanical Stimulus-Response (S-R). Putatively, they signal the "impact" of the "shock" upon the nervous system and so bypass the person. A person cannot help but re-act automatically since it is not the person, but his or her bio-physiology that is doing the acting. In trumping self-control, an emotional response leads logically to the notion that one is focused not on what matters, *in this case* the military situation. Nor is one focused on intangible values like "duty to others." This amounts to a failure to act and lead according to the military situation. This seems to be the gist of Major Reno's detractors' arguments.

If, however, we adopt Averill's viewpoint and meld it with a semasiological framework—that such embodied emotional performances are cultural conventions linked to preferred ethical ways of being—then we are free to consider a social and conceptual rather than an individualistic and mechanical interpretation of Major Reno's actions. So freed, we can now listen to Major Reno the person, not Major Reno the emotion machine, describe his perception of his predominantly Siouxan opponents.

The Indians were peculiar in their manner of fighting; they don't go in line or bodies, but in parties of 5 to 40. You see them scattering in all directions.

Bloody Knife [Reno's Arikara scout] was within a few feet of me; I was trying to get from him by signs where the Indians were going. [In Reno 1997: 195-96]

Since it is apparent that Reno, like Bloody Knife, could *see* the Native Americans, Reno's professed ignorance of the Indians' direction must have been based not on a failure of perception, but on a failure of conception: he could not conceive of what the Native Americans intended by watching their movements.⁹ If, as a semasiological framework claims, military movements constitute ways of talking with one's body, then understanding dynamically embodied action-signs is a matter of *literacy*, of being able to read other's body movement. Critically, when faced with an alternative cultural system, Reno found himself illiterate.

Part of Reno's failure of conception must have been his lack of familiarity with military action that did not depend on a Western way of organizing soldiers. Western ways of organizing fighters into what Americans and Westerners would recognize as a "military formation" are

cultural conventions, and along with individual bodily movement, could be said to constitute a distinctive Western military movement dialect. Reno's problem with the multi-directionality of Native American movements was rooted in his own lived experience of fighting as part of a cohesive, hierarchical team with an identified leader and moving and fighting in a common direction with a common purpose. Orienting bodies toward the enemy while maintaining a linear formation, thus creating clear "front," "rear," and "side," was (and still often is) the norm. Enemies were always to be kept to the front where commanders could unify, concentrate, and so maximize the gunfire of their troops. The line would then advance toward, over, and through the enemy while, ideally, maintaining formation. Reno used this kind of formation for his soldiers at the Battle of the Little Bighorn. If, for him, the prescribed military convention of the linear alignment of his troops called for moving them in ways that kept an enemy to the "front," we can imagine how disconcerting it would be to see an enemy whose cultural conventions for fighting took fighters "sideways" or "rearward." This would make fighting impossible from Reno's point of view.¹⁰ Yet, Reno's men were being shot, wounded, and killed.

Before going deeper into the problem of how best to understand the claim of Major Reno's failure of responsibility and how best to interpret his actions, I want to solidify the semasiological point that body movement requires translation across cultures. If Major Reno was *illiterate* in the semiotics of Siouxan body movement, we should expect to find evidence of the reverse situation. Mari Sandoz provides just such an example, though unintentionally, in relating a story derived from oral histories of the life of the American Indian Chief Crazy Horse. She recounts that

Here Crazy Horse and He Dog got to know more about the trader's son called Grabber living with Sitting Bull. It seemed the Hunkpapas had found him near the forks of the Missouri several years ago, little more than a boy, standing waiting for the warriors with his hands raised high over his head. So he was named the Grabber, one who raises his hands as if grabbing for something.
[Sandoz 1992: 263]

The Hunkpapa Sioux Indian warriors were culturally illiterate with respect to the action-sign of "surrender" enacted by the half-Anglo Grabber.

Returning to the case of Major Reno, it seems to me that he was neither "demoralized" nor "unhinged" by having Bloody Knife killed quite near to him and having the scout's blood

and brains spattered on him. I think that Major Reno's psychology was and is given inordinate weight because of a) the unmarked but prevalent assumption of the mechanical and necessary relationship between stimulus and response (already institutionalized in principle if not in these exact terms in the late 19th century), and b) the cultural conventions associating some emotional performances with ethical requirements for enacting proper personhood, which, in turn, leads to an *expectation* of such performances occurring. Since there is a large, deep gap between "*could* and *should*" perform 'demoralized'" and "*did* perform 'demoralized'," it is my sense that "a" above carries the weight of objections voiced by Major Reno's detractors. How so? The overall evidence of how Reno actually acted is equivocal at worst and in Reno's favor at best (after all that portion of the U.S. Seventh Cavalry under his command was not destroyed). The main objection by Reno's detractors—chiefly Custer's wife Libby and a powerful newspaper reporter friend—was that Reno made no serious attempt *to save Custer*. Reno, however, had made the military judgment, which militarily he was entitled to make, that charging through the vast camp of Indians as Custer had ordered him to do would have resulted in the destruction of his command. This judgment was exercised after Custer had split his portion of the Seventh Cavalry off from Reno's.

One way to make a case against Reno is to use assumptions of a mechanical, necessary relationship between external stimulus and internal response to generate unanswerable charges. This shifts attention from contrary evidence including Reno's *success* in saving his portion of the Seventh Cavalry from complete destruction and refocuses it on the individual. We should pause to recognize, of course, that the contradiction represented by Reno's detractors to blame him for the necessary operation of his biopsychology replicates the contradiction between description and explanation to which this study is directed. On another level, it is interesting to note that Major Reno was in a difficult position—should he have tried to claim that his visceral experience of Bloody Knife's death did not affect him at all, he might have opened himself to charges of, in 19th century terminology, "cold indifference" or "callousness," and so branded a "monster"

A semasiological perspective suggests that regardless of the status or consequences of Major Reno's actions, his performances were his choice, not an automated response of his physiology. In my estimation, the greater interpretive weight should be given to a socio-cultural explanation of any supposed defects in Major Reno's military actions. Without an understanding of the cultural ways in which his opponents were using their bodies, Reno's ability to be

proactive was circumscribed. He became more reactive and so adopted defensive tactics as a way to protect his command from events he could neither predict nor control.¹¹

These considerations expose the strong allegiance to offensive tactics throughout the existence of the American military, especially among formally trained officers. Custer was an exemplar of such tactics because *they worked*. The basic principle is that what the enemy is doing is, in a way, *irrelevant*, if they have no time to react to an organized, powerful attack. The pursuit of surprise and overwhelming force is a way to end battles quickly, and Custer was a whole-hearted proponent of offensive tactics. This was one important reason why Custer sought to attack a camp consisting of *thousands* of Indians with around seven *hundred* men. Against this outlook and context, the use of defensive tactics, despite their military necessity (in my estimation, and Reno's), would have seemed "cowardly."

Cultural Conventions about Cultural Conventions: What A Semasiological Approach Reveals about Fear and Courage

I have spent considerable space clarifying the relationship of psychological emotions to embodied military action for a particular reason: I want to introduce the idea that a semasiological approach permits us to appreciate deeply that the Western and American conventions about fighting commits combat infantry to very specific views about space and direction. These views about space and direction *are, in turn, the basis for certain emotional performances the invitation to which combat infantry must refuse*. We saw that Major Reno was disconcerted if not confused by (by his own admission) the way his opponents moved. The act of being disconcerted or confused is a cultural convention about how to act in just such situations. The embodied performance of confusion—lack of speed in formulating a plan of action, lack of clarity in orders to subordinates, and so on—is consequent to the way Major Reno was taught to fight, indeed, what he was taught constituted fighting *per se*. For Americans and Westerners generally, violation of cultural conceptions and expectations about what constitutes fighting invites an emotional performance. This too is a cultural convention.

Consider a startling parallel to Major Reno's *experience* during the Battle of the Little Big Horn in 1876. As background, we should note that the linear formations used by Major Reno, have, in the modern world, given way to dispersed formations of soldiers who train to

fight in “disorderly battlefields” brought about by “the range and lethality of modern weapons” (*Warfighting* 2007: 11). The invitation to performances of “disconcerted” and “confused” have not, however, disappeared. In Afghanistan in 2006 a Taliban ambush of British soldiers took place that was later described by two of the participants in a video documentary. According to Major “Paddy” Blair, the ambush

started slowly around us, and then it builds up to a crescendo of fire another couple of groups popped up all around us and started engaging us from different directions the platoon to my front probably had 3 or 4 groups each of about 4 or 5 Taliban engaging them from different directions. [In McNab 2008]

A sniper in Blair’s unit, Lance Corporal Kyle Deerans comments on his experience of the small groups of Taliban attacking from multiple directions (must like Reno’s Sioux opponents)

At stages you could see movement and the Taliban they’d literally as you lifted your rifle up to take aim again they were gone we couldn’t see exactly where they were going they were moving left and right and then they would just disappear they were there and then they were gone. [In McNab 2008]

In his interview, Deerans conveyed a sense of frustration as well as some confusion about the lethal situation in which he and his unit were involved. I want to suggest that Deerans’s frustration and slight confusion were the result of his inability to conceptualize a response to fluidity and multi-directionality of the Taliban fighters’ attacks, just like Reno. Snipers, after all, need to achieve a laser-like focus in a single direction. This achievement requires that other considerations be put out of focal awareness, such as monitoring how a larger, fluid situation is developing. I think, then, that the source of Deerans’s frustration was his inability to exercise the agentic capabilities that he was trained to exercise—the Western way of fighting—as well as that provided his identity, purpose, and relevance to his group of comrades.¹² The circumscription of Deerans’ agency was achieved by the intelligent refusal of the Taliban fighters to move in ways that subjected them either to the individual or the concentrated firepower of the British soldiers. Deerans, literally, had no one to shoot at given his training on how to acquire a target and shoot at it.

I hasten to add that the grounds for my interpretation of Deerans’s as being frustrated are *not* fully evident in Deerans’s words, but rather in his facial expressions, the tone of his voice,

and the small and variable but discernable variations in his bodily posture and head alignment while he struggled to describe and explain his experience in the documentary. In this ethnographic case, the meaning Deerans seeks to have us understand does not fully emerge in his words *per se* but rather in his use of his body to perform the emotional content he wants us to appreciate.¹³ A full appreciation of his meaning *requires* seeing and hearing the dynamics of his embodied presentation. It also requires a conception of how bodily movements such as “stable posture” can and do constitute meanings like “encouraged” and “unafraid” that then result in a comment about Deerans like “I saw him pull himself together” offered by a British photojournalist that accompanied Deerans’ unit during the ambush. Overcoming the conventional invitation to focus on the self and one’s own frustration or confusion, *that is, on how one feels, constitutes* the act of valuing *others* and the values that underwrite one’s identity and way of life. In achieving a stable posture, Deerans rendered himself effective and killed a Taliban fighter. Though the results of this achievement are many and can vary according to the onlooker, I suggest that two of the more important are that Deerans helped his unit to live and that he aligned himself with those values for which he and his unit collectively pledged themselves to live or die.

Summary of Semasiological Theory

What lessons or principles can be drawn from the close consideration of military movement in cultural contexts using semasiology? The shift in conceptual schema from behavioral-mechanical to agentic-creative permits anthropologists to see human agency in action. Human beings are active and the mode of that activity is language use. In addressing the “double hermeneutic,” anthropologists creating grammars of ethnographic representation can avoid two major pitfalls. First, it is not legitimate, because it is not scientifically plausible, to overtly or covertly re-assign the capability of producing socio-cultural worlds through social, semiotic practices to human biology (the “instincts” and “genes” of evolutionary psychologists), human culture (the social structure of Durkheim), or any other entity, real or putatively real, that is not built to generate semiotic activity. Human beings are uniquely capable of that activity based on their unique biological structure. Second, it is not legitimate, because it is not scientifically plausible, to simply claim that human agency exists. Required is a clear statement

of theoretical framework that connects perception with conception and vice versa via a robust understanding of causal powers and the corollary to that understanding: for human beings the cultural subsumes the biological (but does not and cannot simply ignore it).

The semasiological viewpoint emerging from this conceptual shift permits anthropologists to see human beings as dynamically embodied. Human social action is primarily discursive, now understood as including both vocal and gestural modalities. Depending on the situation, one or the other of these modalities may be primary, fundamentally modify the other, or even be in conflict with the other. Semiotic practices are action-signs. That is, (using the military context) the different ways soldiers move entails commitment to a value position, parallel to the way in which a soldier might state his or her allegiance to a particular value using vocalized words and sentences. These embodied value commitments are idiomatic, dialectical sub-cultural conventions. Through the ways in which they move, soldiers have real effects in the social worlds of persons. By implication, those who can understand the particular idiom or dialect of a movement language appreciate more deeply and more clearly the meanings being made. This stands in stark contrast to the traditional Western view that “nonverbal” behavior lacks both “language and mind” (Farnell 1999: 346).

Farnell and Varela place the semasiological perspective in a helpful context, comparing it to objectivist and phenomenological approaches to embodiment.

We can observe that in traditional disembodied social theory there is talk *about* the observed body from an objectivist intellectualist standpoint (e.g. symbolic/structural anthropology, psychoanalysis, Durkheimian sociology). In the predominant dissenting tradition of *embodied* social theory in the first somatic revolution, there is talk *of* the experienced body from a subjectivist lived standpoint (e.g., the Jackson-Csordas paradigm). Finally, in *dynamically embodied* social theory there is “talk” *from* the moving body (an agentist enactment standpoint). Here we have the basis from which we can better identify the first somatic revolution in social science theory. The Csordas-Jackson paradigm was a revolt against the deterministic reduction of the human body to a mechanical system: behaviourism, psychoanalysis and naturalistic sociology, were different ways to theorize that reified conception of human somatics. [Farnell and Varela 2008: 218]

The objectivist approach, talk *about* the body, is implicit in the bio-reductive framework, and we encountered a number of the deleterious and inhumane consequences. Talk *of* the body, the

subjectivist approach, is a more humane approach but also results in negative consequences.

U.S. Marine Colonel Bryan P. McCoy in *The Passion of Command* wrote

As for killing the enemy, I never had and never will have remorse for that. In fact, I drew gratification from it then and still do. But that doesn't stem from blood lust; it is more akin to the satisfaction a sheep dog must feel after having successfully defended the flock from a predator. An embedded reporter asked me after a firefight in Afak, during which I killed two enemy fighters attempting to fire into our flank [the vulnerable side of the Marine unit], how I felt about it. My response was no more profound than an expression of having been 'proficient' at an everyday task, a business transaction. Now, nearly two years removed from that day, my feelings have not changed.

I...saw children maimed and killed. I, however, did not feel anything, nor was I moved to act. I abandoned what may have been my duty as a fellow human being and continued forward into the attack, doing my duty as a commander.

My indifference to suffering had been nothing more than a stone mask, an emotional flak jacket to prevent such pitiful scenes from robbing my body and mind of the precious energy and conviction I needed to keep my own men alive. [McCoy 2006: 73]

In the context of being a warrior, a combat infantryman, McCoy's feelings are, during and after combat, *not the point*. In fact regard for talk of the body is strictly prohibited since potentially detracts from the commanders ability to focus on the infantry for whom he is responsible. To understand combat and courageous action then is not about understanding subjective talk of the body because it has no place in the embodied conversation that occurs on the battlefield, at least for McCoy.¹⁴

Since talk from the body is in fact a conversation, it requires translation, just like any vocalization. Until we understand the concepts and values that inform it, watching McCoy and his Marines run *past* wounded Marines to engage enemy fighters would, perhaps, be unfathomable and deeply contradictory of a perspective informed by everyday American, civilian mores. Similarly, as with vocalized discourse, a proper anthropological approach seeks to understand embodied discourse from the standpoint of the actors first, and then generates translations, interpretations, and conclusions. We do not *need* to hear how McCoy felt or did not feel *about* his combat experience in order to understand his military identity. Instead, we need to hear, or, rather, *see* the values he enacts socially and dynamically with his body. With embodied discourse, then, it is not enough to simply videotape or photograph movement. Instead, we need

a movement script that locks observed movement to the observer's conceptual and value orientations. With such a script, we are less likely to gloss over important, moved cultural meanings.

From a semasiological perspective, explaining human social action means understanding human semiotic practices in light of conventions, values, and social rules of a particular cultural milieu. Some good questions to start with are “What are the “rules” for being a person that matters to the members of the local cultural milieu? Are the rules malleable? What is the range of resources for being a person in the local cultural milieu?” Answers to these questions are a matter of meaning-laden reasons and values, not mechanical causes and species survival. While these answers can be descriptive, their explanatory content of necessity includes an ontological statement of what exists. Explaining the social actions of the central African shaman has to do with, at minimum, the local culture's understanding of the capabilities and liabilities of an *mbwiri* (malevolent spirit). *But*, it is also a question of what the researcher adds to the local culture's self-understanding. After all, not all cultural members philosophically reflect on their lives, they just live them and in this sense they may be wrong about what is going on. Moreover, if a researcher is simply repeating an informant why not skip the middleman and simply talk to the informant?

As the philosopher of social science, Peter T. Manicas states

An ethnographic (and hermeneutic) moment is essential to grasping a social mechanism, but as Weber had long since noted, it was but the first step in social scientific inquiry. That is, while we need to understand the social world as its members understand it, we need to go beyond this and to consider the adequacy of their understanding of their world. Since social process is the product of our activity, and since members may well *misunderstand* their world, social science is potentially emancipatory. [Manicas 2006: 4].

In this light, it is important to realize that the researcher *should* take a position on, in this case, the question of whether or not an *mbwiri* actually exists. Of course a detailed ethnography will require a position be taken if it aspires to anything more than simply re-description: it will be apparent in how the researcher represents the social milieu of the central African shaman. This does not mean that the researcher is denigrating the beliefs of shamans, but rather accounting for them given the fact of her own cultural standpoint, which, in the West, must depend on realism if simple re-description is to be avoided.

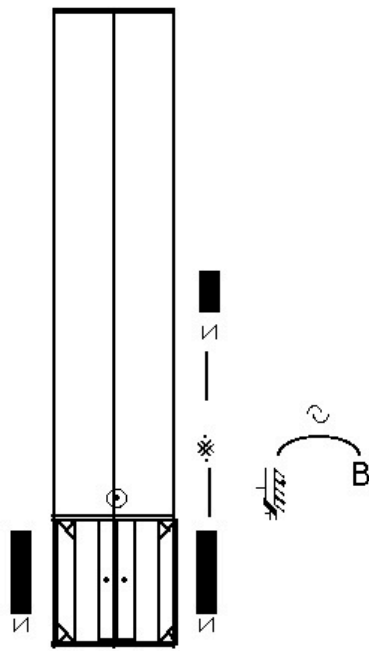
Figures



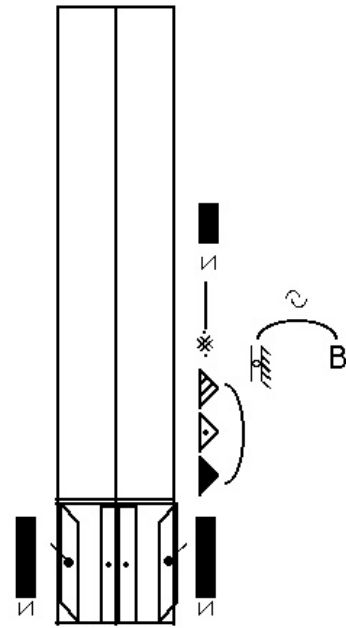
Figure 2: U.S. Marine Corporal Casey Owens Saluting¹⁵



Figure 3: American Marine Corporal Casey Owens and British Army Lieutenant Colonel Patrick Sanders¹⁶



B = Outer right brim of cap



B = Outer right brim of cap

Figure 4: Labanotated American (left) and British (right) salutes

¹ Alternative but implausible or insufficient conceptions of human movement as it relates to human social action include the assumption of universal human gestures in the behaviorism of visual anthropologist J.H. Prost (1975, 1996) and the idea of bodily experience separate from or prior to socio-linguistic concepts in the phenomenology of socio-cultural anthropologists Jo Lee and Tim Ingold (2006).

² E.g., Aronson, Harré, and Way (1995), Bhaskar (2008), Bunge (2001), Harré (1986), Keat and Urry (1975), Manicas (1991), and Shotter (1994)

³ Farnell (1999) identifies the Western Platonic-Cartesian notion of the person as a dualistic entity as a discourse that reflects and propagates the ontological mistake of assuming that matter is inert and the scientific mistake of violating the integrity of naturally occurring wholes, such as “the human person.” She writes,

Generally speaking, the Western model of person provides a conception of mind as the internal, nonmaterial locus of rationality, thought, language, and knowledge. In opposition to this, the body is regarded as the mechanical, sensate, material locus of irrationality and feeling. After Darwin (1872), such physicality has most often been understood as natural rather than cultural, a survival of our animal past perhaps. [Farnell 1999: 345-346]

With the bifurcation of mind and body embedded in the assumption of the inertness of matter, the search for what “motivates” human social action is open-ended and impossible to resolve *in principle*, but the West identifies language-use both as a symptom of what makes us uniquely human and associates it with “mind,” not “body” since bodies are, essentially, inert. *Vocal* language use becomes a symptom of our powerful, intangible “spirit,” an entity not subject to the inertness or mechanical determinism otherwise thought to rule the natural world. Farnell points out that

In Western academia, this bifurcation has led to a valorization of spoken and written signs as “real” knowledge, internal to the reasoning mind of the solipsistic individual, to the exclusion of other semiotic (i.e., meaning-making) practices, thereby bifurcating intelligent activities. This, in turn, has produced a radical disjunction between verbal and so-called nonverbal aspects of communication in our meta-linguistic discourse. [Farnell 1999: 346]

It is in this historical context of Western ideas that both Farnell and Williams claim that “many people simply do not *see* movement, and, although they see signifying acts (such as turn signals, face slapping or greeting gestures), they rarely connect these to movement (Williams 2003: 4).

⁴ By “system of signs” Farnell means the network of cultural conventions that assign to movements and to vocalizations as people make sense of their lives and generate valued life ways. It is worth highlighting Farnell’s conception since it differs radically from some ethnographic conceptions. Farnell’s use does *not* refer to a “system” as conceived by, for example, Anthropology and Cultural Studies Professor Roger N. Lancaster in his book *Life is Hard: Machismo, Danger, and the Intimacy of Power in Nicaragua* (1992). He writes that

Forms of consciousness are precisely what machismo, as a “field of productive relations,” produces...

Lancaster thinks that “fields of productive relations” are systems of power relations, and

Because systems function as *systems*, operating by and reproducing their own logic—no less in the personalities of people than in the realm of international commerce—the relations they engender are not easily redefined, even by deliberate, self-conscious efforts. [Lancaster 1992: 20]

Lancaster’s conception of “system” suggests that the power to bring a system into existence is in the system itself. People are somehow apart from the system and so their agency in terms of changing it is circumscribed. Scientifically, this conception of system applied to the socio-cultural life of persons, is implausible because it assigns causal powers to a non-material, extra-personal entity that does not exist as Lancaster supposes. In anthropology this mistake is commonly known as “reification.” But, as Varela (2003) argues, the problem with reification is *not* concretizing an abstraction, but rather assigning causal powers to an abstraction.

Lancaster’s misconception of “system,” like other examples of ethnographic reification, leads to representations of persons as impotent victims. Lancaster states “Nicaraguans themselves remain trapped in a discourse not of their own invention, unable to break the circuit of logorrhea” (1992: 230). “Logorrhea” is Barthes’s neologism denoting “an uncontrolled torrent of speech.” Being trapped and subject to the “imperialism of the [linguistic] sign” means that Nicaraguans are doomed to keep living the racist social order bequeathed to them by Spanish colonizers—even to the point of loving their darker-skinned children in a way that is conditioned by a sense of defeatist resignation to the “fact” of the lessened social stature of those children (Lancaster 1992: 229). The ethnographic misrepresentation of persons here is not that Nicaraguans do not regard their darker

skinned children less, but that Lancaster's presentation implies that are *not* to be held responsible for that activity given that their social relationships are determined by an impersonal system. I think anthropologist Sherry Ortner sought (impotently) to avoid just this sense of "system" as a deterministic characteristic of human social life.

⁵ (<http://www.qmmuseum.lee.army.mil/history/vignettes/respect1.html>)

⁶ During the summer of 2008 I attended a meeting between the commanding Brigadier General of the British Royal Marines Commando training school and the Director of the U.S. Marine Corps Martial Arts Center of Excellence. The point of the meeting was to solidify plans to exchange personnel to better understand training principles and goals in each program.

⁷ Labanotation permits the researcher to identify features of movement in two ways. First, the researcher can pick out and call specific attention to movement that is important from the standpoint of informants. Second, the researcher can pick out and call specific attention to movement or components of movement that are important for the researcher's analytical and explanatory purposes *without collapsing one into the other*. For both American and British soldiers, the salute *as a whole* may be of primary importance while the researcher notices the subtle but ethnographically important and culturally definitive difference in the orientation of the palm. Both, however, are clearly represented in the Labanotation. In these aspects, Labanotation differs radically from the attempt to graphically represent movement found in, for example, Gell's *Style and Meaning in Umeda Dance* (1985). Gell develops "an 'observer's model' ... within which relationships between [patterns of movement] can be made explicit" that "reduces Umeda dance movements simply to movements of the leg, seen sideways on" aimed at "uncovering gross features of the shapes produced by plotting Umeda dance movements on to graphs" (1985: 185, 187, 188). There are at least two major problems here. First, Gell's "observationist" standpoint is clearly his, not that of his informants, which necessarily limits the representation to what he alone thinks is important. Do the Umeda, for example, place some substantive emphasis or generate special meanings with the movements of their legs? We do not know, and we *cannot* know give Gell's approach. This gives rise to the second problem: Gell has no way to justify why we should pay attention to the "gross features" of the *shapes produced by plotting*. Umeda leg movements are plotted as a function the angles of bent knees and bent legs. But since we have no way of knowing whether or not those functional relationships capture anything of semiotic importance to the Umeda, there is no way for Gell to protect himself from the charge of masquerading an artifact of his graphing as ethnographic data about the Umeda. For example, it might be the case that for the Umeda, angles are irrelevant compared to, say, the *speed* of achievement of those angles.

⁸ Note that "coolly" and "unhinged" are individual terms that summarize the observers assessment of the quality of Reno's actions *both vocally and bodily*. That is, these terms reference in substantive ways the ways Reno moved and did not move as well as the ways he did and did not vocalize.

⁹ In the same was Harrington could not see the plane landing on the Hudson or Marion could not see the crawling Japanese soldiers as part of a patrol.

¹⁰ Two other witnesses during the battle described the Sioux way of fighting: "As a rule they fired from their horses, *scampered around* and pumped their Winchester rifles into us" (*In Reno 1997: 178*); and "Indians are individual fighters; each one has his own way of doing it" (*In Reno 1997: 179*). Rather than the individual, most Western militaries historically have used at least two soldiers trained to operate as a single entity as the basic unit for warfighting.

¹¹ In the United States, the traditional outlook has been that defensive tactics are to be avoided unless absolutely necessary. Such tactics have been historically associated with timidity rather than aggressiveness. Custer's style was aggressive. Such tactics can and often did work. In my judgment this is one of the reasons why Major Reno and Lieutenant Colonel Custer could have been, until the Battle of the Little Big Horn, successful inter-cultural fighters: the speed and firepower achieved by organized multi-person teams with a unified purpose and shared commitment overwhelmed more individualistic enemies. Also in my judgment this same quality is one of the principle reasons Major Reno found himself in the predicament he did: in his haste to attack and in his (over)confidence in aggressive attacks, Custer underestimated, discounted, or ignored the danger associated with the sheer number of Sioux warriors and their allies.

¹² In modern warfare, another way that circumscription of the enemy's agency is achieved is through firing at the general location of a target. Even if the fire is not all that accurate, the perceived volume and directedness (at you!) of fire can hold soldiers in place. In McNab's Tour of Duty video, another British Paratrooper, Sergeant Major Mick Bolton described being "pinned down,"

I was in a ditch and there was rounds you see it on the films the explosions all around you [unintelligible] I couldn't move the O.C. was shouting for me and I just couldn't move I was pinned down we were starting to get encircled by Taliban I could see them some of them were like 20 meters away [unintelligible] started getting his kit out I said pack it away we haven't got time whatever we get we're gonna get rolled up here and if we don't move here we're all gonna die here. [In McNab

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YUp02m_duBw&feature=PlayList&p=09CD20B60EF04D7C&index=12&playnext=3&playnext_from=PL_00:00-00:30

¹³ Here are two relevant clips from the program

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DBv_iw4zhFw&feature=PlayList&p=09CD20B60EF04D7C&index=11&playnext=2&playnext_from=PL_ The locations are 4:28-4:33 and 5:59-6:15.

¹⁴ This insight has direct implications for an American civilian perception of dedicated military members as emotionally cold, unfeeling, and heartless.

¹⁵ <http://www.talkingproud.us/ImagesPhotoGallery/Patriot/MarineSalutesInjured.jpg>

¹⁶ <http://www.talkingproud.us/ImagesPhotoGallery/Patriot/MarineSalutesInjured.jpg> and <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-479745/Basra-handover-defeat-insists-PM-Brown.html>

CHAPTER 6

CONTEXT: THE UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS AND THE MARTIAL ARTS CENTER OF EXCELLENCE

The thought manifests as the word; the word manifests as the deed;
The deed develops into habit; and habit hardens into character.
-- *The Buddha*

I have focused so far on developing the concepts necessary for a scientifically and philosophically plausible ethnography of the embodied value ‘courage’ among American Marine combat infantry. The necessity comes from the realization that to see and understand phenomena, whether occurrences in the natural world like “continental drift” or in the social world like “an insult,” requires appropriate conceptual resources of how those events are caused and how they then cause other events in the physical and social worlds respectively. Rigorous analytical study of the phenomena of human movement requires the right conceptual resources. The right concepts include the scientific and philosophical idea that (1) human beings as persons are uniquely capable among the organic life forms on the planet to use both vocal and gestural language to generate meaning interactively, (2) the competent use of both vocal and gestural language both creates and depends on irreducibly social and cultural contexts to generate meaning, and (3) a recognition that the researcher *will* take a position on the adequacy of his consultants’ view of their social world regardless of any overt intention to do so. This implies that the researcher is morally responsible for, in turn, the adequacy of the theoretical framework he choose to generate that position.

For the ethnographic component of this project this means that dynamically embodied persons are the only plausible, existing entities to which we can attribute the capability and so capability of producing the diverse socio-cultural milieu that includes “courageous action.” The classic mistake in Western social science has been to ascribe the power to produce the human social world to entities that are scientifically implausible and so freakish such as a psychological unconscious, a biological instinct or DNA, a social fact, or a cultural rule. This chapter then

focuses on the use of the right scientific and philosophical concepts to rigorously analyze the ethnographic context and detail of Marine combat training.

I intend to show that the Marine Corps is a special kind of sub-culture, purpose- and value-driven in definitive ways based on their encounter with killing, life, and death. As we might expect, the purpose and values of the Corps is evident in the activities of the local sub-cultural unit in which I undertook my field research, the Martial Arts Center of Excellence in Quantico, Virginia and they constitute a critical context for the generation of meaning. That is, the purposes and values of the larger cultural organization enable the generation of meaning in vocal and gestural discourse. This constitutes an application of Farnell's "system of signs."

It is a social scientific truism and so to be kept in mind that the semiotic practices of members may or may not be aligned with the overt purposes and values expressed in and through the larger organization. The converse is also a truism, that organizations often have informal "rules" of conduct as well as formal rules. Informal rules may not only spring from a single person but may actually be more important or more "valued" in some situations than the formal rules. Careful analysis and judgment needs to be exercised in such cases since some values that are formally disapproved remain sanctioned informally both by local actors and the larger organization itself. An example of the latter would be a Marine engaging in a formally prohibited act which is recognized by the organization but nevertheless goes unpunished. An example in the same vein that has puzzled me for a great while is, given the near-religious commitment to teamwork in the American military, why do Americans and even the military generally value the actions of individuals over units in our moral hierarchy? In popular and military thought, accounts of Congressional Medal of Honor recipients eclipse accounts of Presidential Unit Citation recipients.

I will structure my analysis using the semasiological principle of "nesting," which is illustrated in Figure 5 (see Figures section at the end of this chapter). At this point most of my analysis will be located at levels IX through V. For the sake of efficiency in presentation, I will not draw specific one-to-one correspondences between my topical material and the charted level in the text. My goal is to provide a detailed analysis of the relevant context in order to conduct a detailed analysis of action—at levels IV through I—in the next chapter. There I will examine how dynamically embodied movement in context *is* courage.

The United States Marine Corps: Warfighting as Purpose for Existence

The United States Marine Corps (USMC) is America's "quick reaction force," meaning that the purpose of the organization is designed to be capable of "intervening" anywhere in the world within a matter of days.¹ The USMC website characterizes the Corps as the

First to fight, ready to win battles in the air, on land and at sea.

When our nation's commitment to democracy is challenged, when our national interests are threatened, in times of international disaster, crisis or war, the Marine Corps is ready. We will be first on the scene, first to help and first to fight. For this, we have earned the reputation as "America's 911 Force" — our nation's first line of defense. The Marine Corps is ready to respond on the ground, in the air and by sea. [http://www.marines.com/main/index/making_marines/culture/traditions/first_to_fight]

While the Marine Corps is capable of intervention in an "international disaster," I want to argue that that capability is an offshoot of the Corps' primary purpose: warfighting. Marines do not train primarily to provide relief for international disasters instead they train primarily to win wars. The discipline and organization of Marines to fight is the bedrock on which effectiveness in disaster relief is predicated. Marines leverage some aspects of capabilities developed in the service of warfighting to meet the demands of roles other than warfighting.

If warfighting is the primary purpose, what is war to the Marine Corps? During my fieldwork, one of the Marine leaders of the training program in which I took part alerted me to the small volume called *Warfighting* (2007) that was, in his view, a concise summary of the Marines' approach to war. In it, the Corps defines war as "a violent struggle between two hostile, independent, and irreconcilable wills, each trying to impose itself on the other." The Marines assert simply and directly that war is fundamentally an interactive social process focused on dominating the enemy, meaning other persons. *Warfighting* warns Marines that it is critical to keep in mind that "the enemy is not an inanimate object to be acted upon but an independent and animate force with its own objectives and plans" (United States Marine Corps 2007:3-4). This warning directly references one of the main points of this study's theoretical position: to think that people are inert is a fundamental error. In war, this kind of error gets you killed. The Corps' terminology in their warning is a bit strange, however, particularly the use of the pronoun "its." We know that terminology and convention in the use of English permits if not

invites its users to turn intangible ideas into “things,” and “things” into empirical “problems” to be “solved” (Whorf 1956). Speculatively, then, the use of the term indexes the strong tendency in the American military to objectify the other as part of a strategy to focus on the practical and utilitarian in warfare *even as the Corps warns Marines not to objectify the enemy!* On this analysis, for the Corps to really honor its commitment to being realists in their assessment of and engagement with real world conflicts, it should use the term “his” or “her” instead of the term “its” and “person” not “force” (or, “the force of persons”) to characterize the enemy. Only persons, not forces, can be animate in relation to “owning” objectives and plans. The Corps’ advice, nevertheless, belies its realism: *other creative, intelligent, causally powerful people with purposes and values* are the source of, and so the problem in, warfighting.

The constitution of the Corps itself is symptomatic of its warfighting purpose. That constitution is oriented toward the principled management and application of violence. The Corps states, “It is through the use of violence, or the credible threat of violence, that we compel our enemy to do our will. Violence is an essential element of war and its immediate result is bloodshed, destruction, and suffering” (United States Marine Corps 2007: 14). As one Marine Instructor-Trainer, Staff Sergeant Wilder, stated during a training class on “The Warrior Mindset” being a Marine is being a warrior and being a warrior is “being a Marine in combat.” According to SSgt. Wilder, all human dimensions of being a Marine center on this grounding principle (Fieldnotes, July 2, 2007). The use of the Corps in an “intervention” therefore presumes that the target situation is dangerous, threatening, overtly hostile, or, potentially so.

This combination of organizational purpose and member identity permits an important realization: even if the situation is not dangerous or potentially dangerous to begin with, the presence of armed Marines *makes it so*. Combat and the potential for combat is assumed *and generated* by the Marine Corps. At minimum, in, for example, a disaster relief scenario, an intervention entails ensuring the security of the Marines themselves. Establishing security further presumes using force or the threat of force as a counter to actual or potential violence in the target situation.² Again, the Corps assumes the potential for, if not the likelihood of, violence and combat. We can conclude that the potential and likelihood is generated by the mere presence of the Corps in an environment.

The imposition of will on any scale, however, from two to two million, in any situation from disaster relief to war, assumes the ability to *control* the will of others. This can be

accomplished in many different ways, as *Warfighting* (2007) implies. Through force, for example, by making “the enemy helpless to resist us by physically destroying his military capabilities” (United States Marine Corps 2007: 24-25).³ The Marines call this *attrition*. Control can also be achieved through force *or the threat of force* to “convince the enemy that accepting our terms will be less painful than continuing to resist” (United States Marine Corps 2007: 25). The Marines call this *erosion*. Importantly, gaining control or imposing their will on others tacitly indexes a specific *kind* of physical location: land. The Marines’ mission calls for being prepared in three kinds of environments, but, I would argue, their primary focus is on land since it is on land that, quite simply, socio-political will is based. In short, enemy persons live their culture existentially but live *materially* on land. *Influencing* the enemy’s agency in the form of their socio-politics can be accomplished in the air and on the sea, but *controlling* it must be accomplished on land.

We can appreciate this tacit focus in the fact that Marine air and sea forces are designed to *support* the organization’s primary task of being able to control people on land. The mission of the non-infantry components of the Corps, such as the Marine Air Wing, is “to support ground forces in support of the mission.”⁴ By contrast, consider the mission of the U.S. Air Force, which is to “fly, fight and win...in air, space and cyberspace.”⁵ Even more indicative of this tacit focus is the Corps’ requirement that all enlisted Marines receive training as riflemen and all officers receive training as infantry platoon leaders *regardless of their job or Military Occupational Specialty (MOS)*.⁶ The tagline used to capture this approach is, “Every Marine a rifleman.” As a result, even cooks are trained to take on the role, if necessary, of infantry and learn to cooperate with twelve other Marines in physically approaching and eliminating enemy positions using rifles, machine guns, hand grenades, and other close combat weapons. Similarly, all officers, including helicopter pilots for example, are trained to lead a platoon of about forty Marines in the same task.⁷

We should note that in requiring every Marine to be capable of infantry fighting, the Marine Corps is requiring that every Marine be prepared to, as Marine Colonel and infantry combat veteran Bryan P. McCoy succinctly describes it, “violently close with the enemy” (2006: 78). A good place to start investigating this concept of “violently closing with the enemy” is to elaborate the Corps’ two main ways of establishing control: *attrition* and *erosion*. The Corps seems to be inviting us to think that warfighting is mostly about the *physical* processes of

“reducing in numbers” and “eating away.” The Corps’ conceptualization of warfighting, however, contradicts this invitation.

Various aspects of war fall principally in the realm of science, which is the methodical application of the empirical laws of nature. The science of war includes those activities directly subject to the laws of ballistics, mechanics, and like disciplines; for example, the application of fires, the effects of weapons, and the rates and methods of movement and resupply. However, science does not describe the whole phenomenon.

An even greater part of the conduct of war falls under the realm of art, which is the employment of creative or intuitive skills. Art includes the creative situational application of scientific knowledge through judgment and experience, and so the art of war subsumes the science of war. The art of war requires the intuitive ability to grasp the essence of a unique military situation and the creative ability to devise a practical solution. It involves conceiving strategies and tactics and developing plans of action to suit a given situation. This still does not describe the whole phenomenon. Owing to the vagaries of human behavior and the countless other intangible factors which influence war, there is far more to its conduct than can be explained by art and science. Art and science stop short of explaining the fundamental dynamics of war.

War is a social phenomenon. Its essential dynamic is the dynamic of competitive human interaction rather than the dynamic of art or science. Human beings interact with each other in ways that are fundamentally different from the way a scientist works with chemicals or formulas or the way an artist works with paints or musical notes. It is because of this dynamic of human interaction that fortitude, perseverance, boldness, esprit, and other traits not explainable by art or science are so essential in war. *We thus conclude that the conduct of war is fundamentally a dynamic process of human competition requiring both the knowledge of science and the creativity of art but driven ultimately by the power of human will.* [United States Marine Corps 2007: 18-19]

According to the Corps, attrition and erosion are brought into existence by and subject to, in realist scientific terms, the *agency* of Marines themselves as they seek to combine knowledge of the empirical world with creative use of their intelligence to meet the challenges of fighting conceived as a competitive social interaction. “Will,” at least as the Marines are using it, is a traditional Western codeword for “agency.”

In this light the Marines are using the term *attrition*, or reduction in numbers, in a literal sense to denote the destruction of tangible objects like soldiers, missiles, radar stations, and so forth. The Marines are referring to the basic scientific fact that loss of physical integrity means the loss of the capability for action by physical objects (including human bodies), depending on

which particular parts of what kind of object are lost and on the extent of the loss. With *erosion*, or eating away, however, the Marines are using the term metaphorically. That is, “eating away” is a physical process applied to the social-psychological process of undermining the enemy’s “will to fight,” for example by reducing the number of his friends, eliminating his ability to communicate with other units or commanders, or destroying his weaponry. To be clear, the Marines cannot mean that they *directly* undermine the enemy’s will to exercise her agency against American Marines, as if there was a mechanical causal relationship between their actions and the erosion of the enemy’s will; rather, non-physical failure to exercise agency is symptomatic of a *choice* on the part of the enemy to cease resisting to do what the Marines want them to do (or not do as the case may be).

When a situation becomes overtly threatening or violent on any scale from two individuals to two million, the discursive framework becomes one of “challenge to control,” which calls into question the what the Corps thinks are the bases for individual action: the physical, mental, and character qualities of the Marine.⁸ Combat, we can conclude, is personal in the sense that it is about the exercise of agency in an idiom of embodied violence by the individual against other individuals. Combat is about deciding whose purposes and values will determine the socio-political reality of a locality, whether that locality is a patch of sand behind a house in Iraq or an entire country like Afghanistan. Combat, then, is a question of political freedom that mandates, and is based on, the resolution of the question of ontological freedom.

I should note that this does not mean that Marines automatically start killing people once the discursive framework of personal challenge emerges, as a Stimulus-Response (S-R) framework would have us believe. Rather, the Corps’ takes seriously the notion that the personal agency of Marines through its realist approach to agency is informed by its conceptions of warfighting as social, and of social situations as fluid. That is, what people, Marines, and situations mean can change, remains stable, or be in some ambiguous or contradictory state. This variability requires ongoing assessments and choices about what level and kind violence, if any, Marines should use once control is called into question (United States Marine Corps 2007). What have here, in effect, an introduction to what the Corps envisions as a “good Marine.” Not only does the good Marine need to be realistic in conducting himself in combat, but also she needs to subject her exercise of violence to intelligent judgment against Corps values and

principles. This is, simply, *discipline*: Marines controlling their own actions to honor and achieve purposes and values in light of potential or real conflicting values and meanings.

Our sense of the meaning of being disciplined comes from the purposes and values in the service of which self-control is being exercised. Marines have shown that they will risk their own lives by holding their fire against insurgents in Iraq, for example, to uphold American values like “not killing civilians or women or children.” This does not mean, however, that in some contexts, or in situations of conflicting values, decisions to kill civilians will not be made. Former U.S. Army officer and combat veteran Paul Rieckhoff said this about his experience manning checkpoints in Iraq:

I spent roughly a year in Baghdad and manned countless checkpoints just like the one that's described in this incident. I think the thing I want people to really understand is the enormous pressure that these soldiers are under and the enormity of the task that they're faced with. They're asked to make really split second decisions that could mean the difference between their own lives and obviously Iraqi civilian lives as well. It's a tremendous amount of pressure and soldiers are forced to make these types of decisions in Iraq every single day. It's really not a good duty that you want. I mean you're under tremendous pressure from car bombs, from RPG's, from insurgents. There's a million and one ways that an American soldier could be killed in these checkpoints and at the same time they are trying to preserve the lives of civilians.

[http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/middle_east/jan-june05/checkpoint_3-7.html]

Rieckhoff's comments alert us to the fact that, at times, the lack of clarity in situations of potential or actual violence can lead to a fundamental lack of clarity about the status and meaning of soldiers' actions. Are those Marines who choose to fire on vehicles refusing to stop *any less disciplined* than those Marines who chose not to fire? If we refuse to commit the irrational mistake of holding Marines accountable for knowing *before the fact* what could only be known *after the fact*—that the car was not loaded with explosives but refused to stop because the driver did not, for example, understand American hand signals—then how can we answer the question posed above?⁹

An important realization here is that situations that are clear can become unclear not simply through the dynamics of social interaction and interaction with the physical environment, *but through allegiance to a value system as well*. This is a form of allegiance to ideals that, while foundational to the identity of a soldier as a *good* soldier and American, can get him killed.

U.S. Army Staff Sergeant David Bellavia is a recipient of the Silver Star and was recommended for the Congressional Medal of Honor. He was in the infantry fighting in Iraq in 2003 when he spotted a gunman on a roof and snuck up behind him. The gunman was

a teenaged boy, maybe sixteen years old. I could see him scanning for targets, his back to me. He held an AK-47 without a stock. Was he just a stupid kid trying to protect his family? Was he one of Muqtada al-Sadr's Shiite fanatics? I kept my eyes on him and prayed he'd put the AK down and just get back inside his own house. I didn't want to shoot him.

He turned and saw me, and I could see the terror on his sweat-streaked face. I put him in my sights just as he adjusted his AK against his shoulder. I had beaten him on the draw. My own rifle was snug in my shoulder, the sight resting on him. The kid stood no chance.

Please don't do this. You don't need to die.

The AK went to full ready-up. Was he aiming at me? I couldn't be sure, but the barrel was trained at my level. Do I shoot? Do I risk not shooting? Was he silently trying to save me from some unseen threat? I didn't know. I had to make a decision.

Please forgive me for this.

I pulled the trigger. The kid's chin fell to his chest, and a guttural moan escaped his lips. I fired again, missed, then pulled the trigger one more time. The bullet tore his jaw and ear off. Sergeant Hall came up alongside me, saw the AK and the boy, and finished him with four shots to his chest. He slumped against the low rooftop wall.

"Thanks, dude. I lost my zero," I said to Hall, explaining that my rifle sights were off-line, though that was the last thing going through my mind. [2007: 6-7].

SSgt. Bellavia's quandary is both similar to and radically different from that of U.S. Marine Sergeant Stevens's quandary, which was whether or not to shoot the old Iraqi man who grabbed his rifle muzzle. Both soldiers' quandaries are ethical problems concerning the enactment of values. The quandaries center on whether to enact the trained and institutionally expected (the Army's) response to "hostile intent" or to modify the training lesson and abridge the institution's value system in light of their own judgment of the meaning of the situation. The other person in each soldiers' case was judged to be afraid and both soldiers wanted to reconsider their initial understanding of the meaning of their respective situations in light of that judgment. Both soldiers, moreover, had very little time in which to reassess the other person, their relationship to that person, and, based on the result, kill or not kill the other person.

There is a qualitative difference, however, in the grounds for each soldiers' hesitation to kill pending reconsideration of the meaning of their respective situations. In Sgt. Stevens's case, an old man grabbed his rifle barrel in a dark house in the middle of the night. In SSgt. Bellavia's case, a boy leveled a combat rifle at him on a rooftop in daylight after scanning for targets. Beyond the context for and actions of each person, Stevens and Bellavia considered their respective *identities*. The old man and the boy were being assessed as potentially harmless based on the soldiers' (perhaps stereotyped) association of each with an age-based identity category. In the United States, old men and boys are, generally protected when it comes to combat because they are defined as "harmless," but not if they are armed and embodying the intention to use the weapon. Here is a critical, realistic, factual distinction in each situation. The old man was not armed, the boy was. We can admire the self-control exercised by Stevens but what should we make of Bellavia's?

While we don't know the full details of either soldier's perceptual field—for example did Stevens simply assume or did he actually see that the old man was unarmed—but we can usefully posit a question as to how and why, in Bellavia's more obvious situation, he hesitated. I suggest that Bellavia was living out his ethical commitment to not killing children *despite the fact that the boy was aiming to kill Bellavia*. Importantly, there is a kind of idealism at work in both Stevens's and Bellavia's cases, but each is of a different 'flavor.' Stevens' idealism was qualified by what might be called the "level of threat" in the context of the old man's actions and his being unarmed. He saved the life of another by choosing not to follow-through on what he might have at least been legally within his rights to do and at most institutionally expected to do given his training. His risk was to his own moral life in the name of the life of another who presented little threat. Stevens' risk was losing his moral life temporarily. Bellavia's risk was to his own life in the name of an idealized version of the actual person in front of him who presented an imminent lethal threat. Bellavia's risk was also losing his physical life permanently. In the comparison, Bellavia's quandary was a personal battle between idealism and realism in a moment of lethal danger. Through this comparison we can appreciate that combat infantry choose to act fast, and to risk physically and morally lethal confrontations, in the midst of perceptual, conceptual, and moral ambiguity.

We should note too the fact that often the actions of a combat infantryman in a moment of lethal danger impact, potentially or actually, his or her comrades. Risk is endemic not only to

the combatants individually but to the combatants corporately and in close combat, it might be impossible to separate risk to self and risk to comrades. Insurgents in Fallujah, Iraq, trapped SSgt. Bellavia and a number of his fellow soldiers in the living room of a house. The insurgents were through a doorway, only feet from the soldiers. As the insurgents were firing intermittently at the trapped soldiers one of Bellavia's comrades, Misa, shouts

“Frag out. Frag out” [which warns the soldiers that he is about to use a fragmentation grenade on the insurgents in the next room]. This mortifies [another soldier] Fitts. “No,” he hisses. Misa freezes. Fitts continues, “They’ll bowl that bitch right back at us. You’ve got no idea where they’re at. You don’t know how many fucking dudes are in here. Don’t frag out. Put it away.” Misa abandons the grenade idea.

Misa’s aborted plan gives me an idea. A few days before we assaulted Fallujah, Staff Sergeant Hector Diaz...traded some shit with Special Forces to get me a flash-bang grenade. It has a two-second use, and will stun anyone who is unfortunate enough to be around when it goes off. I could throw it and stun the insurgents long enough for everyone to escape. I mull this over while fingering the flash-bang’s cylindrical tube. It looks like an oversized roll of Kodak film. I’ve never use one of these things before, and that gives me pause. If I fuck up, I could flash out the entire platoon and incapacitate myself and my own men. That’s a pretty big risk. I abandon the flash-bank idea. [2007: 210-211].

Interestingly, in this case, SSgt. Bellavia’s judgment is that using a weapon system he is unfamiliar with is a greater risk than enduring the direct fire of enemy insurgents just feet away from him and his fellow soldiers. His judgment indexes the substantial self-discipline that combat infantry are required to exercise in fighting.

Not all challenges to the physical, mental, and character qualities of soldiers and Marines as disciplined actors are as dramatic as SSgt. Bellavia’s. They can be subtle. Consider a criticism of the American tactic of sequestering troops in protected camps and armored vehicles while trying to battle insurgency in Iraq in 2006. Former U.S. Marine infantryman during the Vietnam War and author of a number of studies on counter-insurgency warfare, F. J. “Bing” West, argued that the Iraqi insurgency’s “roots lie below the level of the military effort. The Iraqi Army provides a [security] umbrella only as long as squad-sized patrols are present in an area” (West 2006: 5). When the ground troops leave an area, insurgents are able to influence or control the local population to the detriment of American and Iraqi interests.

The new U.S. Army and Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual (2007), a handbook containing principles for conducting a counterinsurgency for officers who lead groups of about six hundred infantrymen, states that “If military forces remain in their compounds, they lose touch with the people, appear to be running scared, and cede the initiative to insurgents” (2007: 48). Physical presence and direct action is acknowledged as necessary to achieve control. If we follow the logic of this requirement in conjunction with the purpose of the Marine Corps as I developed it above, we can conclude that establishing control requires judgments about the use of violence. Such judgments in turn constitute an appreciation of why, and under what conditions, that physical presence and action is necessary. Knowing the relationship between “security” and “control” and the potential for the use of violence in establishing that relationship, even a simple phrase like “secure that house” places the Marine’s presence and actions in an ethical frame. A principle emerges here that is underwritten by semasiological theory: despite any seeming simplicity the actions of combat infantry are always framed in terms of some ethic.

Placing the presence and actions of Marines into an ethical frame simply by using a phrase as seemingly utilitarian as “secure that house” suggests the further question of what Americans call “character:” “Are Marines *willing to fight*? Will they enact the necessary physical presence by leaving their bases and vehicles thereby putting themselves at risk for death or long-term psychological issues? Will they do the hard thought-work necessary to conducting their operations within legal and moral bounds?” If we take seriously the conception of agency discussed in the first chapters of this study, there is no way to guarantee an affirmative answer to any of these questions. Nor is there any way to pre-figure, with certainty or any approximation thereof, what judgments will need to be made in the face of novel or ambiguous situations, what value conflicts will arise, or what outcomes will ensue in the actual course of events.

These realist acknowledgments about the nature of combat action result in a realistic approach to training combat infantry. In my view, after experiencing it, the point is to increase the probability that Marines will fight, and that they will fight in ways that are within legal and moral bounds. Ideally, the probability of “correct action” is to be increased through individual motivation and purpose rather than external oversight. Realistically, teams of Marines are more *effective* than individuals in many ways, ranging from, simply, more firepower on a battlefield, to motivational support during combat, to conferees about competing courses of action and their potential consequences. Highly motivated individual Marines in teams are, in my estimation, the

ultimate goal, therefore, of training. There are two basic infantry combat units in the Marine Corps. One is the individual Marine and the other is the combination of the individual Marine and his or her “battle buddy.”¹⁰ Colonel McCoy’s (2006) book on leading Marines conveys the realization (on the Corps’ part) that the presence of a fellow Marine during combat is one important way to increase the likelihood that Marines will “violently close with the enemy” and, perhaps, die, in order to achieve the goal of killing or incapacitating them.

The analysis so far has skirted a value that seems unmarked in Marine Corps discourse. That unmarked value, *certainty*, has to do with control and it requires some attention before we can move forward. There is one way in particular to be certain of control of an area. It is a corollary to “boots on the ground.” To be certain of control one can denude an area of people by killing them all. Since Marine and American values do not sanction this kind of activity—*you cannot kill everyone because not everyone is a combatant, or, deserves to die*—certainty is, at best, an ideal to be pursued, but *never* to be realized except in special situations where all the inhabitants of an area, such as a military fortification, are combatants. For example, after cordoning off the city of Fallujah in Iraq in 2004 thus defining it as a battlefield, the American military permitted non-combatants to enter and leave the city based on the license plates on their cars.¹¹ Given the Marine Corps’ realist recognition of persons as agents the attempt to allow residents some freedom of movement is antithetical to the logic of control and security that the Marines seek to establish in combat zones. When Marines permit non-Marines into any environment they *create* uncertainty, not certainty. After all, today’s ally can be tomorrow’s insurgent (and sometimes for good reasons). Consequently, we should appreciate the depth of the Marine commitment to the value of not just the lives of others (non-combatants) but the *quality* of those lives. Institutionally and formally, the Marines choose to live in a constant state of risk and uncertainty. In fact, they create it, simply by adhering to their values, and, as I noted above, simply by their presence. The U.S. Marine Corps is an organization that creates, invites, and risks the antithesis or destruction of itself in pursuit of its treasured values.

Within the category of “combatant,” then, killing people is a means to certainty of control for the military. Killing can be, and, for many of the Marines I interacted with, actually is conceived as a *practical* problem concerning the mechanics of strength, intelligent and speedy application of force, and efficient and accurate use of weaponry. The more quickly and the more pointedly force is applied, the greater the chance that warfighting capabilities, whether enemy

weapons systems or bodies, are eliminated. One example from my fieldwork can be seen in the video “MAIT 03-07” in Appendix A. The time frame 8:52 to 9:04 illustrates my *failure* to apply a basic principle of the training I received: *never* go “strength-on-strength” with an opponent. It wastes energy and time, which are precious in a combat situation. The point of the exercise was for each team of Marines to dunk the heads of their opponents under the water (as a safety measure we were also responsible for ensuring they resurfaced) while being neck-deep and blindfolded in a river. I am nearest the camera and the first to be dunked by my opponent, Staff Sergeant McCloskey. SSgt. McCloskey had the nickname “Sergeant Smash” in light of his imposing stature and physical strength. Nevertheless, he chose to apply his strength more intelligently than I: he grabbed my head while I grabbed his shoulders. Trying to “muscle” him under was foolish and got me eliminated. He used the principle, “where the head goes the body follows,” which we had learned during the training.

The U.S. Army and Marine Corps (2007) calls the use of force a “kinetic” solution to a battlefield problem in their jointly issued *Counterinsurgency Field Manual*. Kinetic solutions and their call for the application of practical principles to combat can translate into *security* for some period of time depending on the local circumstances. For Americans, the cultural assumption seems to be that kinetic actions *should result in* kinetic actions in return, thereby promoting the emergence of “strength on strength” contests. This assumption is, I think, what underlies the historical American global dominance on conventional battlefields. We think in terms of what is vernacularly called “a pissing contest.”

The brilliance of an insurgency is predicated on avoiding such contests. Insurgents exploit weakness and seek to avoid a “strength-on-strength” contest since they will most often lose against the usually superior organization, firepower, and resources of conventional forces. “Non-kinetic” solutions to battlefield problems have emerged recently in light of the form of, for example, the U.S. Army’s Human Terrain System (HTS). “The HTS approach is to place the expertise and experience of social scientists and regional experts, coupled with reach-back, open-source research, directly in support of deployed units engaging in full-spectrum operations.”¹² It should be noted that, generally, non-kinetic solutions are employed chronologically prior to or after actual combat, with the point being to *avoid* killing and so undermine the hatred, contempt, or other motivators to combat with conventional forces.¹³ Emphasizing the radically different social situation for the employment of kinetic versus non-kinetic solutions, the

Counterinsurgency Field Manual states, “The admonition ‘Sometimes, the More Force Used, the Less Effective It Is’ does not apply when the enemy is ‘coming over the barricades’; however, that thought is applicable when increased security is achieved in an area” (2007: 48). One of the most troubling components of an insurgency situation for American and Western soldiers is that battlefields, as spaces of physical conflict, emerge and disappear at the whim of combatants who choose when, where, how, and for how long, they remain combatants. Insurgents’ refusal to overtly “hold” terrain and so establish clear “lines,” along with the ease with which they blend in with the local population, means that Marines assigned the task of leaving their defined bases must train to be *constantly ready* to make split-second choices like that of Sergeant Stevens between kinetic and non-kinetic “solutions.” In fact, such split-second decisions were overtly conceptualized and discussed during my time as trainee and trainer with the Marines. Combat veteran and fellow trainee Staff Sergeant Twiggs noted in the context of a discussion about checkpoints in Iraq that the Marines, as well as the rest of the U.S. military, did not realize that hand signals were not universal:

Yeah, holding up your hand with palm outward, facing them, does NOT mean stop to Iraqis. It’s a curled “o” with the thumb to fingers and it’s pointing toward you, not toward them, like this...

The ensuing confusion caused by this lack of cross-cultural knowledge about dynamically embodied action-signs provided the basis for a further discussion of shoot/don’t-shoot decision-making that led SSgt. Twiggs to remark in amazement,

The way these Marines flip, the way their brains flip, you know especially these infantry, since they’re out here training to kill every day. [Fieldnotes, June 14, 2007]

Combat veteran and trainer Staff Sergeant Wyman told me that “the decision between lethal and non-lethal is instantaneous, and yes we can train it” (June 14, 2007). In keeping with the theoretical position of this study I interpret the remarks of the staff sergeants to mean that *Marine* training is a distinct and special affair. Marines are being trained to ‘act reflectively’, that is to ‘decide in an instant’ whether or not to kill and thus to act *spontaneously*, they are not being trained as Skinnerian pigeons to ‘behave reflexively’ and so kill *instantaneously*. Marines are persons, hence, persons are trained, not their brains. “Reflexively” refers to the Behaviorist idea

of a natural tendency to be reactive (to react as if to a stimulus). Marine training *can not be* about either a natural tendency to be reactive or automating responses to stimuli since both conceptions require the existence in humans of bio-physical machinery that simply does not exist for our species.

Based on what has just been spelled out my point is that combat, no matter how fast, no matter how automatic it may appear, requires the use of judgment and therefore intelligence. We will encounter this idea in substantial ethnographic detail in chapter 7 where we will find that a combatant *has to decide* whether or not to fight *at all*. There is not such thing as the binary “fight or flight” instinct for humans. The introduction of judgment and intelligence into this discussion sets off in bold relief some important characteristics of the problem-solution frame with which the Marines tend to view battlefield combat. Within that discursive frame, values such as *utility* and *efficiency* become particularly prized. I found that these values run quite deep in the Corps, and they are generally seen as physically oriented. They become tropes that influence not only the very organization of the Corps but are expressed in Marine vocal and gestural discursive conventions.

The hierarchical organization of the Corps (see Appendix B), like many modern militaries, is at the very least, an attempt to ensure the efficient execution of orders and so the precise application of force by assigning clear responsibility and demanding principled decision-making. Linguistically, the constant development and use of acronyms is an infamous symptom of the sub-cultural quest for utility and efficiency. One Marine officer told me during an informal interview in 2006 that coming up with a good acronym for a program or event is a very serious matter with substantial time and effort being devoted to its creation. Problematically of course the cipher-like shorthand of this discursive idiom presumes an insider status for *the listener to know what the acronyms mean*.¹⁴

Once it is decided that violence, or kinetic solutions, will be used, Marines tend to conceive of killing as something to be done quickly, to save time, which equates with saving resources, like “energy” in the case of hand-to-hand fighting. This is not *inhuman*, but quite *humane* when appreciated from a qualitative standpoint. At the very least this can be understood from the standpoint of self-preservation, not an instinct for it, but a positive decision to value one’s own life when faced with an opponent wanting to kill you. The Marines reveal this implicitly in their tacit call for *respect* in the act of killing others. Where possible, killing is to be

done proportionally meaning that only the force necessary to the circumstances should be used. There are at least two judgments demanded by this formulation. First, what exactly *counts* as a relevant “circumstance?” Second, what force is legitimately applied in such circumstances? We should remain aware that the word “necessary” might *obscure* the value judgments I just enumerated by implying, as it does, that the external world *dictates* a course of action. This is yet another variation on the S-R formulation of human behavior.

Marines take very seriously the fact that we are human beings, not just animals, where our humanity is incidental, and so they have designed a training system to transform one kind of person, a citizen, into another kind of person, a Marine combat soldier. Thus, the principle that, ‘*Where possible, killing is to be done proportionally,*’ is one good way to capture the ‘humanitarianism’ alluded to above. The Marines take this value, it seems to me, from larger American culture and give it its special sub-cultural meaning.

To illustrate how Marines actually grapple with their practical formulation of killing proportionally consider this story related by a staff sergeant in my training squad in the summer of 2007. The staff sergeant led a small group of Marines who happened upon an insurgent planting an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) in a road. It was after dark and there was some distance between the suspected insurgent and the Marines. For the purposes of this discussion, we can say that among the possible courses of action, the staff sergeant could have chosen to have his small group close the distance and use rifles, close the distance and throw grenades, or rush the insurgent in hopes of capturing him (all variations on the theme of “violently closing with and destroying the enemy”). As it turned out he decided to employ a weapon called a Shoulder-Launched Multi-Purpose Assault Weapon (or SMAW). The SMAW is designed to destroy fortifications and tanks, not individual human beings. The weapon practically vaporized the insurgent. The use of the weapon was, *by his admission*, disproportionate. To the extent that killing involves more or less force than is necessary Marines risk moral approbation centering on, for example, risking the lives of non-combatants (more) or permitting suffering in the service of an unsanctioned value, like revenge (less). In American vernacular, the phrase “a quick, clean death” indexes pursuit of the value of respect in killing, though it may be that that battlefield situations, available weaponry, and the variability of combatants’ willingness to risk their own lives to achieve it, can make it quite elusive.

Some days after the staff sergeant related his story of the SMAW incident in Iraq, one of the Marine Instructor-Trainers held a discussion on the topic of “never being quite certain about what you’re facing on a battlefield.” The staff sergeant wryly noted in a low-voiced, straight-lipped, jaw-outthrust way, “that’s why I shot’im with the SMAW,” a comment that brought gales of laughter from my squad of Marines (Fieldnotes, July 17, 2007). The laughter was generated both by the delivery and the shared sense of irony involved in being a Marine: while the Marines possess sufficient weaponry to generate the absolute certainty that creates absolute security and so a means to guarantee their own safety, nevertheless they are expected to assume personal and group risk to life and limb in order to honor the legal and moral principles that instantiate values like “respect for the enemy,” and “respect for life.”

By way of comparison I suggest that *jihadi* combatants too, act to honor moral principles, but those principles differ radically from those of Americans exactly on the concept of “respect for life.” Al-Qaeda bombers, for example, will kill everyone pre-defined as unbelievers to achieve certainty and so absolute security for their way of life. If their way of life is not ascendant, no life, theirs or anyone else’s is permissible or worthwhile. We can look to Laurent Murawiec’s work in *The Mind of Jihad* (2008) to get a sense of what this means. He writes about two Israeli soldiers cornered and killed by a crowd in Palestine. Included in the book is a picture of a young man who

soaked his hands in [the dead Israelis’] blood and exuberantly displayed it to the jubilant crowd. This was not just plain murder, it was human sacrifice: I (we) kill him (them) so that we can live.

Killing an enemy is part of war. Why revel in it and wallow in the blood, why display ecstatic merriment to the delighted frenzy of the crowd? Why does the crowd applaud and enthuse? There is revenge and elation at avenging a perceived loss of dignity and honor. The slaying is not instrumental: it is an act in itself; it is human sacrifice. The blood of the enemy renews the identity of the lynch mob: To be a Palestinian is to spill the blood of Israelis. Death is not instrumentality—like the death of the enemy on the battlefield—it has become an end in itself. How else can we fathom the signs on the walls of Hamas kindergarten in Gaza, “The Children Are the Holy Martyrs of Tomorrow”? Death is a source of unalloyed joy: “We love death.” [Murawiec 2008: 11-12]

Interestingly and despite his topic, Murawiec sees *Western* battlefield killing as purely instrumental, a view that I think I have demonstrated as being without merit or foundation except insofar as it is a discursive strategy adopted by some members of the military as a way to

maintain a realist focus on killing those who need to be killed and destroying that which needs to be destroyed.¹⁵ Viewing killing on a battlefield instrumentally can, variously, function to protect the self-image of the soldiers doing the killing, assist in adopting a realistic view of battlefield problems, or even serve as a justification for killing when grounded in the kind of naturalism emerging from the bio-reductive framework (e.g., “it was him or me and I guess my survival instinct kicked in”). But viewing battlefield killing in this way is only one discursive strategy among many with at least one alternative example being provided by Murawiec himself. My point is that *jihadi* combatants like Al-Qaeda or Hamas have chosen a different value system, one that is quite alien to Westerners and Americans. They love death in the way Americans love life.

The ethical lines for Americans, however, can become blurred. This issue was brought into bold relief during an interview with father and son veterans Randy (commissioned officer and non-combat veteran of the U.S. Army) and Michael Sandone (non-commissioned officer and combat veteran of the U.S. Marines in Iraq) in April of 2004. The discussion focused on assessments of and consequent attitudes toward the enemy that resulted in differential actions on and off the battlefield, for example, in taking and treating prisoners. Historically, American soldiers’ attitudes and actions toward German and Japanese soldiers in World War II differed radically, as I mentioned in chapter 2.¹⁶ One powerful, plausible reason for these differences was offered by Randy in our conversation and served to contextualize a revealing conversation about hand-to-hand combat and ethics.

RS: The Germans...if their army was defeated they were defeated...and that’s why they would surrender as divisions or large groups of...and if they captured American soldiers or airmen for all intents and purposes they treated them with a reasonable degree of respect and decorum what have you...whereas the Japanese because their culture that surrender was so dishonorable in their culture that number one if they captured you...they would ascribe to you the dishonor that they believed...surrender...justified and so as a surrendering soldier you were not worthy of any respect or any decorum or any appropriate treatment you were the lowest form of...humanity that there was...as a consequence they acted that way they brutalized our prisoners...and our guys never forgot that by the same token they would not surrender the only way to defeat them was to kill them.

[Comparing World War II to the Iraq War] And I think that...they’re different wars and different ways they approached it...it was a lot easier...I think...while Germans were surrendering I’ve read we were...American GI’s were respecting them and they were

smoking cigarettes and that kind of thing...the Japanese they're still just now getting over it...fifty years later

FT: So, Mike, for you it sounds like there's a similar issue in terms of the way the Iraqis chose to fight that there's a certain level of...expectation of kind of a shared way of fighting that when it's not shared you have a problem, so let's call them what guerrilla fighters using the civilian population cause I think you were mentioning earlier that you never actually engaged a conventional Iraqi unit...so I would assume you mean then that you engaged irregulars or former conventional forces now...

MS: Yeah guys would shed their uniforms and try to blend in but then fight from among the civilians and...you just I don't know you just don't respect that...that kind of...its not really military...really its...

FT: Is it cowardly you think?

MS: It's hard to say...to a certain extent.

FT: But with the firepower (unintelligible) what do you think?

MS: Yeah, how would I act...in their shoes...face the best military in the world I mean how...if I knew I was gonna get killed I mean how would I fight? I think that there's...the big thing with the Germans and the Americans that there's kind of a shared military culture...and something that both can relate to and (unintelligible)...I don't understand Islam I don't understand the fanaticism...that would make someone blow themselves up to kill children...I just don't understand that.

...

RS: I could certainly empathize with the current GI's I don't see how I could ever reconcile myself with these guys...I don't know...its not...the analogy is to step into a ring you know boxing ring and the guy pulls out a...gun and shoots you or something like that or a...bat and starts hitting you...you can't respect him as a boxer...doing something like that...

FT: It's interesting to me because I've heard and maybe you can verify since I've never gone through the training but I've heard that...if it ever comes to close combat there are no rules I've heard that's what you're taught I don't know if that's accurate or not but...if its you versus him and I guess I take that point in Saving Private Ryan remember when the Tom Sizemore character faces off against that other German and they find them...and he throws his helmet and then he...take out the knife and they're shooting pistols and they run out of ammunition and...but I don't know what do you think? Do you think there are even rules at that point or...?

MS: Yeah I don't think so if it's gotten down to that...it's gotten that bad then it's all about survival at that point.

RS: Yeah I was gonna say that there are and there aren't. You know the Geneva Convention and the Uniform Code aren't thrown away just because it's *mano-a-mano* but as a practical matter...it's survival...I mean Geneva Convention and the Uniform Code as it reflects that says that it doesn't matter how brutal you've been fighting if the guy puts his hands out...you can't that's it he's done...it's over...and so in a one-on-one sense if it gets to the point that you've been fighting and finally you have a bayonet to his neck and he says I quit...are there...do the rules no longer apply can you just drive it on through? The rules still apply but are you gonna drive it on through well...I don't know...that's the way it is...that's what I mean yes and no...if he surrenders and you got a bayonet to this neck you're not supposed to run him through.

(Randy looks at Michael and vice versa, Randy shrugs a shoulder and flips his palm upward while raising an eyebrow signaling, "Can't tell")

MS: (shrugs one shoulder) Run him through.

RS: Probably would...cause it's human nature to at that point...and I don't think anybody would hold you to it, so...it's an interesting topic you've chosen it's very deep with a lot of different angles. [Interview, April 24, 2004]

I have quoted this discussion at length for two reasons. First, it suggests a limit to the kind of ethical action, or perhaps *expectations for* the enactment of the kind of ethical action that is being trained at the MACE. In so doing, it, secondly, forces us to engage with the idea that some military actions might be appropriately moral but unrealistically idealistic while others are appropriately realistic but excusably immoral. Consequently, we are invited to consider the relationship between realism and idealism in military action generally and amongst Marine combat infantry specifically. This is a delicate matter because it implicates the moral character of the actors.

For Randy (commissioned officer and non-combat veteran of the U.S. Army), the values of most Western militaries as embedded in the Geneva Convention and in the specifically American Uniform Code of Military Conduct are clear about what action is *prescribed* when an opponent in close combat embodies the concept of "surrender" by "throwing up his hands." While the rules for conduct are clear for both, Randy offers two kinds of doubt about whether or not that conduct is *realistically to be expected*. First, doubt that the rules are realistic; second, doubt that even if they are realistic, the rules are somehow trumped by human nature. In the first form of doubt, Randy essentially gives us an ideal; that is, a goal that, in principle, cannot be achieved but is worth pursuing even if the result of the effort is an approximation. In effect,

Randy *reformulates* the Convention and the Code from a set of prescribed and proscribed ways of acting into a set of ideals that are of dubious attainability. In the second form of doubt, Randy, *and then Michael*, affirm that in a situation of life and death personal (hand-to-hand) combat, something changes, qualitatively.

The context is symptomatic of this qualitative change: *the rules (Convention and Code) do not apply*. The implication, it seems to me, is, really, that *no rules apply*. But is this a description of the actual fact of the matter in hand-to-hand combat? If so, how are we to understand it? We can address this issue anthropologically by analyzing these comments from the Sandones after I asked if rules applied in hand-to-hand combat:

MS: Yeah I don't think so if it's gotten down to that...it's gotten that bad then it's all about survival at that point.

MS: (shrugs one shoulder) Run him through.

RS: Probably would...cause it's human nature to at that point...and I don't think anybody would hold you to it...

The Sandones' contention that "no rules apply" can be set against the notion that, at least as far as the U.S. military is concerned, rules *do* apply.¹⁷ In light of their organization's clear statement on how members must conduct themselves, the Sandones' position *must* be a proscription, not a description. I mean here that for Michael definitely, and Randy probably, *the rules should not be seen as legitimate guides for action*. This means that actions taken, and so decisions made, during hand-to-hand combat are questioned by third parties *at the moral peril of the third parties*.

Importantly, both Randy and Michael cite "nature" and "survival" as their explanation of why hand-to-hand combat is qualitatively exceptional and rule-less. By now we know that these terms function as pseudo-scientific explanations of behavior. In implausibly and so illegitimately reducing action to behavior, culture to biology, these terms function as justifications, not explanations. From a critical realist anthropological perspective, the Sandones are offering a justification of their provocative position, not an explanation of the factual status of hand-to-hand combat. This is, as we have seen, not unusual in a culture where bio-reductive deterministic explanations for human social action are so pervasive and powerful.

In fact, however, another Marine combat veteran who I interviewed for this project, Colonel Bryan P. McCoy, denies the possibility of a biological explanation for combat in any form when he writes,

America does not possess a warrior culture. Let us disabuse ourselves of the notion of the mythical American Warrior. To do otherwise is intellectual folly and reflects more wishful thinking and illusion than reality. Any notion of some innate warrior culture or an inherent fighting ability of Americans is an idea born in a hothouse that will wilt once exposed to the brutality of real battle. [2006: 15]

While I actually agree with the Sandones that there is something exceptional about hand-to-hand combat, I disagree about the reason: the difference in kind from other forms of fighting does not have to do with a survival instinct or species-specific evolved behaviors because from a critical realist and scientific point of view, there is no such possibility. McCoy's remarks alert us to this fact. Moreover and instructively, Colonel McCoy's argument applies *both to killing and to not killing*.

I'd like to draw out four points in considering this issue. First, the example of Sergeant Stevens in deciding not to fire at the moment of realizing the old Iraqi man's hostile action did *not* mean hostile intent. Second, Staff Sergeant Wyman's contention that combat infantry can be, and indeed are, trained to make exactly the kind of split-second decisions exemplified by Sergeant Stevens. Third, Colonel McCoy argues that killing *and not killing* are not instinctual and so, by implication, are fully subject to the decisions of the soldier and informed by that soldier's values. Fourth, McCoy's argument is given realist substance by the fatal criticisms of the bio-reductive framework offered earlier in this study. These considerations mean that we are left with an open question as to what moral basis a soldier would have for *not* accepting the surrender of an opponent in hand-to-hand combat. Does hand-to-hand combat constitute a kind of moral dead-zone for Americans? Is the contention that "no rules apply" functioning simply as a justification? Are the Sandones contending that the rules should not be seen as legitimate guides for action *because human nature, not the person in the form of the soldier, is the causal source of the action*. Or, are the Sandones expressing, however deterministically and indirectly, the right of the soldier to act *according to whatever value the soldier wants to embody in the*

moment of having total control over the fate of an enemy? If so, is there any moral basis for such an expression?

I want to consider, speculatively and imaginatively, what is going on in hand-to-hand combat as a social and cultural act. My purpose is to try to understand what makes this type of fighting exceptional and so, perhaps, the basis of the near identity of combat and courage. “What,” in short, “makes the use of hands or a knife in trying to kill someone qualitatively different from the use of a rifle or a missile?” It seems to me that close combat both constitutes and expresses an intention to kill or incapacitate an opponent, just as does firing a rifle. What makes it different must be the quality of that intention. The ‘talk’ in both hand-to-hand and rifle combat is *from* the body, but the former has some critical and distinctive characteristics.

The physical proximity of the combatants—body-to-body—generates a number of important dynamics, not the last of which is the violation of otherwise sacrosanct “personal space” (Hall 1966). The chances for escaping uninjured or alive are dramatically reduced because injury-producing actions are less likely to miss at two feet versus two hundred yards range. The lead instructor for my training class, Gunnery Sergeant Friend, said to the trainees, “If you get in a fist-fight, you better be prepared to get hit, if you get in a knife-fight, you better be prepared to get cut” (Fieldnotes, June 12, 2007). Similarly, a vast number of large and small options for action are *eliminated*. As the saying goes, the combatants are “*locked* in mortal combat.” Running away, stopping to catch one’s breath, avoiding injury or death through the use of obstacles (or “cover” as the Marines call it) are examples of *unavailable* options. The personal characteristics of the combatants become critically important—balance, leg strength, determination, dexterity, quality of judgment, critical thinking skills, and so forth. The dependence of such absolute outcomes as life or death on personal characteristics seems to me to be deeply antithetical to what I see as a pervasive sense of the value of individual equality in the United States.

While these personal characteristics may be important in firing a rifle they do not usually define the outcome of the fight. In the case of hand-to-hand fighting, however, differential leg strength can decide who lives or dies. In short, the physical distance between combatants permitted by a rifle prioritizes the ability to handle the weapon and concentration as well as situational awareness, not leg strength. These relationships and dynamics are not absolute: practiced skill and habituated embodied knowledge about, for instance, how to attack a

physically more powerful opponent, can render that opponents greater leg strength entirely irrelevant.

I would like to direct the reader to the video clip entitled “Bear Pit” in Appendix A. In the video (between 00:53-01:28), two male and one female Marines are fighting in an open pit filled with water to about knee height. The two males are substantially larger than the female. The “mission” of the exercise is for each Marine to dunk the other two Marines under the dirty water (and as a safety measure ensure that the Marine who gets dunked comes back up) using hand-to-hand fighting techniques. One previously successful techniques used by physically larger Marines on smaller Marines (male or female) had been to simply bowl over the opponent using body mass. The fight begins and other Marines on shore are shouting encouragement and advice to the three in the pit. One piece of advice was adopted by the female Marine: she let the two male Marines fight each other until they were exhausted and then succeeded in dunking them both. The application of an intelligent strategy permitted the female Marine to pit the physicality of her two opponents against one another and not her, thereby rendering their greater strength irrelevant. From examples like this we can liken the intelligence developed in training and ‘embodied concepts’ to a ‘rifle:’ they are all *tools* a combatant can use to exploit strengths and counter weaknesses in fighting. Of course such strategies can be, and often were, in my training, countered by strategies implemented by opponents! There is, then, a fundamental and permanent *uncertainty* in hand-to-hand fighting that is exacerbated by the speed with which the situation can change, moment-by-moment, by chance and by the purposeful actions of the combatants. The consequences are life or death.

We can say, then, that engaging in hand-to-hand combat signals the express purpose of killing an opponent *despite the uncertainty and the likely dire consequences*. Purposefulness in this kind of action can be said to be absolute; that is, the combatants express the desire for an absolute outcome whose realization is up to their personal skill and commitment. In a way, this is a choice to use one’s agency for an ultimate kind of purpose: extinguish the agency of another person. This intention is conveyed personally and the reactions of the opponent to the damage suffered in the fight are immediately and viscerally conveyed. It is done personally and in an environment of fundamental uncertainty. This, I think, is why hand-to-hand combat is so awesome and fear-inspiring. Even if two opponents surprise one another, we know that decisions to fight can and are made instantaneously. “Freezing” is another option; that is, choosing not to

take any positive action at all. “Freezing” means that the combatant is willing to accept what happens next, such as the likelihood of his or her own death, rather than mobilize his or her agentic capabilities to fight. The decision to fight is one made over and over again through the course of a fight as illustrated by the act of “giving up.” “Giving up” is an embodied way of stating that one would rather not try anymore.

If, as this analysis suggests, *hand-to-hand fighting* requires intelligent judgment in deciding both whether and how to fight, as well as expresses, at the very least, the value-oriented meaning of preserving one’s own life by killing an opponent, then *it is as ‘cultural’ as eating dinner with a friend*. Do the characteristics of hand-to-hand fighting—personal infliction of pain, suffering, and death, absolute and lethal consequences, the intention to realize the death of the other, and the fundamental uncertainty of the outcome—then combine to eliminate rules of conduct as the Sandones argued? Such a position cannot be defended based on any implied delimitation imposed by the nature of the combat itself, for example the speed of such combat. We have seen that decisions can be made in a split-second and options for different forms of action, while limited, are available. What the Sandones are expressing, then, in my estimation, is the idea that opponents in hand-to-hand combat *forfeit* their “right” to live should they choose to engage in it. This seems to be a function of the framing of the combat as, exactly, absolute and mortal, to be worked out and decided right now, in this space. There is a kind of “total commitment” required by this kind of fighting based, in my experience as we will see in the next chapter, on the notion that without total concentrations, focus and so the fight, can be lost. We will also see that focus requires trust in oneself as well as one’s training; doubt can get one killed. *With such small margins for error in a type of fighting that is fundamentally uncertain and absolute in its outcome, thinking about anything other than executing one’s training can be deadly in its consequences.*

Against this analysis, the Sandones’ naturalizing discourse about hand-to-hand combat and the idea of automated human behavior that it implies can be understood as functioning as a justification for the idea that soldiers should not be expected to “flip the switch” and instantaneously cease fighting in hand-to-hand combat. Why might this be too much to expect? Such an expectation would require that, in the midst of mortal combat, one combatant must risk his own life by *offering* to re-establish trust in the social rules for interacting that proscribe killing another person, the very same rules that were, in the last moment, rejected in the

embodied intention to kill the other combatant. Similarly, the other combatant must risk her own life by *accepting* the offer to re-establish trust in the social rules for interacting that proscribe killing another person that were in the last moment rejected in the embodied intention to kill the other combatant.

We should note too that in the offer and the acceptance there two modalities for communicating, bodily movement and vocalization. What happens if or when those two modalities are contradictory in the midst of this kind of fight? Earlier I mentioned the film *Saving Private Ryan* (1998).¹⁸ The film depicts a stunning version of hand-to-hand combat. A German and an American soldier are fighting viciously, punching, biting, and throwing each other around. They fall and roll on the ground. The advantage in the fight shifts back and forth and it is unclear who will win. The American draws his bayonet but the German takes it away. The German soldier eventually succeeds in maneuvering an American soldier into what I learned in my Marine training to be one of the most vulnerable positions possible: flat on your back. The German is using his body weight to pin down the exhausted American. The German is slowly pushing his bayonet toward the American's chest while the American is trying to force the German's arms upward. The American is losing the fight. As the bayonet comes closer, the American protests, saying, "No, no, listen to me, stop, stop," concurrent with imploring facial expressions. From a semasiological point of view the *embodied* intention of each combatant is to kill the other. The *vocalized* intention is to re-establish the frame of sociability where people are not killed. The American is trying to re-establish himself as a person to whom life should be granted as part of a humane fellowship.

Notably, the German soldier has *time* to, one might say, consider the American's proposal *if we assume the German understands English and the American's facial expressions*. But the fight to that moment had included vocalizations of all sorts from both combatants expressing determination, fear of the situation, calls for help, attempts to self-motivate, and so forth. But should the German suddenly trust the American who, moments before, had fought his way to his own position of advantage and attempted to finalize the outcome with the German soldier's death? After all, the American is still resisting; on the other hand, that resistance is *necessary* if the American is to prevent the bayonet from entering his chest. The German's next actions and vocalizations suggest not only that this consideration seems not to have entered the German's mind but that the intercultural communication issue is irrelevant. The German says, in

rough translation, “It’s over now, let it go in,” and actually “shush’s” the American as if trying to quiet a child. The German was totally focused—*as perhaps he should be*—on his goal of killing the person who tried to kill him.

This is death at its most intimate—and, perhaps, its most malicious. From our outsider’s position we might object that by “shushing” the American, the German recognizes what I am calling the American’s attempt to change the frame of the engagement—to *re-establish the rules of sociality that have been compromised in the act of combat*—from absolutely life or death to surrender and life.

The German refuses the entreaty. While this could indeed be a matter of trust (can the German trust the American to cease and desist if he, the German, were to stop trying to force the bayonet into the American’s chest?), we are faced with three mitigating circumstances grounded in the depiction of the German in the film. The German is, first, a member of the Waffen SS, which signals his membership in a military unit dedicated to Nazi “master race” concept. Second, he is a physically and aesthetically imposing, tough-looking character. Third, he had surrendered to the very same Americans he was now fighting earlier in the film and had groveled for his life, which the Americans granted. In fact, they had turned him loose. These depictions present the character of the German soldier as not simply *merciless* but *malicious*. In treating the American like a protesting child, the German signals his refusal to treat the American “like a man.” The German’s actions and vocalizations demonstrate that he takes the American to be, simply, pathetic. How can a member of the master race respect such a creature?¹⁹ Indeed we might say that the idea of sparing the American would have been a betrayal of the ideological commitment that served as the basis for the German’s identity as a Nazi. This scene serves, it seems to me, as a statement about the fundamental unfairness of warfare in general and hand-to-hand combat in particular. From an American point of view, “very bad guys” can and do win.

We are now, I think, in a better position to work out a potential understanding of the Sandones’ argument. We might ask whether an American *should, would, or could* spare the life of an Iraqi insurgent attempting to surrender in the midst of hand-to-hand combat. Wouldn’t sparing an insurgent, whose fanaticism is expressed in the sub-cultural characteristic of blowing up children, be a betrayal of *American* values? Perhaps then the Sandones’ naturalizing discourse is a way of expressing this deep cultural commitment to being an American and living according to American values in light of a realization that *there is no changing the mind of a*

fanatic. That fanatics are indeed fanatics is demonstrated in their willingness to turn children into suicide bombers and killing children indiscriminately. Implied in such a value position is the notion that no rational discourse is possible with ideologues. Killing such people is not only the best option it is the only option. To the extent that fighting and killing is value-driven, I want to now suggest that there exists an American, and insofar as the organization is distinctive as a sub-culture, a *Marine* way of fighting and killing. I hasten to qualify this statement even as I write it. We should, as researchers, expect *multiple versions* of “the Marine way of fighting and killing” based on the truism that there are formal rules promulgated by the organization, and informal rules worked out *in situ* by members of the organization. In my opinion it is most informative to discover the latter through examination of the former.

“Fighting,” we have seen, is not a monolithic concept. It varies based on socio-cultural conventions, values, and even ideological commitments. Fighting is not a “natural” action, *although the capacity to fight using the physical body is indeed natural*. That is, in learning material and conceptual relationships between oneself and the world necessary for simply moving in it, the basic material and conceptual relationships for fighting become available; from the swing of an arm while walking, for example, comes the perception of mass-force relationships as anyone who has banged her hand on a table can appreciate. On the cultural level, during my fieldwork, Marine instructors clearly demonstrated and constantly reinforced the distinction between fighting conceived in terms of sport and fighting conceived in terms of military action. In the former, such as professional mixed martial arts in leagues like the Ultimate Fighting Championship (<http://www.ufc.com>), there are rules agreed upon by all parties, time limits, and third parties actively concerned with preventing death if not serious injury. The point of this kind of fighting is to incapacitate, not kill, one’s opponent. In the latter, such as MCMAP, there are some rules unilaterally adopted by the Marines (but not necessarily their opponents), no time limit, and no third parties concerned with preventing death if not serious injury. In this kind of fighting, the point is to incapacitate or kill one’s opponent.

The MACE: Training Leadership in the Principled Use of Violence

In 2000, Commandant of the Marine Corps, General James L. Jones, established the *Marine Corps Martial Arts Program* (MCMAP).²⁰ According to the *Martial Arts Center of*

Excellence Martial Arts Instructor Trainer Manual April 2007 Revision (hereafter MAITM 07), The United States Marine Corps Martial Arts Program (MCMAP), is designed to:

- 1) Improve the warfighting capabilities of individual Marines and units in a team framework
- 2) Enhance Marines' self-confidence and *esprit de corps*
- 3) Foster the warrior ethos in the Corps²¹

The program is further described as a “distinctively a weapons based system, integrating combat equipment, physical challenges, and tactics typically found in the combat arena” (MAITM 07:Section 09, page 8). On a more general plane, the program combines “the best combat-test martial arts skills, time honored Close Combat training techniques, with proven Marine Corps Core Values and Leadership training” (MAITM 07: Section 09, page 8).

MCMAP is delivered to the Corps through the administrative and training center called the *Martial Arts Center of Excellence* (“the MACE” in Marine parlance) in Quantico, Virginia. I participated in and observed active-duty Marine martial arts training programs in the summers of 2007 and 2008 at the MACE. All Marines are required to achieve the basic level of competence in MCMAP by order of the Commandant of the Marine Corps. Marines have two options when participating in MCMAP.²² They can develop increasing levels of competence in MCMAP's concepts and techniques to become better warriors and so better Marines. They can also pursue higher levels of competence to become qualified to deliver martial arts training to the Marine units to which they are attached. Qualification occurs through two special training courses Martial Arts Instructor (MAI) course and the *Martial Arts Instructor Trainer* (MAIT) course.

The MAI training course runs for five weeks, while the MAIT course runs seven. The difference denotes the additional complexity and difficulty of the concepts and techniques to be learned by trainees. Increasing complexity and difficulty, and therefore increasing competence in MCMAP, is represented in a hierarchically ranked, color-coded “belt system” typical of other martial arts systems. There are five levels in ascending order: tan, gray, green, brown and black (MAITM 07: 10). Within the black belt level, there is a further series of designations that denote substantial mastery of advanced concepts and techniques. This includes, for example, the ability to teach a group of Marines effectively coupled with the capability of performing martial techniques using a “naked blade” (real, sharpened knives or bayonets as opposed to dull-edged plastic training knives) with a similarly armed opponent. These further levels of mastery are represented by up to six ½ inch wide strips of red cloth called “tabs” that are sewn onto the black

belt; they are, essentially, vertical red stripes. Marines who had achieved the designation of Instructor Trainer (or “IT”) themselves led the training courses for Instructors (MAI) and the training courses for future IT’s (MAIT). In most cases, the IT’s were not only black belts, but possessed one or more tabs. Importantly, to be an IT at the MACE meant having had at least one combat tour of duty overseas. This ensured that the IT’s were transmitting to trainees lessons learned first-hand about personal and team performance.

The realist distinction between sport and combat, as well the realist appreciation of what actually happens in battles as a matter of historical fact underwrites the MCMAP program. The Marine Corps believes that, for combat infantry, close-range combat is a *universal* event, meaning standard through time and across situations, for the Marines. A primary focus of the MCMAP program, then, is to prepare Marines to face

the dilemma of close-range combat; hand grenades, close-in assault fire, weapons fighting, and hand-to-hand engagement [that] will always be a part of the Marine Corps mission. In this respect, the ethos of the United States Marine Corps is timeless. The closeness of interpersonal violence remains unmatched, whether on the beaches of World War II or in downtown Mogadishu, Haiti, or East Timor. [MAITM 07: Section 09, page 6]

Hand-to-hand combat is the archetypal form of combat for Marines because living or dying, or one’s friends living or dying, is (barring chance events) solely under the control of the Marine. We might say then that courage too thus emerges in its archetypal form and so reveals the basis for the near identity between courage and combat for Americans. One way to see this is to realize that the constitution of agency is *autonomy*. Effort, directed by judgment, realizes the autonomy. Force is effort in motion. Courage is the moral value and motive of the effort in motion even as that motion embodies the pursuit of other values, like, “saving the lives of my comrades.” Courage, therefore, is directly expressive of (in Susanne K. Langer’s sense, hence not *an expression of*) dynamically embodied human agency.

While it is, in effect, a worst-case scenario and a battlefield norm given the Marines’ conception of warfighting, the Marines do not prefer to fight hand-to-hand. During my first summer of research, Master Sergeant James Coleman, a combat veteran (as are all the MACE Instructor-Trainers) and senior instructor at the MACE, told me that

The point [in combat] is to eliminate threats from a distance if at all possible though. If I can call in air [support] over sending in an infantry company, that's what I do. Lower ranking Marines are not obligated to act like *robots* and march right at a bunker... 'Hey Massergeant, why don't we hit that bunker with the little gun first?' and I might be like, 'shit, yeah, go do it devil dog.' [Fieldnotes, July 12, 2007, emphasis added]

Master Sergeant Coleman's idea was repeated numerous times in different ways during the course of my training. It served as a backdrop to the training: if you can use your rifle or a grenade, use them, but be prepared if you don't have either of them and you have to use your fists, a stick, or a knife. The Marines, as agents, discipline themselves into a team that *acts like a machine that is not mechanical*. The agency of each individual is directed toward *concerted* effort. This is a new conception of machine, a realist conception of machine comprised of the agency of each member's effort toward achieving a common purpose.

At the heart of the MAIT course (see Appendix C for a short description of the course and an example training day schedule) were the one hundred and twenty eight martial arts "techniques" that the trainees had to learn to qualify for the black belt level. As the Marines used the term, "techniques" referred specifically to action signs within the vocabulary of the martial arts. Also referred to as "moves," techniques had names like "rolling knee bar" or "triangle choke from the guard."²³ The names are important in that they index the practical and utilitarian sensibility infusing Marine perceptions of combat. There is an attendant temptation to think of learning the techniques as a matter of repetitive, mechanical utility. This is indeed one way of thinking of the techniques, which some of the Marines expressed. In fact, the Marines build regular repetition and practice of the techniques into their training regimen and call it "sustainment" (see Figure 6 in Figures section at the end of this chapter).

But this is an overly narrow view of the techniques; one that is invited, especially, by the general American preference for bio-reductive explanations of human social action. Consider the reasons given in the Martial Arts Instructor Trainer Manual for the development of MCMCAP that illuminate the values and meaning of the program. They include:

- Prepare Marines to "deal with complex situations mixed with the spectrum of violence," meaning that Marines need to be able to use force lethally, non-lethally, or not at all. The Marines could not perform missions like crowd control at a food distribution center without violating American civilian and military ethical and legal norms if all they are trained to do is kill.

- Prepare more Marines in a wider range of MOS's to face these complex situations given the current call to "do more with less" required to cover manpower demands in combat zones. A Marine helicopter mechanic might find herself escorting a supply convoy through the narrow streets of an urban downtown. She has to be prepared to act as an infantryman if necessary.
- Guard against an overreliance on technological solutions to battlefield situations: "some aspects of warfare and conflict will never change. The dilemma of close-range combat; hand grenades, close-in assault fire, weapons fighting, and hand-to-hand engagement will always be a part of the Marine Corps mission." As realists, Marines prepare for the worst, and as this reasoning demonstrates, the worst, for them, is hand-to-hand combat. [MAITM 2007 09: 6-8]

Semasiologically, the meanings of Marine actions in training (and to the extent that Marines use them in combat, on the battlefield) are more or less grounded in these values and purposes.

At this point I would like to direct the reader once again to the video entitled "MAIT 03-07" located in Appendix A. The video consists of a slideshow and short clips of the training course in which I participated.²⁴ The movie is an interesting commemorative artifact in its own right, but I recommend the reader watch the video *without sound* by turning off the volume on your player. Viewing the video in its entirety with no sound should give the reader a sense of the training itself and of the vast range of bodily movements, typical scenarios, and interactive contexts that comprised the training.

Techniques, Values, and Violence

The Marine Corps is an organization designed to manage violence, or as the Martial Arts Instructor Trainer Manual puts it, to respond effectively and quickly to "complex situations" throughout "the spectrum of violence" (also called "the continuum of force"). The spectrum of violence refers to the "concept that there is a wide range of possible actions, ranging from verbal commands to the application of deadly force, which may be used to gain and maintain control of a potentially dangerous situation" (MAITM 2007 07: 9). The principle implied here is that Marines *must never forego or relinquish their ability to reconsider their action*. Martial arts techniques are not supposed to be an end in themselves, but only a means to an end. The end should always be informed by both formal and informal judgments about how and why violence is to be employed, if at all. *Discipline* and *focus* become important corollary values to such a principle.

The IT's at the MACE were at pains to explain to me how it is that the acquisition of physical skills necessary to performing the techniques, while the most obvious and central component of the MAIT training class I was in, were not the primary point of the training at all. Their explanations were difficult to articulate in the face of an amazingly strenuous training schedule that seemed to emphasize the sheer physicality of combat. But in both formal and informal interviews with Marine Instructor-Trainers at the MACE, I learned that the practical application of martial arts techniques on the battlefield—the very place we would otherwise expect to observe the operation of instinct—was *positioned as complementary to, not primary over, a holistic view of the Marine combatant*.

Consider, for example, a snippet from a conversation I had during my first summer of research. Captain Jason Ford, Deputy Director of the MACE, grew frustrated at my questions about the battlefield applicability of the techniques of the program. “Was it really possible for Marines in full combat gear to execute some of these techniques?” I asked. His frustration was focused exactly on my *simplistic* reduction of Marine combat training to the level of the practical. Captain Ford said

It's not about direct application to conventional warfare since it's rare to have a knife-fight in combat but that's not the point. There are two important considerations, the range of situations in Iraq or Afghanistan where you're doing a patrol and you're literally walking by hundreds of people, some might be friendly, some might not, so the range of possible situations *beyond* conventional combat is limitless. We need to prepare Marines to respond to these situations appropriately—under control, disciplined. I don't want lambs out there, I want dead bodies. It's about *educating Marines to think quickly about what level of force is right for the situation*. [Fieldnotes, June 27, 2007, emphasis added]

Captain Ford clearly emphasizes the importance of training Marines to exercise judgment. The context of threat in everyday situations in Iraq and Afghanistan would be ideal as a stimulus for what might otherwise thought to be the operation of instinctive responses. *Discipline* and *control*, however, express the self-restraint that we would, normally and otherwise, expect to be *missing* given the bio-reductive framework. Restraint means refusing inviting alternative courses of action in favor of the one or ones expressive of a prized value or purpose. During my training there were plenty of opportunities to “cheese it” or “cheese-dick it,” meaning to slack off or not “put out,” in short to not give 100% effort. Instead of running, building momentum and vaulting

over a series of stomach-high log obstacles on the Obstacle Course, one could cheese it by walking between the obstacles. We know Captain Ford cannot mean instinct despite some of his language because there is no concept of “person” in the bio-reductive framework, no less a capability of “wanting.” Captain Ford, then, is expressing the idea of training Marines to exercise restraint in order to enable them to *think* and *judge* situations *prior to, and especially in, the moment of acting*. This notion fits well with the recognition of the split-second decision-making we see expected on battlefields and exemplified by both Corporal Dunham and Sergeant Stevens.

My interpretation of Captain Ford’s provocative phrase, “I don’t want lambs out there, I want dead bodies,” is based on the overall conversation, which was much longer than the quotation above. Judging by the overall context I believe what Captain Ford meant that he wanted smart, aggressive Marines who could and would kill *if appropriate*. And if appropriate, total commitment and effective execution were expected. This is the point of his emphasis on training Marines to think and judge *in order to* control, incapacitate, and kill *according to American and Marine ethical tenets*. In fact, the analogical usage of “lamb” suggests an important depth to Captain Ford’s construction: a *passive* Marine is not, by definition, *actively engaged in the local situation and so is failing to realize the ethical values and tenets of mental and physical performance* expected of Marines. Not only do Marines *invite* challenges to their way of life by their very presence, they are expected to go *find* and *develop* those challenges. This should expose for us the knife-edge, as it were, that Marines have to walk every time they are “on the ground.”

There is no theoretical, practical, or logical way to mesh this conception of Marine training with an instinct theory. But, as we have seen over and over again, American discourse about human social action is infected with such bio-reductive concepts and Marines are no different in this regard. Captain Ford went on to say that

It’s not about affective behavior, it’s about *predatory* behavior. It takes some thinking to fight well in close combat—blind rage will get you killed. It’s instinctive to *stalk*...you know, when you’re sneaking up on your brother or sister. [Fieldnotes, June 27, 2007]

I invite the reader to view the video clip called “Warrior Mindset” in Appendix A to see and hear exactly how the notion of predation was delivered by IT Staff Sergeant Wilder.

In American culture, situations of threat often invite “rage” as perhaps the preferred conventional response (how one ought to act) when threatened; traditionally, this is especially the case for men. Marines, men or women, are not supposed to accept the invitation, at least in MCMAP training. Ironically, not accepting the invitation is seen as a choice both overtly in conversation and tacitly in training. Captain Ford uses the phrase “blind rage.” Rage blinds Marines, and blind Marines cannot respond to situations very well: they would be focused on how they feel and not on the situation at hand or their responsibilities in that situation. This represents a hallmark case of self- versus other-interest. The Marines called this mistaken choice of focus “going internal,” a spatial metaphor that refers to concentrating on yourself and your pain (physical, emotional, mental or any other sort) rather than on the external world that otherwise should be the focus of your attention *if you intend to be a good Marine*. Lieutenant Colonel Shusko illustrated this distinction when he addressed the training class as follows,

While going through this, all this pain, remember this tie-in. A doctor wrote home to his dad about a [wounded] Marine [he was treating] that affected him. He said that every morning, one private was trying to stand up and the doctor said, “You don’t have to do that devil dog,” and the Marine said, “But I’ve been trained to render proper respect to an officer in the U.S. military,” well, the private had no legs. When you’re out there giving it 65% or 75%, think about these devil dogs. You have to reach down sometimes, you’re pukin’ out there, brush it off and move on. Think about your brothers. They’ll pull you through and you’ll pull them through. [Fieldnotes, June 12, 2007]

Lieutenant Colonel Shusko advised the trainees to *choose to ignore, not focus on, what is (allegedly) an automatic biological response* (vomiting) in favor of getting on with the mission at hand. In doing so Colonel Shusko, like Captain Ford, propagates the idea of the primacy of the thinking, not the merely reactive Marine. He emphasizes the social support available in the form of Marine teammates in making such a choice. Clearly, that choice is not only possible from the Marine point of view, it is also built-in to the expectations for embodied performance at the MACE. Care for the other *is* the care for self. In this case we have a variation on this principle: care for the self is from the other. It is not about “losing one’s self” in the Marine Corps, it is gaining a more extensive self that is radically more capable in the situation of combat.

There remains, however, complexity and subtle contradictions in the various *vocal* discursive constructions offered by Captain Ford insofar as his references to “predation” and “stalking” index the on-going power of the bio-reductive framework and the pseudo-science that provides the veneer of scientific authority which underwrites that explanatory power. Captain Ford’s comments that we all *stalk without any training* implies some sort of universal, evolved biological mechanism; the old conception of instinct is the only scientific category that is available in this situation. Again, it is only through clarity in the use and application of a plausible theory of human social action as well as a commitment to honor the logic of that theoretical position that we can see that, ultimately, Captain Ford’s comments favor an agentic rather than a deterministic view of Marine training. *Understood from the standpoint of semasiology, Marine training is a process of socialization into an embodied semiotic of action, not a process of unlocking the expression of evolved instincts from a kind of cultural entombment.* That kind of nineteenth century theory of culture and biology, of which Freudianism was the most influential representation in the last century, is, for quite some time now, no longer viable in principle.

And yet, as we see here, it lives on outside of the precincts of the social sciences in this century. This situation represents a moment of interpretive, and so theoretical, choice. Which theory of human social action and so which interpretation best represents Marine training? Socialization into a way of life may result in conceptualizations of human life as sacred, and so position killing as a moral wrong, but the response for a Marine warrior is not to strip away culture. It is, rather, to modify his or her conceptual schema with new moral tenets. You are being most cultural when you naturalize the creative outcome: what is natural and what is deterministic are no longer necessarily equivalent. What is natural for persons is to be determinative, not deterministic. This is the singular import of the thesis of the recovery, not the rescue, of human agency from the natural, and therefore, the cultural, world.

This point is well illustrated in the non-military fighting of the American boxer Mike Tyson. Tyson was, in his prime, a fearless, unstoppable fighter. In a documentary interview about his life, however, Tyson told of his family’s move to a tough, violent neighborhood when he was a child.

[The neighborhood was] very horrific very tough very gruesome kind of place, you know kill or be killed. I could remember going to school and being bullied

and people taking my glasses and putting them in the trunk of a milk car. I never had any kind of physical altercation with anybody at that particular time in my life so I couldn't believe anybody would do that. I never dreamed somebody...that...an absolute stranger would do that to me. I didn't know why I just ran I didn't know what happened I just ran. [In Toback, Tyson 2009]

Violence at that point was *incomprehensible* to Tyson and to the extent that it was incomprehensible, it did not exist. Only after adjusting his conceptual schema, much like U.S. Marine Sergeant Marion and his fellow Marines on Guadalcanal during World War II, was Tyson able to develop a coherent sense of the meaning of his experience. Learning concepts for making meaning and acting *is* the process of socialization.

Socializing Marines into enacting violence in the principled and disciplined ways that the Corps wants often conflicts with bio-reductive discourse that pervades the training atmosphere. While some IT's argued that the mental and character qualities of Marines are inseparable from the physical, the Marines themselves sometimes emphasized or prioritized one over the other. Consider this fascinating comment by Master Sergeant Coleman about courage:

Courage is 99% physical, 1% is like moral or decision-making. You gotta hump 60 miles over broken terrain to get to the place and then fight, that's when you're making the decisions [after you get there]. Yes, courage can be trained, but guys have to have something, it's instinctive, some instinctive aggressiveness. You know some guys are just passive and quiet, and you know they're not going to make it [through the MAIT course]. I've been fooled though, week 1 and 2 you think "shit he's not going anywhere" but then week 3 and 4 you think, "huh, he's improving, maybe", then week 5 and 6, "shit, he's really turned around."
[Fieldnotes, June 11, 2007]

Master Sergeant Coleman's comments go some way toward reinforcing what might be called a "physicalist" account of courage and MCMAP training; that is, the emphasis on physical action and martial arts techniques in the course would seem to support the idea that courage is "99% physical." Coleman's remarks, however, do not necessarily contradict the case I have been building for an agentic view of courageous action amongst Marines. I think that Coleman echoes Vegetius' 4th Century CE observation, "What can a soldier do who charges when out of breath?" (Vegetius 1985: 164). The point is that a lack of superlative physical training undermines the ability to act, whether, for example, physically in the sense of lifting an ammunition box or mentally in terms of concentrating in order to determine the source of enemy machine gun fire.

Moreover, the ability to act repeatedly, over time, is compromised. Coleman, in my estimation, was repeating Vegetius' sixteen hundred year old rhetorical question.

Coleman's reference to "something instinctive," however, muddies the interpretive waters, especially since he implies that Marines arrive with or without "it," whatever "it" is. This is a critical ethnographic moment for the researcher seeking to properly represent military culture as a chosen culture. During my research a colleague asked me whether or not the Master Sergeant "really believed" that an innate ability to fight is the basis for being trained to be courageous. I replied that I didn't ask Master Sergeant Coleman whether or not he really believed what he said since his actions appeared to me to make what he meant clear: first, from what I observed, he trained and kept training Marines *as long as they (not their instincts) tried to succeed* and second, he would change his view of individual Marines from initially negative based on their initial passivity to positive based on newly demonstrated aggressiveness. Even if Master Sergeant Coleman "really believed" that training chips away cultural obstructions to fighting instincts, we would be left with the traditional problem of variegated human action. That is, we must ask the question, "Why does training work for some Marines but not others?" How can we legitimately or convincingly hold individual Marine trainees culpable for "not having their cultural obstructions stripped away?" It seems to me that the act of attributing responsibility to Marines is possible only if we accept a glaring contradiction in the logic of the bio-reductive framework: that it is the Marine, not his or her instincts, that *decide* to strip away, or permit to be stripped away, cultural obstructions to instinctive behavior. The point of Marine combat training, then, is to discipline the effort of agentic precision in execution of purposes and meanings prized by the Marine Corps. The effect of the disciplining is naturalization.

If the primacy of the agentic person is tacitly if not overtly required in Marine training, then a corollary principle supported by semasiology emerges: physical movement and ethical content are inseparable for dynamically embodied human beings in social interaction. *Ethics are not simply evident in decisions **about** which actions to take, they are **built in** to Marine movements per se.* This fact is in many ways obscured if not denied by the long Western and American dependency on a conception of human being as composed of two radically distinct entities: mind and body. The philosopher Renè Descartes generated this wrong-headed and debilitating split in the 17th century. It still haunts and confuses thinking about human social action and is a fundamental component of the bio-reductive model. The idea that "culture"

somehow can be *and should be* “stripped away” to re-enable the operation of bodily instincts for fighting generated over the course of human evolution was a position advanced by some of the IT’s at the MACE when teaching Marine trainees. Drawing on earlier arguments we can recognize in this theory the separation of culture and biology, mind and body demonstrated to be scientifically implausible. To maintain it is an to enact and *idealism quite at odds with the general realism practiced by the Marine Corps. In this sense the Marine trainers’ explanation of the source of fighting contradicts their own training program.* That is, the realism of the Marine Corps and the combat veteran IT’s at the MACE expressed both in how they invite their trainees (not their trainees’ instincts) to revise or improve their performance and in their understanding of the inseparable connection between mind, body, and character is contradicted by the notion that culture/mind can be and should be separated from biology/body in order to permit, unimpeded, the operation of instinct. This is a systematic implication of the deep contradiction in the Marine Corps belief system.

The reflections of a naval aviator shot down during the Viet Nam war put the matter succinctly. U.S. Navy Vice Admiral and Congressional Medal of Honor winner James Stockdale spent eight years as a prisoner of the North Vietnamese, two of them in leg irons, four of them in solitary confinement, and was tortured fifteen times.²⁵ He reports of a kind of combat that he and his fellow prisoners of war engaged in

In sorting out the story after our release, we found that most of us had come to combat constant mental and physical pressure in much the same way.

We found that over the course of time our minds had a tremendous capacity for invention and introspection, but had the weakness of being an integral part of our bodies. I remembered Descartes and how in his philosophy he separated mind and body. One time I cursed my body for the way it decayed my mind. I had decided that I would become a Gandhi. I would have to be carried around on a pallet and in that state I could not be used by my captors for propaganda purposes. After about ten days of fasting, I found that I had become so depressed that soon I would risk going into interrogation ready to spill my guts just looking for a friend. I tapped to the guy next door and I said, “Gosh, how I wish Descartes could have been right, but he’s wrong.” He was a little slow to reply; I reviewed Descartes’ deduction with him and explained how I had discovered that body and mind are inseparable. [Stockdale 2006: 14]

Stockdale’s reflections and the expectations for embodied performance as well as actual embodied performance in MACE training provide the empirical evidence that both supports and

emerges from a new realist theory of human social action. In this light, a Marine IT “explaining” the source of combat as some sort of evolved instinct short-circuited by the dampening features of culture is, in reality, not offering an explanation at all. *The discourse actually functions as either a motivation for or a justification of fighting and killing in Marine-defined ways.* It draws its power to “convince” from its supposed basis in the scientific knowledge of allegedly exception-less deterministic laws of nature. If God or Nature are so conceived of, and hence believed in, in this way, compliance to the Word or the Law is, as human history has certainly shown, easily forthcoming.

The presumption of agency that underlies training (despite the contradictory vocal explanations offered by some IT’s) is rooted in the organization’s emphasis on the importance of the three “disciplines” that are central to the conception of training Marines at the MACE. These disciplines provide content for the Marines Corps’ concept of MCMAP training. They are “character,” “mental,” and “physical.” The relationship among these disciplines is conceived as, ideally, synergistic: the effect of these disciplines together is greater than the sum of the parts. We have here an instance of the Durkheimian principle of the social fact: the transformation of individual---the citizen--- being into social—military—being. This “whole-person” approach echoes the theoretical insight offered by Farnell and Varela when they suggest a particular way of understanding the body and mind’s relationship to the person. Farnell and Varela

argue that neither minds nor bodies intend, only people do, because as embodied persons they are causally empowered to engage in social and reflexive commentary with the primary resources of vocal and kinetic systems of semiosis provided by their cultural ways of being human. [2008: 221]

Farnell and Varela help us to *refine* Stockdale’s formulation of the relationship of body, mind, and person in action: ascribing the source of human social action to the mind (Cartesian) or the body (Merleau-Pontyan) is a theoretical mistake of the first order. *The Marine Corps, insofar as the MCMAP program represents it, understands this mistake and seeks to avoid making it.*

While the word “synergy” generally refers to cooperative action of two or more muscles or drugs, the Marines’ use of the term in this context refers to the qualitative increase in effectiveness or competence of a Marine *in being a Marine*. Marines who weight these disciplines equally—in terms of seeking master all three of them through the ever-increasing challenges of the belt system—will achieve an in-kind difference in competence compared to

Marines who do not. One way that the Marines conceive of the content and interrelationships among the disciplines is through the diagram provided in Figure 7 (see Figures section at the end of this chapter). The diagram offers a visual representation of what is essentially the invisible meaningful context in which techniques are embedded.²⁶ The idea of techniques as merely mechanical and utilitarian is untenable when put into the context of, for example, the “Responsible Use of Force” category in the Character Discipline. A MCMAP-trained “person of force” would be irresponsible (and immoral and acting illegally) if she used a lethal technique on an unarmed civilian who did not act in a hostile manner or demonstrate hostile intent. This is one example of the difference between “killing” and “murdering” in the American military: the responsible use of power for the requirement to use force in some situations.

Techniques, mastering them, and learning how to instruct others in their proper execution, use, and application, provided the centerpiece of the MAIT course in which I participated, but the context of this functional goal was “strengthening the disciplines.” In an aggressive, competitive environment like the U.S. Marine Corps, belts corresponding in color to higher levels of achievement create the potential for the owner to receive the respect and deference of other Marines who have not achieved the same level of competence. In an introductory training class Staff Sergeant Demster asked the Marine trainees, “What’s the first thing **every** Marine looks at when you take your blouse (Marine terminology for a uniform shirt) off?” and he provided the answer, “Your belt.”²⁷ Who and what Marines respect—and so seek to emulate—carries a special meaning within the Corps given that it is an organization where what you do or do not do can get you or others killed. In fact, the training material stated that the martial arts are critical “on the battlefield, where armed opponents are engaged in a fight not only for their lives but the lives of their comrades and brothers” (MAITM 07: 11).

The MACE therefore poses two rhetorical questions to trainees that illuminate the larger context of “strengthening the disciplines,” “What is the goal of MCMAP? Strengthening the disciplines or wearing a belt?” (U.S. Marine Corps Martial Arts Center of Excellence, Martial Arts Instructor Trainer Manual, Revised April 2007: section 09, page 10, *hereafter* MAITM Rev. 07). The right answer is that “Reinforcing the disciplines must always be the priority...Marines don’t need these skills to show off some new form of decoration, Marines need these skills as force multiplier in conflict” (MAITM Rev. 07: section 09, page 10). Apparent here is the idea that individual Marine trainees could—*indeed, had to*—choose how they would conceive of the

training and what sort of Marine, therefore, they would choose to be. The performance of techniques and all other training exercises had as its ultimate point preparation for enacting life-and-death decisions on the battlefield.

Given the conception of the warrior ethos as combining three synergistic disciplines, failing to “train in,” for example, the Marine Corps Core Values—Honor, Courage, and Commitment—jeopardizes life and limb just as much as failing to execute techniques properly. And of course, the jeopardy is not yours alone, but that of other Marines and persons you ought to be protecting. Mastery of techniques, then, is inseparable from mastering the application of the ethical (and legal) code that governs their use, the spirit in which they are to be employed, and the attitude toward them that a Marine expresses. This means, logically, that the *quality* of the performance of techniques *is* an expression of what kind of Marine you are (at least for the time and place of your actions). Mind, body, and values are inseparable in this sense. In their official position about the foundational intra-human relationships among “disciplines,” the Marines of the MACE value the *unity* of human being rather than a Cartesian split between mind and body. This occurs *despite* individual Marines’ tendency, when pushed or asked to explain the source of fighting, to rely on the concepts of the bio-reductive framework to convey the meaning of human social action.

The ‘spectrum of violence’ concept that, theoretically, covers all Marine actions, blends realism with the American ethical value that a broadly inclusive category of others is designated as “non-combatant.” We encountered one “test” for membership in this category in the “hostile action equals hostile intent” principle used but not acted upon by Sergeant Stevens in his encounter with the elderly Iraqi man during a nighttime raid on a house. While the meaning of actions are not always clear—as Sergeant Stevens in his (non)action in being confronted with a “clearly” hostile action proved—the Marine standard at least demands some empirical substantiation of hostility prior to intent, unlike, for example, the principle in light of which Al-Qaeda suicide bombers will blow up *anyone* whom they unilaterally determine is either to be killed or expendable. American Marines like Corporal Dunham can and do get themselves killed acting to honor this realist/ethical principle; after all, Dunham chose to smother with his body a grenade dropped by an insurgent who could have been just as easily shot dead by the Marines as they approached but for this very principle.

At this point I want to offer three statements about Marine training. First, the actual practice of training to fight like a Marine and not, for example, like an MMA sport fighter, should *not* be necessary were the bio-reductive framework a reference to real forces and entities. The person uses the body to embody mind and body in a dynamically embodied execution of a performance of being and the be-ing of a Marine. This is why the training is of Marines by Marines who address them as persons. No Marine IT talks to the DNA or to the instincts of any of the Marines in actual ethnographic fact. Second, the training itself does not constitute “stripping away” calqued-on layers of culture that obstruct the otherwise automatic operation of evolved instincts. Rather it is habituating Marines into new ways of moving (new) embodied values. Habits then become resources for intelligent use by Marines. The degree of expertise brought about by repetition makes these moves *appear* to be automatic, but training, as we will see, constantly forces Marines to think and to make judgments even as they execute these habitual moves. Autonomy constitutes automaticity of the practice, and *this* is why it is not mechanical. The automaticity can only be realized by virtue of the reality of autonomy as an agentic embodied practice. The person becomes charged with new, powerful alternatives for action.

The sense of automated responses in combat situations is enhanced by the complex actions Marines engage in and resolve, in very little time. The reason is that “complex situations” are *modeled in training and responses are thought through, practiced, and turned into a habit during training*. Consider this assessment of a combat operation by Marine combat veteran Colonel Bryan P. McCoy that McCoy used as a basis for demanding tough, realistic training from his Marines:

Major Martin Wetterauer had been a squad leader...in Operation Desert Storm in 1991. He told of a fight his platoon had with an entrenched enemy unit of six men. He described how the firefight that should have been over in a few minutes lasted more than an hour because it was fought only with rifles and the M249 SAW (Squad Automatic Weapon, essentially a machine-gun). Even though Wetterauer’s unit had rockets, hand grenades, and M203 grenade launchers, they were never employed in that fight because they were forgotten in the heat of battle because integration of weapons had not been drilled. Had the HE (High Explosives, such as grenades and rockets) been employed, the fight would have been over quickly. [2007: 27]

Battlefield effectiveness, according to McCoy, has to do with generating embodied knowledge. The speed with which a Marine can assess a situation, judge distance to a small aperture in a bunker, and in a remarkable feat of dexterity toss a grenade through it may invite us to consider a biological basis for fighting. But what happens in a situation like this has to do with conceiving and practicing ways of moving in light of an intelligent judgment exercised by the Marine. Thinking about how to act occurs *a priori*, becomes embodied knowledge, and as such permits Marines to think of other things besides what they are doing with their bodies in the very moment of execution. This means that they can, if they so choose, change their minds *in media res*.

This is not unique to the military and certainly not news to anyone who watches American football, for example. The sensitivity to the vulnerability of quarterbacks and kickers has resulted in severe penalties for opposing players should they use force beyond a certain point, specific blocks or tackles, or simply touch these players at certain points. Video replay clips are filled with players “pulling back” or otherwise amending their bodily trajectory, even in mid-air. This sophisticated kinesthetic capability grounds the legitimacy of an expectation for dynamically embodied ethical action. The human capacity for dynamically embodied movement that is value-oriented and purpose-driven by the person forms the basis of socio-cultural conceptions of courageous action: *ideally*, at any time, under any circumstance, Marines are expected to be able to change their current movement in light of a new perception of the intentions of an opponent, the generation of a new intention on the part of the Marine, or an attempt to more fully realize an ethical principle. This is not always possible given the limits imposed by the natural world where, for instance, a football player in mid-air cannot suddenly reverse direction. Such mitigating factors are included in our deliberations about assignment of responsibility for events in the world and may in fact alleviate a person from responsibility. Third, courageous action is inseparable from movement in context—from combat—because the movements are social expressions of values, not just practical techniques for practical ends. The conceptualization of hand-to-hand combat is foundational to what courage is to (Marine) combat infantry. Critically, that conceptualization is *embodied*, meaning that the way Marines move in close combat is nearly identical with “courage” for not only them but for Americans generally. Understanding why and how this is the case requires a detailed analysis of combat training.

Pulling these strands together results in the following: Marines deploy themselves—meaning their agency in the form of their bodies, vocalizations, creativity, and intelligence—toward the end of controlling enemy. The enemy, like the Marines, on pain of death, must be regarded as equally creative and intelligent in the use of violence toward to the same end: domination. The point of domination is the achievement of certainty through control. This leads to a rather startling conclusion: killing *is not the point* for the Marine Corps though that is their purpose and trained capability. Rather, killing is one among a number of means to an end-state of domination in the service of control. It is not Thou Shalt Not Kill because that is not the reality of war for Marines and the military generally. It is Thou Shalt Not Kill Indiscriminately, Immoderately, or without Respect. Death and killing is an absolute necessity in some cases exactly because the U.S. Marines and the military hold life so dear. There is an inherent uncertainty about combat because of the presence of human beings who are intelligent and creative, who can anticipate and so plan for the actions of others. There is also an inherent uncertainty about the natural world, chance occurrences, for example. “If that rock hadn’t rolled down that hill at that point the insurgent would have stumbled right into me. As it was he turned to look in the direction of the noise and I was able to shoot him.”

Figures

1. All theoretically possible human movement
2. Different cultural manifestations IX
3. Different societal manifestations VIII
4. Separate ‘codes’; rites, rituals, martial arts systems, etc. VII
5. All martial arts, rites, rituals of one people VI
6. A single martial art, rite, ritual, etc. V
7. The totality of moves of one human actor IV
8. One group of phrases or utterances III
9. One utterance of moves/gestures II
- One whole body gesture (kineseme) I
- One part of one gesture (kineme)

Figure 5: Illustration of the “nesting principle.”²⁸



Figure 6: Marines from 3rd Squad, Martial Arts Instructor-Trainer class 03-07 (MAIT 03-07) practice non-lethal martial arts techniques. The Marine facing the camera is (my) 3rd Squad leader Gunnery Sergeant Timothy Blanchard.²⁹

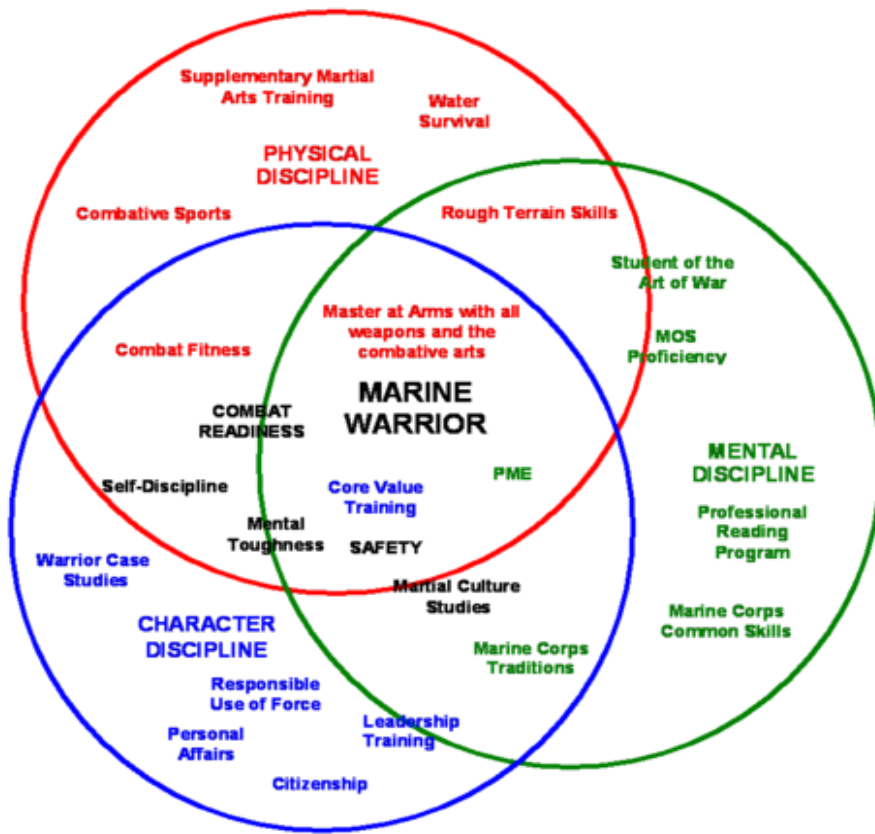


Figure 7: Graphical representation of content and interrelationships among key disciplines of the U.S. Marine Corps Martial Arts Program

¹ The political and moral reasons for deploying Marines are of course critical considerations. The Marine concept of the “mission” captures the close relationship between reasons for deploying and the permissible or necessary range of actions to be employed. The Corps defines “mission” as “the task, together with the purpose, that clearly indicates the action to be taken and the reason therefore” (2007: 106). Reasons for deploying Marines are separable only analytically from what Marines do once deployed because these reasons form the context for the deployment. In most cases these reasons constitute the moral justification for the use of or threat of force and the violation of the otherwise sovereign borders of other nation-states. This does not necessarily mean that there are not incongruities or even outright contradictions between reasons for deployment and actions taken. This kind of contradiction occurred during the Operation Iraqi Freedom II (OIF II) when the reason “free Iraqi’s from a tyrannical government” was contradicted by Rumsfeldian “shock and awe” tactics on the ground that violated the Iraqi values like the sanctity of a household and non-exposure of women to men. A related kind of contextual dissonance occurred on a different scale with the charge that the proffered reason for OIF II—“overthrow a terroristic regime threatening the world with weapons of mass destruction”—was exposed as a reason based on fabricated evidence, thus calling into question the moral justification of the operation. My point in broaching these topics is to note that the discussion to follow will concentrate on a very specific component of “intervention”: the meaning of that term as it relates to Marine combat infantry and why and how they train to act in the ways they do. This section of the study is then narrowly focused on the Marine conception of “warfighting,” and not, for example, “regime change,” “humanitarian relief,” “disaster recovery,” or “rebuilding,” all missions that the Corps has been tasked with, intentionally or unintentionally at one time or another.

² It is this conceptualization of the relationship between intervention, violence, and security that can produce a contradictory effect when Marines are attempting to intervene in the context of, for example, an insurgency. The internet news story on globalpost.com entitled “Winning Hearts and Minds through Shock and Awe” captures this contradiction. The authors juxtapose comments about a Marine mission in Afghanistan with those of an Afghani farmer.

“What makes Operation Khanjar different from those that have occurred before is the massive size of the force introduced, the speed at which it will insert, and the fact that where we go we will stay, and where we stay, we will hold, build and work toward transition of all security responsibilities to Afghan forces,” said Brig. Gen. Larry Nicholson, commanding general of the Marine Expeditionary Brigade-Afghanistan, in a press release issued Thursday.

It’s not going to be easy. No sooner had the tanks begun to roll out of Camp Leatherneck, in western Helmand Province, than the target population began to grumble. After more than seven years of a tug-of-war between the insurgents and the foreign armies, Helmand’s population is in no mood to be patient.

“There are more than 60 tanks in our village,” said Sher Agha, a resident of Nawa district. “Instead of moving along the roads, they are in our fields. They have destroyed our farmland, and smashed everything. They are just like wild boars.”

[MacKenzie and Dayee 2009 <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/afghanistan/090702/marines-offensive>]

³ Notice the proper pronoun use in this quotation, “its” has changed to the more appropriate “his.”

⁴ (http://www.marines.com/main/index/winning_battles/roles_in_the_corps/air_combat/air_combat_mission).

⁵ (<http://www.af.mil/main/welcome.asp>)

⁶ See Appendix B for a chart and short explanation of the difference between “enlisted” Marines and Marine “officers.”

⁷ At the rank level of cooks (privates or non-commissioned officers), their likely position in a ground combat situation would be as a squad leader. A Marine rifle squad usually has thirteen members. At the rank level of helicopter pilots (commissioned officers), their likely position in a ground combat situation would be platoon leader. A Marine platoon usually has forty-one members.

⁸ How the Marines understand and use these qualities will be examined later in this chapter.

⁹ The fact that insurgents make themselves indistinguishable from the civilian population among whom they hide is the basis for the lack of clarity experienced at checkpoints. Taking advantage of civilians in this way is not new or particularly “middle eastern.” The Irish Republican Army actually took the notion to a different level in 1990 when they forced an Irishman, Patrick Gillespie, working as a cook for the British to drive a van loaded with explosives into a checkpoint manned by British soldiers from the King’s Regiment. The explosives were detonated by remote control killing Gillespie and five British soldiers. The IRA forced Gillespie to drive the van by holding his wife and three children hostage and threatening to kill them if he did not drive the van. (<http://www.nytimes.com/1990/10/28/world/evolution-in-europe-bishop-rebukes-ira-for-car-bomb-attacks.html>)

¹⁰ My remarks here are supported by my training experiences during the summers of 2007 and 2008 as well as the structure of the training itself, which challenges both the individual and teams of varying sizes. Sometimes the training pitted an individual against a team, an individual against another individual, or team against team. These claims will be borne out as the analysis proceeds. The concept of the “battle buddy” and its application in both training and combat can be seen in McCoy *The Passion of Command: The Moral Imperative of Leadership* (2006).

¹¹ (<http://www.cnn.com/2004/WORLD/meast/04/05/iraq.main/index.html>)

¹² (<http://humanterrainsystem.army.mil/>)

¹³ See the *Counterinsurgency Field Manual* (2007) for a discussion of when and under what circumstances each type of solution can or should be applied.

¹⁴ I was party to numerous conversations in which it became clear later that one or all parties were not clear about an acronym's meaning. Interestingly, only when the acronym appeared to play a critical role relative to the larger context or content of the conversation did a conversant ask for clarification. Although more research is necessary, my impression was that admitting to not knowing an acronym was seen as vaguely negative and sometimes elicited a slight sense of annoyance on the part of the speaker who's quick and efficient talk was being interrupted. This idiom then could be used as a tool for the negotiation of power relationships: who is "in the know" versus who is "not in the know." In one fascinating case I observed a non-commissioned officer speaking with his superior commissioned officer. The superior officer was a new 2nd lieutenant (the most junior commissioned officer) and so quite inexperienced. The non-commissioned officer was a gunnery sergeant with over 13 years of experience. The 2ndLt. did not understand the reference to an acronym used by the GySgt. as was made apparent by his answer to the GySgt.'s question (neither did I for that matter). Though the GySgt. could have legitimately brought the issue to the fore and explained the acronym's reference, he chose instead to re-present the question as a request for confirmation of the 2ndLt.'s preferred course of action *without using the acronym*. The 2ndLt.'s facial expression demonstrated that he realized his preferred course of action would not be appropriate given the acronym's reference and so changed his reply to the GySgt. The true art here was that the GySgt. extended a great kindness to the 2ndLt. by helping him to develop an appropriate course of action without calling overt attention to his lack of understanding, thereby preserving the 2ndLt.'s authority over the GySgt. himself!

¹⁵ Of course this can produce negative results accidentally or be imposed as an interpretive framework as a positive strategy for absolving enactors of violence from responsible for honoring competing or even more important values.

¹⁶ I am *not* referring here to the use of internment camps for Japanese-American civilians nor what I see as American hypocrisy resulting from the concurrent employment of Japanese-Americans as combat troops in Europe. I am referring specifically to the context of combat and the battlefield, including treatment of prisoners.

¹⁷ In the larger discussion, Randy clearly struggles with this contradiction more than Michael. This may or may be expressive of their differential service: Randy did not see combat while Michael did.

¹⁸ Whether the example affirms or confirms my point is somewhat of an open question. It is certainly a plausible scenario based on accounts I have read of hand-to-hand combat in memoirs and letters but I am not clear that it is entirely believable. I am hedging somewhat here because I have yet to explore this particular representation in depth with combat veterans ethnographically in interviews. The scene, however, inspired my questions about "biting" opponents in hand-to-hand combat that I will review momentarily.

¹⁹ My interpretation of this fictional German character's character was worked out in discussion with Dr. Charles Varela. Our discussion was framed by the novel *The Kindly Ones* (2009) by Jonathan Littell that portrays the ideology and cultural commitment of a World War II German SS lawyer working for Heinrich Himmler. By way of contrast, if the German soldier was to be depicted as simply a soldier, and not an ideologically-fueled Nazi, then it would have to have been shot differently. That is, there would have to have been some portrayal of a mitigating factor, such as the American simply losing his grip without having vocalized or embodied any protests. Such as scene might be effective in depicting the hand-to-hand combat as merciless and unfair as opposed to malicious, merciless, and unfair.

²⁰ From the Martial Arts Instructor Trainer Manual, 2007 revision, section 9, page 8. Hereafter: MAITM 2007 09:8.

²¹ Some Marines I spoke with during my fieldwork objected to the term "warrior." The gist of their objection was that the term failed to carry with it unified purposefulness of the teamwork associated with their preferred term, "soldier." "Warrior" was too individualistic.

²² All Marines, regardless of rank, must achieve a basic level competence in MCMAP, a "tan belt" designation, by order of the Commandant of the Marine Corps.

²³ Realism and utility: the Senior Non-Commissioned Officer (an officer that gets promoted through the ranks rather than commissioned by the U.S. Congress) in charge of the all the IT's at the MACE explained to me that the techniques being taught were chosen from a range of different martial arts around the world according to the interconnected principles of effectiveness, utility, and field-usability. Effectiveness refers to the idea that the technique potentially produced a desired result quickly, depending on the judgment of the user. For example, chokeholds that cut off the blood supply to the brain were chosen over chokeholds that cut off the supply of air to the lungs because the former resulted in the incapacitation of the opponent more quickly than the latter. Utility refers to the applicability of the technique to scenarios that deployed Marines might face. The various lethal knife and bayonet techniques, such as a "vertical slash" would not be the first choice in a crowd control scenario. A non-lethal technique like an "arm bar" would work better *given the point of the mission*. The mission provides one component of the larger context for judgments about what counts as the best technique to utilize. As we saw in a review of the actions of U.S. Marine Sergeant Samuel J. Stevens (chapter 2), however, the context or conditions never *determine* the actions: the judgment comes from and is authored by the Marine. Field-usability refers to whether or not a Marine with a full field pack of equipment and weapons (perhaps up to 100 pounds) could execute the technique, which eliminates, for example, a "flying kick."

²⁴ Sergeant Betts, the only woman IT at the MACE during my training class, was responsible for creating this video. A copy was given to each graduate to the training class. See also The History Channel's production of *Human Weapon: Marine Corps Martial Arts*, A&E Television Networks, 2007. The production was shot during my fieldwork and offers additional footage of training situations. Interestingly, no effort was made by the MACE staff to distinguish me from the "real" Marines being filmed and I appear in a few places in the program.

²⁵ O.S. Guinness in the Foreward to *The World of Epictetus* by James Stockdale, page 5.

²⁶ After diagram in MCMAP and the Marine Warrior Ethos by Jamison Yi. A Venn diagram normally represents all the possible logical relations among members of sets. I have not yet explored why a Venn diagram was or is considered the best vehicle for the representation of the interrelationships among disciplines. It may have been chosen for its visual utility.

²⁷ SSgt. Demster also instructed the Marines in the moral rules that should be followed to *not* invite this kind of competitive comparison among Marines when he added, “On the other hand it’s not about taking your blouse off when you have a black belt with a red tab.”

²⁸ After Williams 2003:63

²⁹ Photo by author.

CHAPTER 7

COURAGE

One who conquers himself is greater than another who
conquers a thousand times a thousand on the battlefield.
-- *The Dhammapada*

Courage...must in the end remain a mystery.
-- *William Ian Miller, 2000*

Courage may be taught as a child is taught to speak.
-- *Euripides, 5th Century BCE*

Courage is not the absence of fear. It is the ability to face fear
and overcome it. It is the mental, moral, and physical strength
ingrained in every Marine. It steadies them in times of stress,
carries them through every challenge and aids them in
facing new and unknown confrontations.
-- *U.S. Marine Corps website, 2009*

Having set the theoretical and cultural context for the generation of embodied semiotic practices in American military training and combat in the last chapter (using the semasiological principle of nesting) I will now focus on connecting movement, meaning, and context in actual training (i.e., Figure 5 in the last chapter, levels V through I). I will examine the vocal and gestural discursive practices used in Marine combat training and explicate the concept of “courage” that emerges from them. In doing so, courage becomes *comprehensible*. This means that the semasiological framework will be used to untangle the Marines’ contradictory discourses of and about courage. This framework respects both their agentic descriptions and their agentic, embodied expressions of courage. Also required is an exposition of the relationship between combat training and actual combat that will provide the ground for my claims about the nature of courage. This exposition will be constituted by an analysis of two specific *visible* martial arts techniques, the “round kick” and the “counter to the round kick” in relation to (1) the Marine trainers’ tacit assumptions about the capabilities of Marines as persons and fighters, (2) their theoretical understanding of the nature of combat as a whole-person, value-oriented social

interaction, and (3) sometimes conflicting expectations for embodied performance that range from realistic to idealistic. (see Farnell 1995)

In short, I aim to connect the *visible* techniques of Marine combat training with the *invisible* concepts that make possible the existence of “courageous action” as a way of being through dynamic embodiment for Marines. Farnell and Varela call this anti-Cartesian endeavor “bringing together somatics and semiosis” (2008: 215). These “invisible concepts” are nothing more than cultural conventions, the same shared meanings that, for example, permitted a British army officer to report that, “Often all that was needed at a Commanding Officer’s conference was an executive nod; the action, even of an intricate nature, then followed promptly and efficiently without any visible co-ordination whatsoever” (*In Baynes 1967: xviii*). From a semasiological perspective we know that visible, tangible *techniques du corps* (in Marcel Mauss’s phrase) and invisible, intangible values like “courage” are inseparable. The visible and the invisible are a *duality* in Giddens’s sense, not a *dualism* in the standard Saussurian sense.¹ Knowing, moving, and being in a culture is irreducibly value-laden.² Rigorous and detailed ethnographic analysis is required show how exactly how somatics and semiosis, the visible and invisible components of ‘action-signs’, relate in any given local culture.

The orienting questions this chapter is designed to answer are: “What *is* ‘courage’ is to U.S. combat infantry, specifically U.S. Marines, and can it be trained? In the analytical sense that I am using it here, I want to offer a formulation of “combat” as “a variable set of movements employed by a person to harm or kill another person in the social situation of an enemy who is engaged in a similar practice.” The kind of combat I am referring to is close, or hand-to-hand, combat. It should be noticed that without the tacit agreement of another person who defines him- or herself as an “enemy” through embodied practice, there is no combat. Combat is actualized in the moment-by-moment, interpersonal enactment of embodied meaning: in using their bodies in motion combatants are “speaking” intelligently and generating meaning. I present “training” as “domesticated combat,” meaning that it approximates and in some ways replicates actual combat, but it is never identical with it.³ The U.S. military in general and the Marines in particular express this when they espouse the prescription and description “*train like you fight, fight like you train.*” As a consequence of the analysis we will be in a position to understand the basis for the near identity of courage and combat that has so far been assumed not only in this study but also in popular analogies between civilian and military actions.

Realism in Marine Corps Training: Domesticated Combat

During both of my summers with the Marines at the MACE I heard a number of comments from both IT's and trainees about the quality of the training. The comments generally placed the MCMAP program as one of the toughest in the Marine Corps and it was compared in everyday banter to U.S. Army Ranger training. The IT's noted that past iterations such as the Linear Inline Neurological Override Engagement (L.I.N.E.) program, were, variously, "beat-fests" or "beat downs," meaning that the physicality of the course was overemphasized to a deleterious degree, and that the program was incongruous with the Marine philosophy of *offensive movement*. Staff Sergeant Twiggs, an IT-in-training attached to the MACE told me, "the LINE program was the last martial arts program and it didn't work. It's something like Linear In-Fighting Neuro-Override Engagement...? *It's really defensive.*" (June 14, 2007, emphasis added). We will see momentarily how deeply such a defensive posture is *rejected* among U.S. Marines both organizationally and individually, and for good reasons. The preferred posture is offensive.

The IT's and MACE leadership tended to distinguish the MCMAP program from its predecessors on the basis of the three-discipline approach. The mental and character disciplines that we encountered in the last chapter are as important as the physical. A clear difference between the MCMAP program and its predecessors is to be found in the inclusion of "tie-ins." Tie-ins are events comprised of narrative accounts that I would classify as *moral parables*, and often focused on Marines who had won awards on the battlefield for their actions. In a tie-in, an illustrative description of the battlefield (or other) actions of a Marine was followed by a discussion of the values expressed in those actions. Tie-ins were usually delivered to the trainees right after a difficult, but not exhausting, drill. (To get a sense of a tie-in *in situ*, I have included a video on DVD of an Obstacle Course Drill and a tie-in in Appendix A). Usually, the IT in charge of the drill led the discussions.

These events were remarkable from an anthropological perspective since they presented the members that make up an organization in the explicit act of reviewing and reaffirming the principle values of their way of life. In this context, then, tie-ins constitute illustrations of being

a “good” Marine. They were also remarkable from a semasiological perspective since they demonstrated the way the members of a value-driven organization ascribe moral values to embodied action. Since the tie-ins were most often focused on battlefield actions, there is a clear and consistent message about what Marines do (fight), how they do it (selflessly), and why they do it (for their fellow Marines, the Corps, and their country). In this model of an event structure there is one particular theme that cannot be over-emphasized: *it is sometimes their words, but mostly it is what Marines do and so it is what they mean in using their bodies that counts most of all.*

The delivery of a tie-in after strenuous exercise is an overtly theoretical and so methodological decision by the MACE staff. For them, the tie-in’s messages are *appreciable to all Marines regardless of ethnic, socio-economic, or educational background* if delivered after tough physical training. Jack Hoban, retired Marine Captain, adviser to the MACE, and guest IT during my training noted that, “the Marines are ready to hear the content after a drill...it works on their emotions” (Fieldnotes, June 21, 2007). Staff Sergeant Wyman echoed this understanding when he noted that tie-in methodology is based on a book called

Developing the Ethical Warrior by Dr. Richard Strozzi-Heckler. Physically draining the Marines makes them more receptive to the moral and ethical messages, it’s just how your brain is wired. He based his book on research by Dr. Hummerls(?) who did a study. [Fieldnotes, June 14, 2007]

According to Hoban’s and Wyman’s explanation of the methodology of delivering tie-ins, physical exhaustion permits the Marines to *bypass* what anthropologists would otherwise argue are irreducible and necessary components for cultural being in the world (ethnicity, class, gender) and deliver ethical content directly to mind. The implication is that the brain, due to its structure, is the primary driver of human social behavior.

In my view two important issues are inappropriately entangled in this conception. First, in the semasiological and critical realist understanding of the mind-body *duality (not dualism)* we should expect that physical exhaustion and mental exhaustion can be related. In fact, as we saw in the last chapter, U.S. Navy Vice Admiral and Congressional Medal of Honor winner James Stockdale experienced this very relationship during his time as a prisoner of the North Vietnamese during the Vietnam War. MCMAP training, indeed, much military training, takes advantage of this relationship as a way, *simultaneously*, to teach combatants to be strong

mentally and to suggest acceptance of the new concepts and ethics that are required as part of the military sub-culture.

Second, in the semasiological and critical realist understanding of the mind-body *duality* (*not dualism*) there can be no such thing as “talking directly to someone’s brain,” as the Hoban-Wyman formulation could imply (if we adopted the bio-reductive framework). A consequence of this understanding would be to interpret SSgt. Wyman’s comment that “it’s just how your brain is wired” as a bastardized version of “it’s a liability of being having a mind and body in close relationship.” Importantly, we might see the Marines’ approach here as a form of “brainwashing.” Since there is no such thing as washing a brain clean, even figuratively, we can conceive of the term as a metaphor for the social process of using physical-mental exhaustion to cajole, demand, persuade, or force, a change in the value system by which a person defines himself and guides his actions.⁴ In a non-trivial sense, moreover, the person subjected to brainwashing must *agree* to the change in values, which signals the process as fundamentally social and interactive, not biological and vectored.⁵

Against this discussion, we can ask what, if anything, separates MCMAP MAIT training from brainwashing? The training is designed to produce pain and exhaustion while the moral lesson of the training is that the Marines are not only supposed to act, but to act according to principles regardless of that pain and exhaustion. *Which* principles and how best to express or honor them is often problematic, but the point is that principled action is required. This requirement exists *not because of but in spite of* a properly functioning biological feedback system conveying pain in the back, burning in the thighs, and shortness of breath. In this sense, the expectation built-in to training was to get the trainee to *refuse* the invitation offered by a properly functioning physiology. That invitation is to pay attention to pain and exhaustion and then to seek to alleviate it with appropriate behaviors like slowing down, hunching over, dropping the weight, grabbing the side of the pool and so forth. Since the course is entirely voluntary, the Marines who took part in the MAIT course *asked* to have their physical and mental disciplines challenged and so to risk a transformative experience in their character discipline. Marines could (and some did) *quit* the training and risk the approbation of the MACE staff and the members of their home unit instead of pushing themselves perhaps to go beyond their own limits physically, mentally, and morally.

The primacy of the *agency* of individual Marines in the training—and so the distinction between training and brainwashing—is reflected in an admonishment offered by Lieutenant Colonel Shusko:

When you're out there giving it 65% or 75%, think about these [exemplary] devil dogs. You have to reach down sometimes. You're pukin' out there, brush it off and move on. Think about your brothers, they'll pull you through and you'll pull them through. [Fieldnotes, June 13, 2007]⁶

LtCol. Shusko asks the Marines to take themselves as objects of critical inquiry and act to express the prized values of the Corps and the MACE MAIT program. Such acts are tacit refusals of the physiological messages being received as an invitation to focus on one's own pain and discomfort. In the refusal there is a personal denial of substandard performance *on behalf of the social others in one's group*. The use of familial or kinship terminology is one important, readily available, and generally understood way of indexing the kind of unwavering commitment to other Marines that LtCol. Shusko and the IT's expected. We can, say, then that the Marines who participated in the training *asked (were not forced into)* for the opportunity to risk a character transformation and in doing so they were agreeing to value others by performing at the peak of their abilities. I suggest that the difference between MCMAP training and brainwashing is exactly in the agentic decision to risk personal transformation through the encounter with pain and exhaustion versus the requirement to transform based on unwanted pain and exhaustion.

We can note, additionally, that LtCol. Shusko's discourse addresses Marines *as persons* in unwavering social and cultural commitment to one another as brothers, not as emotion-driven organisms emotions with their brains as individuated organs. The upshot of this kind of discourse is, it seems to me, is a Marine who *chooses* to monitor his or her own conduct and works to habituate thinking and acting that puts other Marines *first*. There are *other* good reasons to deliver tie-ins, and perhaps there are even good reasons to deliver tie-ins after strenuous physical activity, but those reasons are not and can not be based in any plausible way on a claim about delivering cultural content directly to human brain structures and their functions.⁷ Tie-ins, for example, generate a connection between past, present, and the future when the battlefield actions of a World War II-era Marine are offered as exemplary for the present trainees to enact in and after the training class. The act of remembering, and remembering *together* in the context of training, is one important way that the Marines generate

their tradition. “Marines have a tradition to uphold” is a phrase that I heard repeatedly. Perhaps more importantly, tie-ins illustrate the choice among Marines to commit themselves totally in their character, their minds, and their bodies to the values of the Corps. In training and therefore on the battlefield, the totality of their commitment constitutes the totality of embodiment. Intrinsic to being a Marine is a constant moral struggle to give oneself entirely to others.

How Marines are using their bodies in difficult and certainly dangerous or deadly contexts is what counts, which fact can be appreciated given that the primary modality for the training is indeed physical. The physical modality is one of the most effective ways of realistically replicating the stress, strain, and time compression while requiring ethical decision-making on the battlefield (both in terms of *thinking about* what actions should be pursued and in terms of *thinking from* the body in executing actions). Honoring Vegetius’s 1,700-year-old insight, the physical in one sense *underpins* training the mental and character disciplines at the MACE. Colonel Bryan P. McCoy (2006) notes that among other things, physical fatigue, stress, loss of sleep, and heavy soldier load are critical factors that detract from a soldier’s will to fight. These are precisely the factors that can be and were replicated in training. Since the physical and mental are intimately linked, physical exhaustion challenges Marines mentally.

It is physical discipline, therefore, that I take to be the basis of the Marine Corps claim to “train like they fight and fight like they train.” In fact, there are excellent grounds for thinking that the way Marines are taught to move in a training environment is replicated on a battlefield. Many combat veterans affirm this principle when they use phrases like, “then the training takes over,” to explain their actions after having set up a dangerous situation that invites fear. For example, U.S. Marine and Congressional Medal of Honor recipient Hershel Williams operated a flamethrower during the Battle of *Iwo Jima* (now called by its original name of *Iwo To*) during World War II. He crawled through machine-gun fire that bounced off the tanks of fuel on his back in order to destroy multiple Japanese bunkers. In an interview he said, “Was I scared? Absolutely I was scared. That’s where the training comes in. You don’t think you respond...I was doing the job I was trained to do” (*Medal of Honor* 2008).

Similarly, one Marine in my training squad, Sergeant Desamours, had this to say when I questioned him about the relationship between combat and the training we were experiencing,

Both physical and mental [disciplines are involved in] patrols in Iraq—they last 3-4 hours and its not just physical—you have to be mentally ready to act, there are

people out there looking to kill you, so you have to be ready, or I'm going to get shot or my Marines are going to get shot, the course here is exactly related to combat since you have to combine the physical and mental to overcome the Obstacle Course obstacles. [Fieldnotes, June 12, 2007]

Sergeant Desamours had been shot during a close firefight with insurgents.⁸ His remarks confirm the intimate interrelationship between physical, mental, and character disciplines in contexts of physical and moral danger.

I use the principle of “train like you fight and fight like you train” as the foundation for upcoming claims about the relationship between training for combat and actual battlefield combat. Though obviously not actually identical, training and combat are, nevertheless, virtually identical in terms of the way combat infantry are taught to move, and to do so in some important contextual and conditional ways. Movement here *includes* the notions of thinking, judging, and deciding (i.e., *mindedness*), with the point being that dynamically embodied movement is *thought in motion*. The context I refer to, for example, includes penalties on the last of the three training squads in any of our squad-versus-squad competitions for failing to accomplish a mission. The “losing” squad had to carry “the log,” a sawn-off telephone pole so heavy that an entire squad had to be mobilized to transport it on their shoulders. The squad assigned to the log had to bring it with them whenever they moved as a unit, near or far. One IT commented, with a wry grin, that the point of the log was to teach Marines a basic principle, “while you don’t have to come in first, you can’t ever be last;” what the trainers understand and seek to replicate is that in combat, “you have to make the other guy come in last. He dies, you live” (Fieldnotes, July 23, 2007). That one squad always carried the log is another lesson from combat: fairness may not exist. The context also includes variable circumstances such as heat, noise, the unknown (as in starting on a run without any knowledge of the destination), and changing missions. In the midst of trying to haul a life-size, two-hundred pound training dummy across an obstacle course, for example, two IT’s might approach the struggling squad and drop another dummy at their feet saying, “Ok, you have another wounded Marine,” and walk away.

There are, of course, limits to my claim that training is “domesticated combat.” Chapter 2 provided an extended study of military analogies and metaphors that serve as guides to prized moral actions. Some of those constructions were found to stretch the connecting tissue between the source model of action (military actions on a battlefield) and the action for comparison

(firefighting actions in a burning building) beyond the breaking point. One obvious limit to any statements about the relationship between training and combat is the fact that, in training, others are not *really* trying to kill you. What training cannot replicate is the reality of actual death and maiming, the horror, disgust, and the frustration of unfair, unjust death not only to soldiers, but to civilians, women, and children, animals, the destruction to property and landscapes, the uncertainty and fear of hunting other people as they hunt you, and host of other qualities and characteristics. While films and movies about war similarly lack this reality, they also lack the reality of training, but not entirely. Actors can and do train for fight scenes, and thereby illustrate or represent components of what has been discussed in this study. Risks are present, but mitigated even more than in training. For example, professional stunt men and women are called upon to perform the riskier dynamically embodied actions for the actors. There are, in short, actors for the actors. Overall, the actions of actors and their actors lack the intention on their part to actually fight in an actual lethal context with actual enemies possessing a similar intention.

The Marines were fully aware of the difference between training and combat reflected in differential thinking and action in training. As Sergeant Terrazas, a fellow trainee, told me, “Marines know when you’re in the field [in the presence of the enemy, near or on the battlefield], it’s serious and they give one hundred percent. Not in the [training] course because its *survival* mode, not *kill* mode” (Fieldnotes, June 27, 2007). Sgt. Terrazas characterized an approach adopted by some Marines wherein they sought to *endure* the course, not *master* it. Though not all Marines adopted this attitude, there were some who expressed a commitment to it by their lack of alacrity, their refusal to push themselves, and their attempt to find an easy way to meet a challenge (which they called “cheesing it” or “cheesedicking it”). This attitude amongst the trainees formed the basis of what was perhaps the biggest challenge to the IT’s: motivating the trainees to play their part in making the training realistic by giving one hundred percent. Individual Marines, squads, and at times the entire training class was admonished at different times for not “putting out” one hundred percent. The point was brought home in a particularly visceral and disconcerting way for me early during my own training in the summer of 2007. An IT asked the class how many Marines routinely included swimming or water-based exercises in their training. Only one out of thirty-two responded affirmatively. The IT noted that this was evidence that the Corps had lost its way and become too bureaucratic in that it had unwittingly

focused all Marines on passing the required, universal Physical Fitness Test (PFT). That test only included running, sit-ups, and push-ups. The irony was clear: the traditional PFT not only discounted the water-borne origins and nature of the Marine Corps, but unrealistically reduced combat readiness to these three physical exercises. To start to remedy this, the MCMAP program requires that Instructor-Trainer candidates pass a series of grueling water-based exercises.⁹

On June 14, 2007 I stood, with substantial apprehension but also a glimmer of hope, on the edge of the Olympic sized training pool at Marine Corps Base Quantico. I had been in the MAIT training class for two days. My apprehension came from the knowledge that I did not know what was to happen next but that whatever it was, it would be awfully difficult mentally and physically.¹⁰ Moreover I was sore and tired from two full days of training with Marines half my age so I doubted my ability to perform well physically. On land I had quickly come to learn that such inability might result in vomiting, passing out, or collapsing onto the ground. The potential consequence for lack of capability in the water is, of course, drowning. But I had always been a good swimmer and thought I could at last at least keep up (contrary to my performance so far), especially in light of a comment from a member of my training squad, Staff Sergeant Strickland, who told me, “there’s a real problem in the Marine Corps with Marines that don’t know how to swim or have basic water survival skills” (Fieldnotes, June 14, 2007).

At the conclusion of three distinct exercises that grew in complexity and physical-mental demand, I again stood on the edge of the pool, but this time I had on my camouflage utility uniform (“cammies” to the Marines), combat boots, flak jacket, Kevlar helmet, ALICE gear (All-purpose Lightweight Individual Carrying Equipment, a series of straps and belts used to secure implements like canteens and knives to your body), and a backpack that had a small Styrofoam float in it. The mission was, simply, to swim around the edge of the Olympic size swimming pool using only approved strokes and without “cutting the corners” or touching the bottom or the sides at any time. Earlier, the look of dismay on my face and a quick request for advice as we were being instructed on how to conduct the upcoming drills brought these comments from Staff Sergeant Twiggs, a fellow trainee who was familiar with water drills:

keep your flak jack loose so that you have better range of movement; keep your Kevlar (helmet) tight and lean backward and into it so that it acts like a float for your head. The most important thing is to stay calm and use explosive breathing

(short, powerful breaths that do not entirely deflate the lungs) to stay afloat. Forgetting technique and getting tired is the real problem since, if you get tired and did not keep your back arched on a float, or if you get water in your mouth and breathed it in and panicked, your body comes out of alignment and instead of conserving energy by having a low profile in the water, you waste energy by trying to stay above water and won't be moving forward. [Fieldnotes, June 14, 2007]

The complicating factor of this exercise was that there would be no Styrofoam float despite all the equipment, cammies, boots, and prior drills. The conditions of this drill ensured that the Marines had to put out one hundred percent effort. With no solid ground, no float, and little energy reserves, the Marines had no way of avoiding the effort that would be necessary to at least maintain their ability to breathe. In this sense, *the drill itself* as designed by the IT's admonished the Marines to exert effort and generate a focus to a level similar to a combat environment.

SSgt. Twiggs' comments, importantly, alert us to the substantive connection between the physical and the mental in the drill. We had to focus on a kinesthetic sense of body alignment and keeping a "low profile," which meant keeping horizontal to the water line or the line of travel, in order to stay afloat, move forward, and finish the drill prior to getting exhausted and sinking. Failing to focus meant compromising alignment, creating drag, expending more energy, tiring quicker, and possibly drowning.

In assessing my physical and mental state, as well as the distance around the outer edge of the pool, I actually thought that drowning or some no doubt painful and terrifying approximation awaited me. And it is exactly on this point that the IT's later upbraided the class and its relatively poor performance. Although I made the swim (much to the satisfaction of the IT's and myself), a number of Marines did not and required a life-saving float to be tossed to them from the pool's edge or handed to them from one of the three IT's monitoring the exercise from in the water. The MACE IT in charge of the class, Gunnery Sergeant Friend, yelled at the assembled Marines saying, "Do you really think that we'd let you drown?! Why was this not one hundred percent effort?! Why didn't you put out?!" In response to their failure, GySgt. Friend amended the training schedule and the class spent the next hour in the gym going through a series of grueling drills.

Gunnery Sergeant Friend's criticism of the failure of the Marines to exercise their agency to its fullest extent permits me to draw out an extremely important component of the training in terms of "courage." Given my interpretation of the drill itself mandating combat-environment-like effort, on what basis could GySgt. Friend criticize the Marines for not putting out? I think that what Gunnery Sergeant Friend meant by his criticism was that the Marines *failed* to live up to a foundational responsibility: despite the real difference between training and combat, their responsibility was to act as if they were in a combat environment through their own effort. They were being challenged to use their imaginations and drive themselves to generate the stress and exhaustion that can compromise their capabilities as agents on the battlefield even as they were expected to fight to overcome it. The Gunnery Sergeant's unspoken demand, then, was that the Marine trainees should have struggled onward until they went down.¹¹ The key indicator of their failure was embodied action: in reaching for the pool side or a float, *they thought about themselves and not their mission*. While civilians might question a demand for this kind of apparently self-destructive effort, the Marine Corps does not, especially in light of their awareness of the realities of lethal combat. The ethical principle was this: it is better to die trying than to give up. And the theoretical-moral principle is this: the absolute commitment to the principle of agency; but now, what makes that principle truly important, is the absolute commitment to the exercise of agency to the very limit, and virtually, to reach beyond it. GySgt. Friend was training the moral value, then, of self-sacrifice.

Gunnery Sergeant Friend later told me that the IT's viewed the water exercise as particularly important for discovering the strengths and weaknesses of the trainees. Later I asked him, half-jokingly, if he had expected the Marines who were struggling to "put out" until they passed out. He replied in all seriousness that he did and that was why he upbraided the class. (Fieldnotes, June 18, 2007). A Marine Corps Water Safety Instructor (MCWSI, pronounced "macwhis") confirmed that Marines can and did exert themselves to the point of unconsciousness in training to become a MCWSI, especially during timed underwater drills. Two days into my training I had discovered not only that the training was realistic *as a model of combat* but that insofar as it was, it conveyed, demanded, and modeled moral values, like what it meant to *fight to the end*. We can say that the latter is accomplished by offering trainees opportunities to strive, physically and mentally, to the point of incapacitation. Whether or not any particular individual actually incapacitates him- or herself in an effort depends on the

individual's choices. The design and speed of the training, as well as the IT's themselves, demand, expect, admonish, and encourage the Marine trainees to push themselves to their limits (and beyond). The goal is the realization of the personal knowledge of one's own limits, when and how those limits can or should be exceeded in pursuit of a value, whether it is accomplishing a mission or saving a wounded comrade. That the program and IT's are so oriented as to defy the very idea of an asymptote should not be confused with the fact that each Marine trainee *chooses* his or her own level of effort, moment-by-moment, situation-by-situation. For, if becoming a Marine is taken to mean that one realize the ideal of incapacitation, the persistence required to do just that *must* be the moment-by-moment, situation-by-situation, determined exercise of agency. Here, we have a meeting of Emile Durkheim's social fact (a kind of social determinism) with G.H. Mead's symbolic interactionism. That is, the *social fact* of Marine cultural determinism is the fact of each Marine's social interactional determination: the mutual role-taking action in this cultural case makes each individual a unique "other" for the taking, that is, there is the fusion of both the generalized and significant other. Thus, *the striving for incapacitation on the part of each Marine (as a self) is in the service of each Marine (as an other): the person and the collective have become one unit of action in reciprocal sacrifice.* Caring for the other in this culture is the expressed in the ultimate act of dying for the other. And this kind of choice of one's level of effort demands a mutual act of total embodiment.¹²

This example illustrates my contention that MCMAP training is analogous to combat in important ways. The nature of that analogous relationship can be understood in the same way that we understand that a scientific experiment, as Harré (1998) puts it, "domesticates Nature." The natural setting of combat and its real threat to life is domesticated or modeled by the control for and delineation of outcomes represented by the presence and capabilities of the IT's. The interaction of tired, weighted-down Marines in deep water is mitigated by the IT's swimming and standing close by. The lack of armed, intelligent, creative persons trying to kill you is also a control. But these controls were mitigated themselves by the trainees' choice to participate at one hundred percent or not. Sergeant Terrazas's description of Marines not putting out one hundred percent until they are really "in the field" now becomes the focal point for questions about the realism of the training. The extent to which participation was subpar was the extent to which the training did not emulate real combat.

The controls for realistic training could also be mitigated by the unpredictable response of some trainees at different times and in different circumstances. During my second summer with the Marines as a guest Instructor-Trainer, one trainee suddenly dropped out of a three-mile run and fell onto the ground. He mumbled something about the heat but the corpsman, “Doc” Young, said to me that he had no symptoms of heat exhaustion. He was, for example, sweating properly. The IT’s immediately concluded that he was faking injury to cover his lack of performance on the timed run. He should have pushed himself to run until he *actually* suffered from the heat. In focusing on himself, the Marine violated a basic principle for the combat-focused Marine Corps: the group, not the individual, always comes first. This was a betrayal of the first order. Three IT’s, in addition to Doc Young, surrounded the Marine and yelled at him, threatening him with, amongst other things, expulsion from the program, dunking in an ice-bath in a nearby building reserved for (real) heat casualties, and administration of the “the silver bullet,” a long thermometer used rectally to measure interior body temperature. The IT’s and Doc Young expressed a harsh contempt in their tone of voice. The Marine finally stood up and staggered over to the rest of the training class where his absence had been noted but not recognized. That is, the rest of the class went on without him and without acknowledging his return. This was a (mild?) form of ostracism.

Marine Martial Arts Techniques: Thinking and Action, Courage and Values

I now want to formulate an understanding of the relationship between the physical and mental disciplines in the context of MCMAP training. So far I have used examples mostly at the kinesemic level. These are “whole-body” movements. As we move downward through the semasiological “nesting principle” hierarchy into levels of greater detail, we eventually come to an example of the smallest meaningful unit of movement in the MAIT training. That is, the shortest understandable phrase “spoken” with the moving body. This movement, we will see, is both *offensive* (as opposed to *defensive*) and foundational to the combat infantry conception of “courageous action.” Before getting to the embodied phrase that enacts “in and toward” (an enemy), I want to clarify my claim that dynamically embodied movement is *minded*, *not mindless*. LtCol. Shusko illustrated this point himself by *prioritizing* the mind over the body when he said, “Where the mind goes the body follows” (Fieldnotes, June 29, 2007). LtCol.

Shusko's comment challenges the MACE staff's presentation of the three disciplines—physical, mental, and character—as co-equal for MCMAP training. Given the theoretical orientation of this study, I understand him to mean that a Marine's intelligent determination to move appropriately subordinates the physical body as a resource for the purposeful exercise of agency, that is, to think and mean *in moving*. This understanding fulfills the interpretive expectation emerging from my stated theoretical position that the cultural subsumes the biological and includes the social.

In the sometimes overt and sometimes tacit recognition of the agency of Marines in training and in the capability of their being trained, the MACE staff implied prioritization of the three disciplines with character being at the top, mental or mind being second, and physical being third. It is something like the vernacular English speaker's conception of "mind over matter." We should note that this formulation meshes well with the idea that the sheer physicality of the program provides trainees with the opportunity to practice resolving the moral struggle between attending to the pain and exhaustion of the self as an opportunity to stop or quit and attending to the needs of other Marines and accomplishment of the assigned mission.

There can be (and sometimes was) an *idealism* being advanced in such talk. It is important to dwell on the complexity of this kind of discourse in terms of what Marines should or could "live up to," *if they so choose* because it brings us into confrontation with what might be called "original acts of agency" and perhaps, into a zone of social action in which the rightness or wrongness of action is indeterminate given the extraordinary circumstances of events and the recognition of human beings as imperfect. The Sandones suggested as much in the last chapter.

A day or two before the pool drill discussed above, a Marine combat infantryman and fellow trainee Staff Sergeant Carr, sprained his ankle badly. This type of injury had dogged him, he later told me, his entire military career. For his injury SSgt. Carr received a pair of crutches, which he used to get to the pool deck. During the drill I watched as SSgt. Carr, in obvious pain, attempted but failed to complete the drill, a failure that, if not remedied through supplemental training within a few weeks, would cause him to be disqualified from the course. That very afternoon we were given a classroom session on caring for training injuries, the principles of which suggested that sprains ought to be iced and the joint elevated. Ironically, there sat SSgt. Carr with ice on his ankle, but his foot on the floor in clear violation of the training he was at that very moment receiving. We might be tempted to think that this was mostly a display of

machismo. Whether it was or not depends on the extent to which we cast the enactment of the embodied strategy of thinking that “the sprain is not as bad as it seems to be” in light of a distinctively masculine ethic. For now I want to leave that question aside and suggest that SSgt. Carr’s violation of the principles of injury care was a strategy for living out or living up to LtCol. Shusko’s notion that where the mind goes the body follows. SSgt. Carr later affirmed the spirit of this interpretation when I asked him about his injury after the class. He said, “Yeah, they (the base doctors) gave me seven days for recovery, but I’m giving myself two, well, two plus the weekend” (Fieldnotes, June 14, 2007). Despite being given official leave from his training obligations SSgt. Carr not only attempted the pool drill, he amended the doctors’ judgment of a proper recovery period to fit his idea of when he ought to be ready to resume training in full. In a way of life that routinely and overtly pits self- vs. other-interest, is SSgt. Carr’s action really just an expression of *machismo* or does it also, or, better, does it independently and therefore more deeply express commitment to a way of being in actual situations of lethal physical and moral danger? In the terms of the latter, this would be strictly in keeping with the Durkheim/Mead principle that *total commitment entails total embodiment and total embodiment entails total self-sacrifice*.

Nevertheless, we might ask if there isn’t a kind of foolishness involved here, a crossing of a realistic line from a kind of idealism that delineates a goal we all recognize is impossible to achieve but is nevertheless worthy of an attempt to a kind of idealism that delineates a goal we all recognize is impossible to achieve but ought to be achieved anyway. After all, without the proper recovery period, SSgt. Carr’s ankle would not work, and, after a few days, this is exactly what happened. SSgt. Carr had to leave the MAIT program because his injury prevented proper completion of the course. The biological body *is* a structure that can break. It is also a structure that can function with or without our active intervention. An example of the latter is digesting food. On the other hand, and as a counterpoint to these seeming realities, consider Marine Corporal James “Eddie” Wright whose story was introduced to me by LtCol Shusko (see Figure 8 in the Figures section at the end of this chapter).

Wright was the assistant team leader with B Company, 1st Reconnaissance Battalion, 1st Marine Division, I Marine Expeditionary Force in Al Anbar Province, Iraq, when his patrol came under small arms, mortar and rocket propelled grenade fire in an ambush. He immediately took action, returning fire with his M-249 Squad Automatic Weapon, until an RPG hit his humvee.

The blast severed both of his hands and severely wounded his left leg. Incredibly, he maintained his composure, instructing his Marines to use a radio to call for help and to apply tourniquets to his wounds. He led his Marines from the kill zone, directing fire on enemy machine gun positions.

[U.S. Marine Major General Thomas S.] Jones listened to the young reconnaissance Marine's story in amazement. He then asked him how he managed to keep from going into shock and passing out. Wright replied, "Sir, I couldn't pass out. I was in charge."

[<http://www.mcnews.info/mcnewsinfo/marines/2005/20053RD/features/sgtwright.shtml>]

MGen. Jones's query to Sgt. Wright conveys the usual (realistic?) expectations about the nature and function of the human body as a biological organism: that it is automatic and automated. Sgt. Wright's example is "amazing" in proportion to our (misplaced) reliance on the bio-reductive framework's denial of our species-specific agentic capabilities and our culture-based enhancement of those agentic capabilities. According to Wright, he had a different agenda in regard to his taking his body as a resource for the realization of his intentions as a Marine leader. The proof of Wright's claim is in the fact of his embodied action—he instructed his Marines to apply tourniquets to his arms, led his Marines, and continued, through them, to fight.¹³

A phrase I appropriate to describing Wright's actions is "presence of mind," as in, "he had the presence of mind to instruct his Marines in applying tourniquets." Wright's actions provide a model for Marines to emulate even as they provide empirical evidence that forces us to critically re-assess what is realistic and what is idealistic in our expectations for combat action. Whether a positive expectation can be or should be applied generally to the exercise of agency by Marines is a question that frames the actual practice of IT's like Gunnery Sergeant Friend who expected his trainees to succeed or approximate drowning while trying. In thinking rather than going into shock, Wright's example grounds the notion that the intelligent agency of the Marine as a person trumps the "dictates" of his or her biology.

The complex role of thinking in combat is highlighted by my experience with many combat and non-combat veterans as well as both trainers and trainees at the MACE who told me that thinking too much is often a way to get yourself or others killed. This puzzled me given my theoretical position, LtCol Shusko's comment, and a multitude of other examples of thinking-in-the-moment such as those exhibited by Sgt. Stevens, Sgt. Wright, and others. A captain at the MACE claimed, for example, that rigorous training produces "muscle memory," meaning that,

“you don’t have to think about it, you just do it.” This comment resonates with World War II Marine Hershel Williams’ statement that “you don’t think you respond.” Was I here being faced with ethnographic evidence for the notion that training is indeed the difficult process of *removing* the obstructing and obfuscating layers of calqued-on culture from individual Marines so that combat, or fighting, and killing, was made possible if not so probable as to approach necessity?

Conceptualization and thinking were not only present, but necessary for the trainees to learn to move in the ways the Marine Corps and the MCMAP program required to be effective leaders and combatants. The persistent mistake in Western and American culture about combat is that it is mindless. That mistake is grounded in the deeper issue of the scientifically implausible notion of human social action presumed by the bio-reductive framework. To the contrary of that model, my ethnographic evidence suggests that not only do human beings learn, they can and do decide when and how to take what they learn as a motivation for action. What the Marine captain at the MACE and Medal of Honor recipient Hershel Williams miss is the idea that while in actual combat thoughtfulness about actions in process is dangerous, the actions themselves are grounded in conceptualizations that occurred *chronologically prior to* their enactment. What is learned, what is embodied today can be enacted tomorrow at the discretion of the person. The phrases “not thinking about it” and “you don’t think you respond” that describe personal experience and suggest a bio-reductive explanatory framework are not simply about what the combatant is not doing—reflecting on actions in process—but they fail to make clear what the combatant is doing: trusting in and executing trained (habituated) movements in light of a conceptually-based appreciation of what is happening in the situation.

These phrases are evidence that combat veterans generally and uncritically accept the bio-reductive framework embedded in the American vernacular. The anti-Cartesian and anthropological insight, however, is that their phrasing ignores the possibility that they are thinking *in and through their actions*. Farnell and Varela elaborate on an important insight offered by the Wittgensteinian philosopher of human movement David Best who writes, “to describe an action as thoughtful is not to say that the physical behavior is accompanied or preceded by an inner mental event: it is to describe the kind of action it is” (cited in, Farnell and Varela 2008: 227). “Active engagement in any activity is thinking, which is not to say that one cannot also be reflective and think about the activity when one is not engaged in it” (Farnell and Varela 2008: 227). Ethnographically, acting thoughtfully in moving is exemplified by a Marine

choosing to execute one among a range of possible bodily techniques in response to a move by his opponent. In the case of simple or complex movements habituated in training, thinking occurs in mastering the movements and in mastering the conceptual appreciation of when, where, how, under what conditions, and in which contexts the movements should be employed. An opponent's counter-move is similarly thoughtful action. In this sense, fighting is a kind of conversation where the combatants attempt to "talk over" one another. One limit to this analogy with vocal conversation is that embodied action can be articulated much faster and can be articulated simultaneously by the combatants.

Equally important is the understanding that acting thoughtfully and thinking other thoughts is possible. In the MAIT training course the IT's presented the trainees with challenges to their "situational awareness," as they termed it. "Situational awareness" means, simply, being aware of the larger situation. What constitutes the boundaries of the larger situation seems to be dependent on the rank, purposes, and understanding of the context in which the Marines are operating, as well as assessments of what the enemy is doing, not doing, or might be doing. A well-bounded example from the training occurred in one challenge where two trainees were paired into a buddy team whose mission was to move along a wooded trail and engage any "threats" that appeared. "Threats" referred to Marines performing as enemy combatants. During their advance down the trail, two enemy combatants would engage the buddy team while a third, who is hidden nearby, waited until the fight was in progress to launch an attack. The buddies need to fight their opponents, monitor and adapt to changes in each other's condition and performance (one buddy may be considered killed or incapacitated by an IT observing the fight) as well in their opponents' condition and performance, *and monitor the general area*.

During their first iteration, most of the Marines failed to pick up on the need to remain aware of changes in the situation beyond their immediate spatial locality and opponent. As a result, most of the buddy teams were "killed." The lesson was that quickly and efficiently eliminating your opponent gives you the time and energy to respond to changes in the larger situation. This was both a tactical principle and a motivation for keeping your buddy and yourself alive. From a personal standpoint in terms of the management of my thinking *from* my body and my thinking *about* my body and four others in the unfolding situation, I found this experience to be like trying to conduct one multiple, loud, angry, insistent vocal argument while listening and trying to understand another, and being challenged by a generalized third argument.

Thinking *about* my body was a *monitoring of*, not a *reflection*, action, meaning that I was monitoring myself in ways such as how I was balanced to how I was pivoting, identifying my opponent's intention kinesthetically (i.e., how he was trying to trip me), seeing what technique(s), if any, my opponent was employing, estimating how far I need to move to make my opponent miss with the weapon (e.g., knife, baton, *mokuju*) he was using and so forth.

What I was not doing was reflecting on, for example, why I was in Quantico, Virginia that day. But this is was a matter of choice and the management of my focal awareness at the time. As Farnell and Varela claim regarding the actor's relationship to the experience of acting in the world:

Active engagement in sensory experience is meaningful. The signifying here is not some semantico-referential meaning outside of the sensory act, it is meaningful because it is understood at some level, and therefore a semiosis—a meaning-making process—is at work. Sensory acts make sense without necessarily being thought about—i.e., engaging in reflective, abstract, critical, propositional, or theoretical thought.

This is not to say that one cannot also be reflective and think about the meaning of sensory experience either at the time or later. It is also worth remembering that in the midst of social interaction, spoken discourse too is most often used without thinking about it. [2008: 227, emphasis added]

I hasten to add, however, that such *reflective* thoughts as “why am I here at Quantico, Virginia today” were not only possible, but also more prevalent than I would like to admit given the stakes of hand-to-hand fighting. While the potential for and the reality of reflective thinking in fighting can undermine a combatant's focus, it is not *necessarily* undermining, even in actual combat, given a propitious alignment of the skill of the combatant, commitment to purpose, some luck, and unlucky or unskilled opponents. By “skill of the combatant” I mean the habituated embodied competence in fighting that permits a combatant to fight without having to concentrate fully on the many movements required. *Fighting can remain out of focal awareness, more or less, for longer or shorter periods of time, in some situations.*

U.S. Army Staff Sergeant Wolfe, a member of the 101st Airborne, represents a case in point. In the summer of 2004 I informally interviewed SSgt. Wolfe after I learned that he was being considered for an award for bravery for clearing a trench of Iraqi soldiers who had ambushed his unit. SSgt. Wolfe told me that he recalls running down the trench killing the enemy soldiers as he went using an assault rifle he took from one of their dead since he had run

out of ammunition. Without prompting he told me, quite matter-of-factly, “I remember thinking [as he was conducting his assault] that my wife would kill me if she saw me doing what I was doing” (Fieldnotes, June 23, 2004). He gave a little laugh. I got the distinct impression that he was a bit amazed and a bit baffled both by what he did and by what he was thinking about while he was doing it.

I suggest that the MAIT training course challenge to situational awareness, therefore, can be understood as an attempt to teach the Marines that when a certain level of mastery of martial arts techniques and fighting is achieved, when their fighting capabilities become habituated, it is best to use one’s focal awareness to, for example, monitor the larger situation rather than reflect on irrelevant or tangential notions. There is, perhaps, an interesting way to consider this issue in light of SSgt. Wolfe’s actions. It may be that SSgt. Wolfe’s adoption of his wife’s perspective constituted a positive strategy for him to ensure that his habituated movements were executed without hesitation. That is, if he concentrated on what he was doing and so risked introducing reflective thoughts about what his actions meant for him and for his opponents, and what he and his opponents were risking, he may have hesitated, stopped, or otherwise blocked the realization of own intention and purpose. Speculatively, the experience of shooting multiple others at close range with an assault rifle might have been difficult to, in a sense, ignore. In sum, SSgt. Wolfe’s strategy might have been to take his wife’s perspective in order to get out of his own way, so to speak.¹⁴

Speculatively or not, SSgt. Wolfe’s focus, or lack thereof, is a choice, and so a personal achievement. It is not the generation of some kind of learned instinct. MAIT training, then, calls into question not only the traditional view that thinking is done “in the head,” but the speed and forms of thinking as relatively slow and linear. The corrective idea is that thinking is done “by the person from the body” and that it can be instantaneous and multi-modal. I want to suggest that MAIT training is designed to teach the Marines that when a certain level of mastery of martial arts techniques and fighting is achieved, when their fighting capabilities become habituated, it is best to use one’s focal awareness to, for example, monitor the larger situation rather than reflect on irrelevant or tangential notions. The mental discipline is disciplined for total commitment to the execution of the intention and purpose of the combatant Marine.

The foundation of this alternative interpretation of the relationships between thinking and acting in combat training and in actual combat is perhaps best appreciated through a detailed

examination of how my class of Marines were trained to counter a basic attacking technique called a “round kick.” A visual representation of this counter move from the A&E Television Networks production *Human Weapon: Marine Corps Martial Arts* (2007) can be found here <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m6nBTjiCz5k>.¹⁵ My training class was formed into pairs of Marines that were to practice both the round kick and the counter to the round kick. The training was structured so that participants practiced each move individually and then in combination. We started with round kicks against a passive opponent. Round kicks are attacks designed to incapacitate or maim, if not kill, an opponent. Generally, round kicks are aimed at the side of the opponent’s body anywhere on the vertical axis of the body from head to ankle.

Where the kick is aimed can be understood as *constituting* the intention of the attacker. Aiming for the thigh, protected as it is by heavy muscle wrapped around a strong vertical bone, constitutes intent to inflict pain. Aiming for the knee, a joining of two separate bones unprotected by heavy muscle and vulnerable to lateral forces constitutes intent to maim. Aiming for the head constitutes intent to kill. During the training we were made aware of these distinctions through prohibitions on certain moves in “sparring,” that is, free-form one-on-one practice using the techniques we were learning. For example, a quick “no knees, no head” from an IT established the rules of the engagement. Figure 9 (see Figures section at the end of this chapter) presents a transcription of a round kick in the movement script Labanotation. As the transcript shows, we were practicing round kicks aimed at our opponent’s thigh. The attacker’s goal is to land the top part of the combat-booted foot onto the defender’s outer thigh. As a safety measure, the attacker was expected to expend at about 70% of his or her total power. It is important to note here that the call for a “measured” attack means that the IT’s must be assuming that the attacker can and will control the strength of his or her kick. Besides expectations for controlling the aim of the kick, we have here one of the most pervasive, tacit acceptances of personal control of the body in Marine combat training, contrary to what we should expect were the explanatory notion of instinct as an automatic reaction at work. And it is also contrary to the commonsense tendency to believe that ‘trained habits’ are automated just because they are automatic. Automatic habits, in being so trained, are thus under the autonomous control of the person. This captures the sophistication of the principle that, “where the mind goes, the body follows.” The fact of ‘training’ for ‘discipline’ is what unifies ‘mind’ and ‘body’ in this principle.

Marines who failed to control their body or improve the aim of their kicks drew the attention of the IT's who delivered further instruction. Further instruction in these instances focused primarily on an IT replicating the move(s) in slow motion with a third Marine serving as a passive defender so the Marine being instructed could watch the example of proper execution. The Marine under instruction often moved around the entangled bodies of the IT and defender to generate multiple perspectives on particular movements, placement of feet, orientation of shoulders, location of grip on a throat, or any of the variety of variables involved in the action

In my own training I often recalled the *image* of the proper angle of an arm or the location of a foot in an engagement as I had seen it done by the IT's and then actively sought to "fit" my own movements to reproduce the image. Over time, the image became unnecessary except when a novelty emerged, such as an opponent with a physical stature quite unlike my training partners. For example, a tacit and implied lesson in learning to "choke out" (into unconsciousness or death) an opponent was that if the opponent were significantly taller than you, you would not attempt to strangle her in the first place!¹⁶ Creative Marines would "solve" the problem by bringing the tall opponent to the ground for example with a technique called a "Reap" which involved sweeping a leg out from under the opponent. Two important principles emerge here. First, we were being taught not to offer an opponent an advantage by attacking a strength (height); second, we should use teamwork to overcome the strengths of an opponent whenever possible. The variations on the latter principle were endless. They included, for example, partnering with a tall Marine in a group competitive training exercise or attacking known strong or tall Marines with more than one Marine where possible and where permitted by the rules of the exercise.

During instruction the IT's would often stop and emphasize specific movements that they thought were being performed at the wrong angle, the wrong speed, the wrong duration, and so on. At times the IT's would physically push, pull, or place a limb or a Marine's entire body to demonstrate a proper or improper position or movement. Anthropologist Greg Downey (2008), who studies Brazilian *capoeira* (a martial art), calls this pedagogical technique "scaffolding" and calls attention to the *sociality* of learning to move martially.

The instructor's assistance helps to control the learner's body, allowing the student to execute actions that will eventually flow with much less effort. When

the novice becomes more competent, scaffolding is incrementally withdrawn or “faded.” [2008: 207]

The “stopping points” generated a beginning and an end to movement that led me to discover what the Marines took to be the smallest appreciable phrases of movement that were understandable. Within those phrases it was not uncommon for the IT’s to seek to correct what we might think of as a particular word within a term or phrase. This multi-level “parsing” of movement phrases occurred in ways similar to those employed in parsing a text. Downey notes that

On closer examination, however, the division of a smooth movement into myriad steps can actually make the technique more kinetically difficult. To stop in the middle of the “stingray’s tail” kick, for example, demands greater balance and body control and requires that a student maintain an awkward bent-over posture. More acrobatic techniques done in stages can be even more challenging, if not impossible. In one particularly difficult exercise, an instructor asked us to delay in the middle position in an *a’u fechado*, a “closed cartwheel”; doing so meant balancing on one’s hands while bent in half at the waist so that the feet nearly touched the ground. Another instructor asked students to stop halfway through a cartwheel and balance before descending into a headstand. Both exercises met with groans from the students, and even fairly competent performers often could not meet the requirement to parse the movements that they could do at full speed. Capoeira instructors frequently tell students that a technique will be easier once it is reintegrated. [2008: 209]

Quite opposite to “stripping away” culture in order to free evolved behaviors, the process of learning to move martially depends fundamentally on the socio-cultural interaction of persons. Parsing embodied techniques into component embodied phrases and action-signs does not reveal what we might otherwise expect to be an innate expertise in moving martially given the supposed source of such movements in evolved behaviors. Rather, it reveals *increased difficulty* that needs to be resolved by the active person through the embodiment of new conceptions of how to move according to the larger concepts of the martial system.

Affirming this interpretation of learning to move martially is the variability among learners that we would expect to encounter. Different Marines presented different levels of ability, not only in executing techniques appropriately but also in “picking up” the instruction being offered. It took some Marines longer than others to achieve a basic level of proficiency in a particular technique, for instance. Moreover, a Marine who otherwise picked up on specific

parsed movements quite quickly might not be able easily to integrate those techniques easily together in the ways we were being taught.

In this light and returning to the “counter to the round kick” technique we were learning, it is instructive to consider the otherwise innocuous point of having a passive opponent in the training. First, the only perceptible or perceptual stimulus that might count for the kind of Skinnerian conditioning underwriting combat training (as suggested by Sergeant Stevens based on his understanding of Lieutenant Colonel Grossman’s argument in chapter 2) is the threat defined in and through the imagination of the Marine practicing the kick. The opponent is another Marine who shows no threatening posture or other “signal” of the intention to harm. Second, the passivity of the opponent allows the attacker time to *think about* his or her attack and execute it in slow motion, as it were. The “thinking about” is a *necessary* component in learning as was illustrated by two Marines who were practicing near me. One kicked the other too hard thus breaking the framing of the interaction as practice: the force of the kick violated the rules of the engagement and the defending Marine said to the attacking Marine, “What the fuck was that? What the fuck are you thinking?” (Fieldnotes, June 11, 2007). Following anthropologist Gregory Bateson (1972) and Erving Goffman (1974), the anthropological issue here is that one Marine broke the linguistic-performative frame “this is practice.” The frame provides a way to manage social relationships and expectations based on shared, prescribed and proscribed actions.

We have here another distinction between training for combat and actual combat. In training, embodied thought in action can be, *indeed is required to be*, slow. Trainees are given time to learn new ways of holding and using their bodies, to learn the interrelationships between tactical principles and the use of their bodies, and the interrelationships between tactical principles, the use of their bodies, and the ethical reasons of and for fighting like American Marines, all without becoming casualties.¹⁷ This allows us to further clarify what Marines mean when they talk about “muscle memory.” Muscle the development of memory is the personal memory of how to use learned physical skills without thinking *about* the execution of those skills. It is a characteristic of the embodied person that includes neuro-muscular patterning (as in the development of “a sense of balance” for example). It is not a characteristic of the person’s muscles or body separate from mind. With enough practice, the Marines and I learned to control our bodies in many ways and so did not need to monitor our embodied movements as those movements were executed. *With enough practice, thought is embodied.* This is why repetition is

so critical. The MCMAP program reflected this understanding by requiring and building into the course schedule time for “sustainment.” Sustainment is practicing what was learned, repetitively, to enhance proficiency. Practice and the gradual acquisition of skill *frees* Marines to think about other issues like, in real combat, monitoring a doorway through which her opponent just emerged so that she is not taken by surprise by other opponents. It can also free the Marine to exercise creativity by exploiting the command of his or her body for novel actions or to take into account a novel action taken by an opponent. In Downey’s terms, the scaffolding offered by *both* the IT’s *and* by the reflective intervention of the learner him- or herself in executing the moves, fades away.

After practicing round kicks against passive opponents, the counter to the round kick was practiced against an attacker delivering the kick at slow speed. During the first series of kicks from my opponent, Sergeant Kimble, I tried to avoid his leg and foot by moving *back and away* from the kick. Sergeant Kimble stopped the practice and corrected me by saying, “No, you step offline and into me” (Fieldnotes, June 11, 2007). I understood the “offline” idea, which meant that I was to disrupt the aim of his kick by removing my body from the impact area but I was somewhat taken aback with the notion that I was to move *toward* him. Moving in and toward Sergeant Kimble (and toward imminent pain), I learned, I could generate multiple beneficial consequences that were the basis for the prescription of moving in and toward the opponent. IT Staff Sergeant Demster affirmed the understanding that in fighting, avoiding pain is unrealistic, and he delineated one of the primary benefits of moving in and toward an opponent who is trying to kick you:

“Crash the gap” between your attacker’s strike and you. Don’t back away from a kick or a punch. Expect to get hit, to get punched or kicked when you’re in hand-to-hand combat. Absorb the punch or kick, yes, but move into it so that you decrease the force being delivered. [Fieldnotes, June 21, 2007]

One of the lessons, better, one of the hard lessons for me was that avoiding pain was unrealistic if not impossible. But, one could manage the pain and the risk of harm by controlling the speed and lethality of the fight. This meant trading some pain and risk in the short term for less pain and risk in the long term, even if the fight lasted only a few seconds. This was a risk I refused to accept in one portion of my own training (see Endnote 17).

Since it was clear that the Marines had the option to move back and away from an attacker (and sometimes you were expected to do so if you thought that by so doing you could maneuver the attacker into a lethal mistake), *moving in and toward the attacker was a choice*. Re-conceiving the *mechanics* of movement was *inseparable from* the acceptance of potential damage and pain. In that acceptance resides a moral decision to accept the new movement direction—in and toward, not back and away—as “the right way to move.” In accepting and executing “the right way to move” I would be positioning myself as a person who accepted the Marine preference for offensive fighting. I would be a “good Marine.” My squad leader and fellow trainee Gunnery Sergeant Blanchard told me,

The martial arts techniques we’re learning are all about aggressiveness. Moving in, toward, and through your opponent. [Fieldnotes, June 20, 2007]

Enculturation into the Marine Corps is, it seems to me, primarily embodied re-conceptualization of one’s relationship to risk of pain and death. It is a positive decision to, as the phrase goes, “put oneself in harm’s way.”

The Mechanics of Movement, the Embodiment of Risk, and Agency

The analysis so far should be suggestive of the mostly unexamined depth of meaning and complexity in what is otherwise regarded as a “basic” and, especially for Marines, unremarkable movement in training. This unexamined depth and complexity include the following premises:

- 1) There is a generally preferred but not absolute “right way” to move in combat
- 2) That right way to move is the Marine way, or “aggressively in and toward” the enemy
- 3) Such movement, especially in an actual combat context, conveys the intention to kill or incapacitate the enemy
- 4) The enemy is willing to use intelligence, skill, and creativity to, in turn, try to kill or incapacitate you
- 5) “In and toward” constitutes a personal *choice* to risk pain and death
- 6) “In and toward” can *appear* automatic, but is actually a learned habit whose speed of execution depends on the agency of the actor

- 7) Risk is accepted in order to achieve or express a value ranging from, for example, “I want to live” to “I want her to live” to “I am defending my country”

With these premises in mind we can now examine the mechanics of the larger, whole-body action-sign, or, *kineseme* that is built from such kinemic movements as “in and toward.” This will give us a better appreciation of how risk is embodied and how risk is identified, provoked, refused, and managed in an equally embodied way. Understanding the relationship between moving one’s body and the management of risk is a critical issue for understanding courageous action.

In delivering a round kick (with the right leg), the left leg stiffens and the front of the left foot pivots outward to present the hips as a swivel and fulcrum (the action of positioning the hips properly was called “opening the gate” by the Marines) that sets up the “whip” motion of the leg. The whip motion delivers the power generated in the rotation of the hips and so the weight of the body through the leg to the foot and then to the opponent. Stepping in and toward the oncoming leg interrupts the generation of force before maximum momentum is achieved. The aim of the kick is also disrupted as the contact surface shifts from the top of the oncoming foot to the ankle or the shin. A secondary consequence is that the attacker is thrown off balance by an earlier-than-expected leg impact (as I learned from observing training fights and in experiencing many of my own). The more experienced fighters were usually the only opponents who were capable of either adjusting to the early impact of their leg (instead of their foot) or, at least, adjusting more quickly.

An equally beneficial consequence of the “in and toward” movement is that it decreases the power of the kick: as in American baseball, a ball hit off the portion of the bat closer to the rotating torso of the player suffers less impact. Lessening the impact is important, but not just for the obvious reason that there is less damage to the organic components of the thigh. I should mention here that in this training exercise, no padding or protection for the thigh was used. The Marines called this “toughening.” I cannot emphasize enough the importance of not wearing any protection: foregoing padding is a way of getting Marines to understand that they can get hit and feel pain without having their focal awareness (attention) diverted from the fight. Having one’s attention diverted gives the initiative to the opponent, who now has the time (and so space) to choose to act in ways that realize her intentions. Similarly, an early leg impact (versus on-time

foot impact) not only can throw the attacker off balance, but it can violate the attacker's expected outcome of moving a limb in a round kick.¹⁸

The attacker's expectation is generated through the use of the *kinesthetic* sense. Farnell and Varela note that this is a legitimate human sense, just like seeing, touching, smelling, hearing, and tasting, and it "provides information on the whole repertory of our motor actions, from the raising of an arm, to walking, even to the turn of the eyeballs and swallowing" (2008: 222-223). Potentially, the defender diverts the attacker's attention away from the kick, the defender himself, the overall sense of the fight, and the larger context, and refocuses it on the attacker's own deteriorating or compromised kinesthetic sense of bodily balance. Highly competent fighters can adjust as they are executing the kick, meaning they can adjust their expectation of where their limb will land and compensate to re-balance using other limbs and muscles while maintaining a sense of how the fight is going, the state of the defender, and the larger context. This agentic capability is, of course, why I have been using words like "can" and "potentially" in describing the consequences of the in and toward movement. The physical-mechanical aspects of movement are always "minded," not mindless. This is why it made perfect sense during training, whether practicing particular techniques or multi-person fights, to hear IT's yell, "*What was that?*" or "*What were you thinking?*" without any of the trainees having vocalized a word.

The "in and toward" movement of the whole body of the defender was my first experience in re-conceptualizing how and why to move my body in a principled, that is, Marine-like, way. Complementing that movement is a blocking action using the forearms. This blocking action is the *primary* way a defender protects herself from the round kick. It is simultaneously the basis for a transition to *counter-attacking the attacker*. After the blocking action comes a counter-attack on the attacker. The attacker's leg is immobilized and the former defender then sweeps the attacker's other leg while simultaneously using his free arm (the right arm when defending against a right round kick) to push through the attacker's left shoulder. The leg sweep removes the former attacker's only vertical support and the shoulder push pivots the former attacker's weight on his immobilized right hip and leg. The counter-attack is designed to put the attacker on the ground, thereby undermining his ability to enact a wide range of techniques. Being on his back, the attacker it made vulnerable to a wide range of techniques and options now available to the former defender. This amounts to creating initiative, opportunity,

and advantage for the former defender. Figure 10 (see Figures section at the end of this chapter) shows the block and follow up attack that constitute the counter to the round kick. As I have presented it, the MCMAP technique “counter to the round kick” is an action sign that has two parts, each containing two distinct kinemic elements. The first part includes the “in and toward” movement against the attacker and the “dual-armed block.” The second part contains “the leg grab” and “the shoulder push/leg sweep.” My presentation of the distinctive kinemic elements copies the way in which IT’s trained individual Marines in the whole-body movement. Each kinemic element was taught and learned as a distinct unit. After repetitive practice of each unit, we were tasked with executing the whole-body movement (kineseme) as the complete action sign, “counter to the round kick”. In actual performance, after mastery of the elements, the elements merge into one organic, fluid whole-body movement. The enactment of one organic, fluid whole-body movement in the context of training constructs the meaning “I’m fighting you.” The enactment of one organic, fluid whole-body movement in the context of actual combat constructs the meaning “I’m fighting you and I intend to kill or incapacitate you.” From a theoretical and anthropological standpoint, there is no such thing as “I’m fighting you” prior to the actual enactment of the movements. Meaning, as we know, is generated between us. Enacting these movements against a person who refuses move in the same idiom is not properly termed a “fight,” rather it is termed a “beating.”

In teaching me the Marine version of “counter to the round kick” Sergeant Kimble was teaching me the Marine preference for *offensive* as opposed to *defensive* combat. It was certainly clear that I had the *option* to move “back and away” from the incoming kick, and in some situations we were taught that to back away from an opponent was exactly the right thing to do, for instance if we wanted to get the opponent moving toward us in order to use her forward momentum as a means to execute a technique at which we were more proficient. Given the fact that I had already been kicked (at about 50% of the force Sgt. Kimble was capable of producing), I had a pretty good sense of the potential pain experiences.

This imaginative and actual appreciation of the pain I was risking and the decision to nevertheless engage in the training were both encased in a larger ethical decision that we can now tell directly justifies the ascription of “courage” to any person so involved: “would I accept choosing to move properly over and over again,” I asked myself, “and thereby subject myself to the risk of damage and pain in pursuit of the goal of learning to fight like a Marine, that is,

offensively?” In doing so, was I willing to risk conveying my intention to pit my physical, mental, and character qualities against those of another in an open challenge? My new understanding—that I “got it”—was not given evidentially through a vocal sign like saying, “I understand” (although I did indeed use that phrase multiple times). Rather it was delivered in how I then chose to use my body in light of that understanding as assessed by Sergeant Kimble. His identification of the kineme, “in and toward” is the minimal meaningful unit that when enacted in the idiom of fighting as a whole-body movement, constitutes the basis for being considered courageous.

Based on the depth of meaning and complexity that carries through from the constituent kinemes in combat movement to larger kinesemes I now want to argue that “courage” is built from such foundational, visible, movements such as “in and toward” in the context of “engaging in combat with an opponent.” The invisible, ethical or character qualities of such movements are generated through the intrinsic risk to one’s physical and moral being (and to that of others) entailed by the movement in the context of larger cultural values. How much risk is entailed helps define our sense of the “amount” of courage. Which values movements are *for* help define our sense of the “kind” of courage.

An Infantry Conception of Courage on the Battlefield

So *where* exactly is “courage” in all this? It is in the conventional value ascribed by American combat infantry generally and Marines specifically to the execution of the kinesemic and kinemic elements of the counter to the round kick. The “in and toward” movement described above *is* the expression of courage given the context of the movement: an opponent seeking to incapacitate or kill you. The principle being honored in the movement is this: risking oneself—one’s moral and physical being—in pursuit of values such as “I want to live” or “I want to kill only those who should be killed given my value system” or “I want my fellow Marines to live” or “I want to protect my way of life from those who want to destroy it.” Which of these values, in which combinations, is a matter of *ex post facto* assessment of past or present intentions of the actor. These might have been delivered vocally in an open discussion about future action, as in the case of Corporal Dunham’s theorization of containing a grenade blast with a Kevlar helmet (see chapter 2). These could be delivered through embodied discourse in

the present by the actions of an infantryman himself in a particular tactical context, like Sergeant Stevens who, simply, did not pull a trigger. As is true generally and ultimately, however, deeming any action as “courageous” rests with whatever audience is relevant at the time of assessment and the theoretical and value frame they choose to employ in making the assessment (Harré 1979).

For Marines, the most substantial “weight” in such assessments is placed on embodied discourse. This is not surprising given that the most important expression of their commitment to their sub-cultural values is the actual commitment of and to their bodies as combatants. Staff Sergeant Carr, the Marine trainee with the sprained ankle, connected the practiced habit of moving martially, said as much when he told me that, “Marine combat infantrymen don’t care about their bodies” (Fieldnotes, June 14, 2007). He went on in an attempt to clarify his meaning:

I’m an MOS [Military Occupational Specialty] 03...I’m an infantryman. I can tell you what courage is. Courage to a combat infantryman is the willingness to do anything possible to protect his Marines and take the fight to the enemy in any way possible without any thinking...without any hesitation. [Fieldnotes, June 14, 2007]

The body is the primary means for expressing the values of aggressive protection of other Marines and aggressive engagement with the enemy. This is an assessment of the body’s status as a resource not just for *surviving* as a human being (biological species value), but also for *existing* (cultural membership value) as a good Marine. Yet, combat infantry must be ready to commit—without thinking and without hesitation—in short, *totally commit*, the body to the expression of values. This means that the body is simultaneously the most important resource Marines have for being a Marine and the primary source for expressing their values through the sacrifice of that very resource.

This idea was affirmed constantly during my time as a trainee and a guest instructor-trainer at the MACE. Sometimes a Marine would “shuffle” instead of run or drop her hands during a sparring match thus leaving her head open to attack or gradually put less and less force into *mokuju* thrusts at opponents. The IT’s observing the drill used phrases like, “Do you want to be here?” “Do you want to quit?” “It’s always about you isn’t it?” “That’s it, get in your little pain bubble.” The IT’s vocalized a response to what they *saw*. The dissonance for the IT’s was that the Marine trainees who were flagging or failing were, through their embodied action-signs,

contradicting earlier vocal and embodied discourse about their commitment to the MAIT course. In focusing on or attempting to avoid pain, discomfort, or significant exertion, they were failing to sacrifice their bodies, themselves, and so failing to express their commitment. This failure is a form of betrayal of the values of the Marine Corps.

Gunnery Sergeant Friend, lead IT for my training class, offered a similar formulation of the connection between the body as the primary resource for expression of values and sacrifice for values:

Your job in the Marine Corps is for the lives of other Marines. We want to make them better people, not just killers. Really, the point of the program is not to teach martial arts, but to teach them to be leaders, to approach, close, and move through an opponent. The point of moving offline of a punch or a kick is to give you the advantage to attack, not to avoid getting hit. If you get in a fistfight, you better be prepared to get hit, if you get in a knife-fight, you better be prepared to get cut. You might get punched or cut, but you will kill your opponent.

[Fieldnotes, June 12, 2007]

GySgt. Friend's comments echo those of SSgt. Carr in their focus on the secondary importance of suffering harm in the act of using one's body to effect the death of an opponent so that other Marines will live. *This is why killing is not simply the practical matter of ending the life of an enemy.* At least in the way Marines construct it, killing is not to end the life of others, but it is *for* the life of others; and that requires risking one's moral status as well as pain, discomfort, injury, or death. In teaching Marines how to move in combat, then, the MCMAP program is also teaching them why and how self-sacrifice is a necessary component of being a good Marine, meaning "totally committed to the values of the Marine Corps."

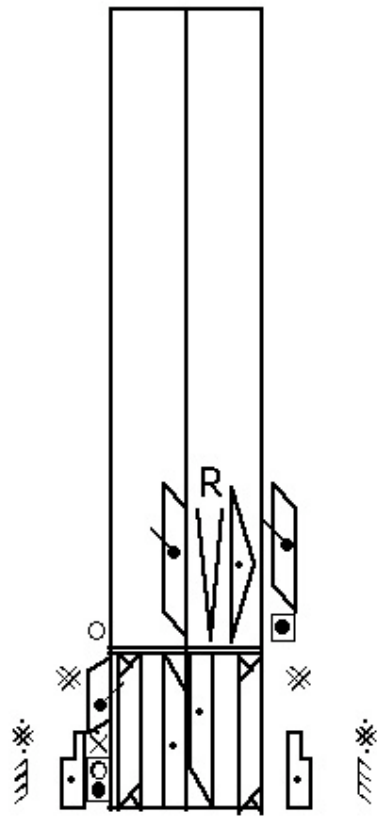
There are two necessary components of the combat infantry conception of courage without which the conception is empty. The first is "selflessness" and the second is "choice." Both SSgt. Carr and GySgt. Friend illuminated the notion of selflessness quite clearly: Marines are not supposed to value themselves over others, especially other Marines. Their lives, professionally and personally are, ideally, for others. Their personal pain, whether physical or mental, is, ideally, irrelevant. Marines are not forced into this value orientation. Enlistment is voluntary and attending the MAIT training course is voluntary. The challenges of the training program are an invitation to demonstrate loyalty to the values of the program and the Corps. Trainees are not forced to complete the training they can choose to leave. Of course the

organization can remove that choice by forcing them to leave either for medical reasons or for failure to meet MAIT standards. Selflessness and choice are foundational concepts in the tacit, descriptive, and embodied discourse of MCMAP training. They are chimerical concepts in the bio-reductive framework that many Marines, like many Americans, use for explanations of human behavior. The agentic, semasiological framework permits us not only to see what Marines and MCMAP trainers see but permits us to take what they see seriously. Given this alignment of ethnographic data and theoretical framework, I think we can safely argue that to the extent that self-sacrifice for others— acting for prized values in situations of lethal physical and moral danger without regard for the self— is part of MCMAP training for combat, then such training trains courage.

Figures



Figure 8: U.S. Marine Corporal James "Eddie" Wright.¹⁹



R = Opponent's Ribs

Figure 9: Labanotated Round Kick

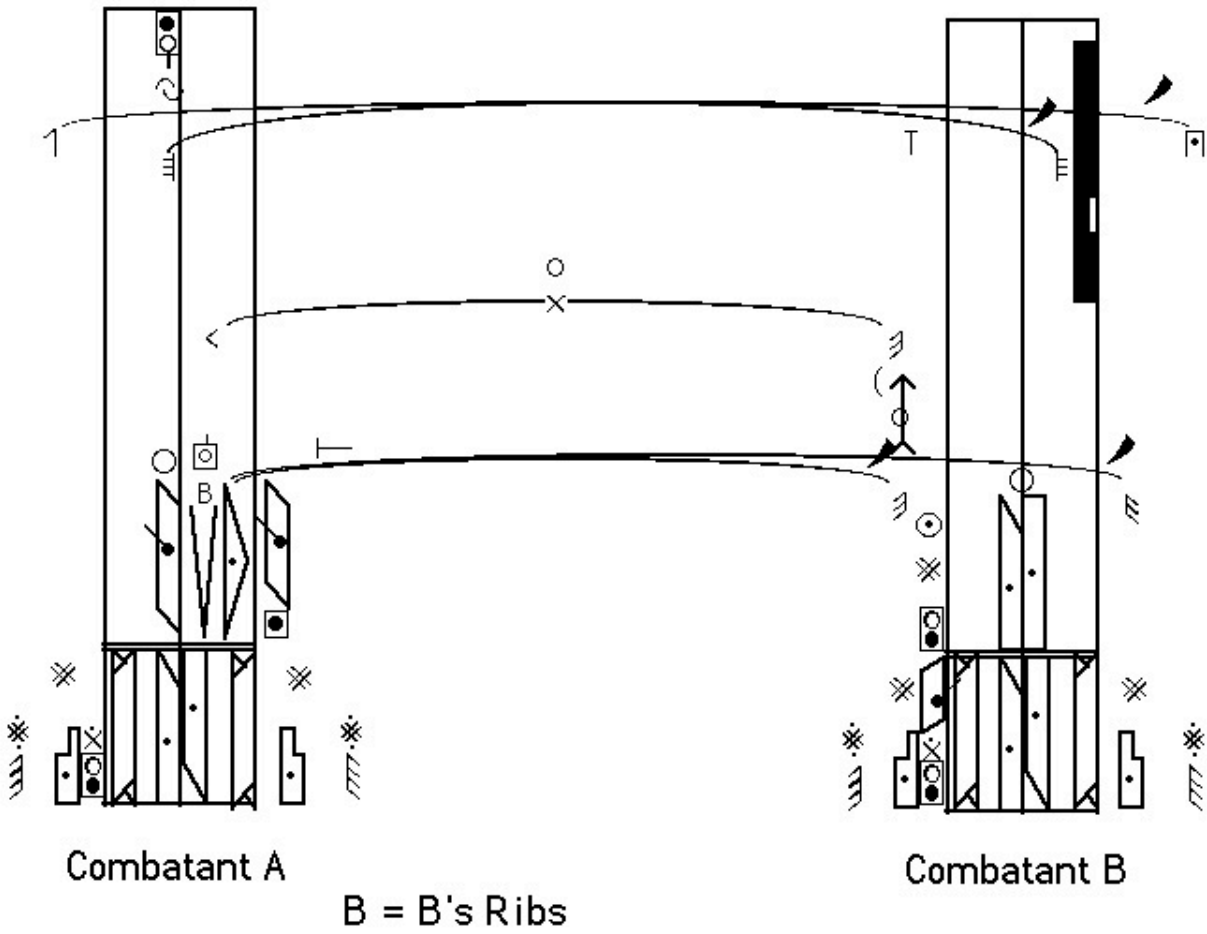


Figure 10: Counter to the Round Kick – A attacks B with Round Kick, B blocks and then attacks A

¹ See Farnell and Varela 2008: 221-228. The “visible” and the “invisible” in semasiology originated in the application of the Sasserian concept of the linguistic sign as the signifier/signified *duality*. Sasser was at pains to avoid a dualistic reading and emphasized that the two components of a linguistic sign are inseparable, as in the two sides of a coin. Williams’s application to movement resulted in the idea that the signifier is the visible movement while the signified is the meaning of the movement.

² This is a human universal: we are built to be dynamically embodied semioticians.

³ This phrase originates in the work of Rom Harré. In his paper, “Recovering the Experiment” (1998), he uses the phrase “domesticated nature” to capture his sense of the *approximation* of “wild nature” achieved in scientific experiments. His insight is that experiments are neither entirely natural, given the controls and limits placed on the operation of natural processes by the researcher, nor are they entirely unnatural, given that the controls and limits do not entirely change the operation on natural processes.

⁴ The use of the term in discourse assumes a competent adult actor since it is the radical change in the enactment of being a person that is marked by the term. There can be no such thing as a competent adult actor who does not possess some cultural content by which she enacts being a person. That is, no competent adult actor can be turned into a *tabula rasa*. I would suggest “value-replacement” as opposed to “brain-washing.”

⁵ I am indebted to Dr. Brenda Farnell for her insight into the connection between the Marine tie-in methodology and brainwashing. An important ethnographic moment that had puzzled me for some time was clarified due to her intervention. In November of 2007, I visited with the MACE staff in Quantico, Virginia to thank them for their time and support. There was a new IT, Gunnery Sergeant Woodall, who asked me whether or not I “saw things differently,” now that I had gone through the training. Did I, “keep myself in shape,” and did I “walk down the street and notice who was coming toward me?” I took these questions to mean that GySgt. Woodall wanted to know whether or not the training had turned me into a Marine warrior. I told the Marines that I was keeping fit, but certainly not in “fighting shape,” and that at times I would “size up” potential opponents on the street. GySgt. Woodall replied, “At least he’s honest.” What puzzled me was why GySgt. Woodall thought I had *turned into a Marine warrior*. There are two points to be made here. First, the Marines think that being a Marine constitutes a *transformation* and second, the MACE staff thinks that the training itself further transforms Marines. Lieutenant Colonel Shusko said as much to me when he commented that “many Marines change when they come through this course, one Marine cried and said how he witnessed a girl being attacked and had not done anything about it but now that he had the training he knew he would do the right thing in the future” (Fieldnotes, July 25, 2007). One way we can make sense of this is that the training-induced(?) transformation is presented as a kind of *catharsis* in which a Marine sheds detrimental values that inhibit right action and replaces them with positive values that demand right action. A new way of looking at the world *should* ensue. This, I think, was what GySgt. Woodall’s questions were exploring. I got the sense that GySgt. Woodall was mildly perturbed when I did not present symptoms of the expected transformation. This led, I think, to a degree of suspicion of both my capabilities and motives when I returned to the MACE during the summer of 2008. Despite having completed the course, to him I wasn’t *quite* legitimately one of them.

⁶ The term “devil-dogs” is a translation of the German word *teufelhunden*, which the Germans bestowed upon the U.S. Marines for their ferocity in combat in World War I.

⁷ Dr. Charles Varela has developed a tongue-in-cheek but telling way of illustrating the implausibility of the reductive notion of language use directly impacting the brain. Imagine a conversation in which a friend calls you and says, “Hi Frank, you know I have something important to tell you...but, you know, it’s so important I want to talk to your mind, put your mind on the phone...well, actually, you know, it’s extremely important and I don’t think your mind will get it, put your brain on the phone.” Using Sasser’s notion of *la parole* we can tell, ethnographically, that Americans and Westerners generally *do not talk this way in everyday life*. They talk to persons, not to their minds or their brains. Yet, in contexts where an explanation of behavior is required, they tend to posit a *la langue* that is tapped into or accessed by talk under certain sorts of conditions. This move, in effect, turns the fantastical notion of a language-to-brain mechanical causation into a supposedly legitimate explanation of what is really happening in conversation. Further comment requires a better understanding of Dr. Strozzi-Heckler’s work on my part.

⁸ Sergeant Desamours reinforced his perception of the strong analogy between training and combat five days later on June 19, 2007 after a particularly difficult and challenging forty-minute drill called the Combat Conditioning Exercise (CCX). The exercise takes place in a purposefully overheated room about 25’ by 25’ and includes a number of complex team-oriented and leadership tasks rooted in grueling physical exercises. The room is filled with yelling and a soundtrack plays recordings of machine-gun fire, yells, babies crying, and other sounds at ear-splitting levels with a clear design to tempt the participating trainees into concentrating on themselves “going internal” rather than the mission and team. Spontaneously Sergeant Desamours turned to me and said,

You know I fought at Al Kut and Fallujah, I’m a radioman. What was going on in that room was just like combat—the noise, heat, the physical exertion, the mental strain—in my first firefight, I froze, I’m not even gonna lie, I’ll say it. I was laying in my rack and boom! Mortars. My staff sergeant hit me on the back of my helmet to get me going. It’s loud, people are yelling, and you’re moving up and back, get to the side, move up, you’re moving all the time and I’m carrying all my gear and I have to keep up with my CO [Commanding Officer] who doesn’t have anything on except his flack and pistol! I was carrying my own body weight in gear and I had to keep up with him. And not just that, I had to listen to the radio for my CO’s

call sign while I was trying figure out what was happening, and in all this time, you have to keep thinking (points to his head) because you know, there's rounds coming down range, so on top of everyone yelling and the confusion and being hot and not knowing what's up ahead or over the next wall, or how far you have to go, you're listening to the radio and fighting... DAMN! (shakes his head from side to side, looks down, half-smiles and in lower voice says, "good times, good times. You know a lot of guys got a tattoo after OIP 1 that said, 'Some gave some, some gave all.'" [Fieldnotes, June 19, 2007]

⁹ Toward the end of my second summer (2008) at the MACE I learned that the Marine Corps was on the verge of implementing an entirely new "Combat Readiness Test" that included realistic tests of the physical, mental, and character disciplines through exercises such as lifting and transporting heavy ammunition boxes, carrying and dragging fellow Marines, and throwing simulated grenades.

¹⁰ Retired U.S. Marine Sergeant and combat veteran Michael Sandone reported the following story to me of a young private in his unit during his combat tour in Iraq:

There was a kid who had trouble getting out of our Amtraks a few times—the Amtraks is the armored personnel carriers—and he just wouldn't get out, because he didn't know what was outside and that...just not knowing was enough to scare him, to shake him not to stay in and its just something that, that you just have to overcome. You're not always gonna know the complete situation that just going out the door not knowing when to...you know you just don't know what's out there and...it was just something he could not do...he was...it was amazing...just, "No!" (shakes his head side-to-side) fin' had to drag 'em, drag his ass out of there. [Interview, April 24, 2004]

Knowledge, or lack thereof, could be a definitive obstacle to action *if one's focus is on that knowledge (or lack thereof) and the threat or risk to oneself in light of it* instead of on what one should be doing in the particular situation. One critical purpose of Marine training (in my estimation) is to decrease the likelihood that a Marine will freeze or fail to act, even in situations of novelty, by teaching Marines to focus, laser-like, on mission accomplishment. The means may be generated creatively or not, but the goal is supposed to be inviolate.

¹¹ Film actors who train for a role in this way can be said to be pursuing combat training and not acting.

¹² I am indebted to Dr. Charles Varela for this formulation of the Marines' intersection with Durkheim and Mead.

¹³ This is a classic example of military teamwork in which some members of the team make up for a compromised or lacking ability on the part of another member.

¹⁴ The formulation of these ideas is happening as I construct this study. Had I thought of them in the field I would have certainly asked SSgt. Wolfe about my speculative interpretation of his taking the perspective of his wife. Of course I may be completely wrong in my interpretation, or, even more intriguing, indeterminate. It may be that SSgt. Wolfe himself had and has no idea why he looked at his actions through his wife's eyes in the moment of their performance.

¹⁵ While the video offers a visual representation of the counter move, the focus is on the *effects* of a properly executed counter to a round kick from the point of view of utility and mechanics. There is much more to the counter move in two important ways. First in the agentic framework, embodied movement is always value-laden. By concentrating only on mechanics and effects, the video completely misses the values instantiated in the move. Second, there is a set of movements *prior to* the moves presented in the video that are critical to what I will argue are the moral values embodied in the counter move as a whole-body movement. In this sense the video reveals only a partial view of a partial "movement phrase," or a kineme, rather than a kineseme (whole body phrase) in semasiological terms. To get to a fuller understanding of the entire kineseme and its illustration of human agency as well as the moral content embedded in it, I will describe the counter move as I was taught to understand and use it during MCMAP training.

¹⁶ The "chokes" that we learned are misnamed since the point of these techniques was not to interdict the flow of air into the lungs via the throat since it takes a long time for someone to drop unconscious and die from asphyxiation. The preferred techniques were "blood chokes" which cut off the supply of blood to the brain by pressure on the arteries in the side of the opponent's neck. I brought opponents and was brought by opponents to near unconsciousness in a matter of seconds using blood chokes.

¹⁷ I want to illustrate this point by referring to an incident involving fellow trainee Sergeant Terrazas and myself. During a drill on July 25, 2007, our respective squads were in a wooded area with about 30 yards of distance between us. Each squad was in protective gear (e.g., lacrosse helmets, padded gloves, padded groin protectors) and lined up facing *away from* the gap between the squads in a kneeling position. In that space was located, randomly, a variety of training weapons ranging from knives to *mokujus* (wooden rifles with hard rubber tip to practice bayonet training). The IT's would tap one, two, or three Marines from each squad on the helmet. The mission was to jump up, turn around, find a weapon if possible, close with the enemy and eliminate him using any techniques that had been learned. Neither squad knew when a particular member would be selected or how many from their squad would be selected. Neither squad knew how many opponents the chosen Marines would face. Techniques were to be executed full-speed and full power. The only "safeties" were that there would be no weapons used on the groin or head.

When I was selected I jumped up, turned around and started running toward the middle ground between the squads. As the distance my opponent (who I later learned was Sgt. Terrazas) and myself rapidly diminished, I could not locate a weapon and so decided to simply charge at him. In the last moments before the impact I saw that he had a *mokuju* that he pointed directly at

my upper chest. I succeeded (much to my surprise) in using my left forearm to push the tip out of alignment with my body. Problematically, I decided to slow down at the last second in order to have a better chance at swiping away the *mokuju*. Additionally I angled my body offline and turned my shoulders so that if I missed the weapon, it would hit me in the left shoulder and not the throat area. I should have trusted in my abilities by keeping my body aligned with his, swiping away his weapon and barreling straight into him with the probable result of putting him on the ground, on his back, and underneath me. Quite quickly I could have completely eliminated his weapon-based advantage and given me the upper hand, so to speak. As it turned out my slowing down increased the likelihood both of a successful swipe and of protecting my throat area, but it also permitted Sgt. Terrazas to say on his feet and retain the use of his weapon. Since my momentum had brought me past the tip of the *mokuju*, Sgt. Terrazas swung the butt of the wooden rifle into my (helmeted) head three times in quick succession even as I was throwing my elbow into his. I “lost” the encounter as Sgt. Terrazas continued to pummel me with the *mokuju* while eventually backing away enough from me to stab me with the hard rubber tip representing a bayonet.

I was angry with Sgt. Terrazas for breaking the rules and angry with myself for my lack of competence. I *felt* the lack of resources in fighting. Literally I did not know what to do when my tactic failed, or, perhaps more properly, when I failed my tactic. I ended up yelling at him “What the fuck was that? No rifle-butts!!” The only reply I received was pepper spray to the back of the neck from one of the IT’s—the penalty for losing the fight since actual wounds and death were not part of the training program. Two months later I reviewed this incident with LtCol. Shusko (who had witnessed it). He affirmed my interpretation of the situation to the effect that my responsibility was *not* to get angry, which is self-indulgent and beside the point, but to get better at fighting. This is especially important in combat since the emotional upset presents a possible obstacle to clear thinking and recovering after a setback. With more confidence in my self, meaning my combat skills, I would not have hesitated at the last moment. In combat, opponents will not necessarily follow rules and my embodied skills would require more training if I was to survive. As for Sergeant Terrazas, LtCol. Shusko said that the IT’s should have penalized him in some way as well since Marines are supposed to fight according to not just cultural values but actual rules for engaging the enemy. In a way, this was a training failure on the part of the IT’s but again, the ultimate responsibility was with myself and Sgt. Terrazas. The “feedback” that I received at “full-speed” was that I required a controlled environment in which to further increase my competence in my embodied performance, both physically and mentally.

¹⁸ Contrary to much anthropological focus and fascination with the experience of subjects, Marine training seeks to actively discount this kind of physical experience, or, feeling *of* the body, in service of the larger goal of staying alive in order to accomplish a mission. I was introduced to this notion in an abrupt way during my second day of training in 2007. We set off at a run to a training field to engage in grueling two-hour drill known as “The Heartbreaker.” My squad was in a line, one Marine behind the other. I was at the end and fairly close to the Marine in front of me. His body blocked much of my view of the ground and I accidentally stepped onto a tree branch with my left foot. By doing so I locked the branch in place. In bringing my right foot down, my right calf hit a sharp protruding sub-branch. The sub-branch gouged a three-inch furrow into my calf and when my foot landed put a dime-sized hole in my calf at the top of the furrow. The pain was terrible but I kept running. During the ensuing drill, we were tasked with “buddy-squats.” One Marine has another lay across his shoulders of another and then executes squats. When my turn came to lie across Gunnery Sergeant Blanchard’s shoulders, my hips began to slip from up by the back of his head down his back. This pulled my legs down his back as well and instead of holding them both by curling his right arm over them, he ended up holding my right foot, bent at the knee, over his shoulder while I essentially held on to his left shoulder. As he executed the squats and I tried to stay on his back my injured right calf rubbed over his flak jacket. I held on for a few repetitions but then told GySgt. Blanchard I had to get down. He dropped me and I went to a few feet to the side to check my leg. GySgt. Blanchard was told to do push-ups while I got myself in order. Standing near me was Master Sergeant Coleman, the second most senior non-commissioned officer at the MACE, with his arms folded and an impassive look on his face. I rolled up my cammie uniform leg and saw a yellow, green, blue, and black bruise with the furrow and hole caked with fresh and dried blood. Master Sergeant Coleman bent ever so slightly to get a look and asked me, in a lighthearted way, “What’d you scratch yourself?” He then turned back to watch the drill in progress and I was left to decide whether or not I wanted to get back into the drill. The lesson was that pain is not the point.

¹⁹ The photo by U.S. Marine Sergeant Richard Stephens and is taken from

<http://www.mcnews.info/mcnewsinfo/marines/2005/20053RD/features/sgtwright.shtml>. We might note that the photograph conveys important semasiological detail. Now a Sergeant, Wright’s arm positioning for the salute *approximates the existence of his hand and wrist*. The replication of a salute learned using a fully extant limb demonstrates that the salute is conceptual-based and habitually trained using a kinesthetic sense of where the arm *ought* to be positioned. In short, Wright is not using his sense of touch in order to modify his salute in light of his injury. His salute is a *Marine* salute, not an *injured Marine* salute.

CHAPTER 8

THE ETHICS OF BEING AN ETHICAL WARRIOR

In this chapter I will lay out a form of doubt about values and training at the MACE through an analysis of the views of one MACE staffer, Staff Sergeant Demster. This doubt centers on the ethics of being an ethical warrior and captured in the question, “Whose ethics should we use in MACE training?” SSgt. Demster’s views will lead us to consider one way to answer those concerns offered by retired Marine captain and master martial artist Jack Hoban (who we encountered in the last chapter). Mr. Hoban’s formulation is not a pervasive, but rather a specific meta-narrative about the values being taught in the MCMAP program. The concept of the Ethical Warrior (with a capital “E” and a capital “W”) he advances is founded on a supposed universal human value, called the “dual-life value” that, it is argued, serves as a universal standard for assessing the legitimacy of human action, especially the legitimacy of killing. It is thought that properly grounded and so legitimate reasons for killing are especially important in preventing Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD). Consideration of this meta-narrative will lead to an analysis of exemplary, and primarily vocal, discourses that simultaneously obscure and highlight the (ir)relevance of gender in being a good Marine. The link between Mr. Hoban’s formulation and gender is to be found in a startlingly similar universal standard for assessing human action and especially the differential status of the sexes across cultures advanced by anthropologist Michelle Z. Rosaldo over thirty-five years ago. After developing this analysis I will offer a few limited remarks on ethnicity. My goal in this chapter is to add even more depth to the complexity facing combat infantry, specifically U.S. Marines, in trying to be good in and at their way of life.

Whose Ethics?

Although identifiable values are inseparable from movement in substantive ways (as inseparable as they are from vocal discourse), there yet exists a fundamental lack of clarity about which values should be pursued when, and by whom, within the MAIT course. The last two chapters have demonstrated that such ambiguity is an irreducible component of acting on

battlefields and in training that may or may not be recognized, pursued, denied, achieved, or remain implicit. *Some* value or values are always involved regardless of this ambiguity. Oddly, perhaps, the domestication of combat in training appears to generate a similar ambiguity that has resulted in on-going discussions among leaders of the MAIT and MCMAP programs about *whose* ethics are, could be, or should be used in training. I will say at the outset that the sources of ambiguity on the battlefield and in training are multi-facted and complex, similar and different, compared to training. For reasons of space, I will not concentrate on a comparison between the two but on one ongoing discussion within the MACE to which I was introduced. That discussion centered on the desire to generate some positive statement about the values or morals for which Marines fight. This desire was fueled, in part, by the serious problem of PTSD, which, some of the staff and advisors like Mr. Hoban thought, is connected to the morality of killing.

During my second summer of training, I asked IT Staff Sergeant Demster about the moral or character discipline of MAIT training and why it seemed to me—after a year pondering it—to be somewhat in the background of the training. He told me that every year a review board meets to consider the MCMAP program in all its components and every year there is discussion about the moral component of being a warrior. “The problem,” he said succinctly, “is *whose* morals [should we follow]?” (Fieldnotes, July 1, 2008). He illustrated the point by saying,

who am I to tell you what your character should be? That’s a matter of your upbringing and what you choose to do. Some Marines it goes in one ear and out the other and some other Marines take it to heart. You can say that you agree that being a good person means helping someone fix a flat on the side of the road but the next day you drive by a person with a flat and you say, “mmmm” (he tilts his head and grimaces to signify refusal to help the person with the flat tire).

[Fieldnotes, July 1, 2008]

SSgt. Demster raises two obstacles to overt advancement of values or morals in MAIT training. The first is his *lack of authority* to demand a certain kind of moral standard be met. This obstacle is based on the idea that character ultimately depends on the unique experience of each Marine in the socialization process of becoming a person in conjunction with his or her agency—moment-by-moment choices—through time and across situations. The independence of personal decision-making and commitment appears to undermine SSgt. Demster’s confidence in the program’s ability to convey and inculcate values decisively. Possible grounds for such authority

in his position as an IT, his clear competence, and his past combat experience seem not to emerge for consideration at all.

This situation is ironic in two ways. First, when discussing battlefield actions and Marine Corps Core Values (Honor, Courage, Commitment) during, for example, presentation of tie-ins, there did not seem to be a similar level of concern about “whose moral code should we use?” Often the lead IT would ask the trainees, implicitly or explicitly, about the relationship between action and value. The response most often would be a single term or short sentence that expressed the meaning of the movement. In listening to approximately thirty tie-ins over my two summers with the Marines, *not once* did I hear what might be considered a “discussion,” no less any form of dispute, over the connection between movement and values. Here is an example.

During my first summer of training, IT Staff Sergeant Demster told our training class a tie-in after an Obstacle Course Drill. He related the actions of a U.S. Marine named Private Alvin La Pointe who, during the Vietnam War, eliminated an enemy antiaircraft position single-handedly using grenades and his bayonet after he ran out of ammunition for his weapon. According to SSgt. Demster, La Pointe saw that the antiaircraft gun was “tearing up” another platoon of Marines so, without any officers or support of NCO’s (non-commissioned officers) he took action (Fieldnotes, June 21, 2007). When SSgt. Demster asked the class, “Why...why did La Pointe do that? Why did he just go take out that gun,” trainee Staff Sergeant McCloskey answered, “He didn’t think about it, he just did it, he saw Marines in trouble and he just reacted.” SSgt. Demster replied, “Yeah, he killed those VC (Viet Cong fighters) because of, for, his fellow Marines, not for himself” (Fieldnotes, June 21, 2007). There was no question in this case about what morals or whose morals were being expressed and which were to be pursued by the trainees in the future.

From my outsider, anthropologist’s perspective, and assuming that SSgt. Demster’s presentation respected the facts of the case, however, what puzzled me was why La Pointe was a courageous hero when he left his own unit, apparently without the knowledge or permission of his own unit’s leaders as emphasized by SSgt. Demster? If SSgt. Demster was trying to generate a sense of strong personal initiative about “doing what needs to be done” in a combat situation, he also generated a moral question for me. Did La Pointe’s individual efforts simply reflect a battlefield fact that in close combat, units become separated and mixed up with other units? Were La Pointe’s actions indicative of an informal—but formally tolerated if not encouraged—

ethic that permitted breaking some military rules when the value being pursued is the lives of Marines? Or should I understand his individual efforts as a breach the formal military chain of command and, in a way, a betrayal of his fellow Marines who were depending on him to “watch their backs” as the saying goes? Should La Pointe have actually been reprimanded for *not thinking* about his unit and the chain of command?¹

It took me some days to formulate these questions and concerns. As I reviewed the tie-in I was struck by the fact that my questions and concerns did not seem to be shared by the Marines. None of them, for example, expressed concern that La Pointe had left his comrades, or had left his unit without the knowledge or permission of his leaders. The association of actions with values was immediate and unremarkable during the tie-in exchanges. While these questions may be symptomatic of my outsider position—that is, in not being socialized into the Marine Corps I did not have the insider knowledge about why such questions were not relevant—there were other trainees present who, in being without combat experience, presented a similar outsider status. While there might have been all sorts of other possible reasons for Marines not questioning the quick and easy association of La Pointe’s actions with selflessness, among them the idea that a Marine might make himself look foolish in front of his comrades by questioning something everyone “in the know” knows *not* to question, the point remains that there was a communal lack of concern, overt or covert, about any of these moral issues.

My discussion here implies that *there should have been* more overt talk about morals. I want to suggest as much to the Marines for two reasons. First, this study has shown that values are inseparable from the way they move. Second, there is a substantive difference between being able to say *what* you see—that “those actions demonstrate selflessness” for example—and being able to say *why* you see it in the way you do. Clarity is especially important, I want to suggest, in discussions about the morals expressed in life and death situations, especially for non-combat experienced Marines. The presentation of tie-in’s by the IT’s and the inclusion of tie-in’s in all MCMAP training *is* evidence that the MACE staff appreciates this and attempts to achieve it. Mr. Hoban’s efforts, as we will see momentarily, convey a similar message about achieving clarity about the basis for decisions to kill or not to kill and so for being overt in discussions about the morality of killing.

I want to suggest at least three issues that I think block this kind of talk and that cannot be accounted for in full by my outsider status. First, like an iceberg, there is a vast amount of

relevant data about acting on a battlefield that gets omitted from the presentation of battlefield action during tie-ins. The descriptive detail of the tie-in presentation of battlefield action selects and highlights those actions that are considered courageous to begin with. This effect seems to be a byproduct of the IT's use, in many cases (but not all) on citations for bravery or heroism that provide a concise description of actions and an overt association of the actions with prized values.² Data that are otherwise critical in fully appreciating the richness and complexity of human action from a semasiological viewpoint, like refusing to leave an Amtrak prior to clearing an enemy-held building, a start and a stop prior to another start in charging a machine gun, running away from the enemy prior to stopping and fighting hand-to-hand, these types of action never appear in citations. Such actions are not *necessarily* fatal to assessing action as “courageous” except perhaps in contexts like that of the Marine Corps where total commitment is valued and expected if not required.

We have seen that, for example in the case of U.S. Army Staff Sergeant Wolfe, who took the perspective of his wife to reflect on his battlefield actions as he performed them, total commitment is not necessarily total, at least in the way that the Marines would prefer in order to increase the odds of surviving if not prevailing in combat. Not only can there be a *disjunction* between thinking *about* action and thinking *in* action that nevertheless succeeds militarily, such disjunctions could serve to alert trainees to the complex issues they might face on a battlefield. Of course “thinking about what I should be thinking about” in combat provides a new and potentially deadly option for *not* focusing on—for not being totally committed to—eliminating the enemy. The concentration on selected and highlighted action and the value(s) expressed by that action, on the other hand, *obscures* the presence of these omissions.³ From a military point of view, this, perhaps, is a way of helping trainees generate total commitment in the unique environment of lethal combat. It is perhaps supported too, in the military, and especially in the Marine Corps, in the primacy of embodied action over what is thought or said.

Third, as I was working through my puzzlement about these issues in the ascription of courage to actors in military settings I decided to ask another IT, Staff Sergeant Wilder, a hypothetical question based on a tactical principle I learned in the training. The tactical principle and situation is this: Marines are responsible for continuing to “fight through” a near-ambush (enemies are close enough to see you and use rifles and grenades). This is called a “counter-ambush.” The point is that in a near-ambush, the enemy has created an advantageous position in

which they have pre-targeted the areas in which the Marines would have to move in order to fight once the trap is sprung. A corollary principle, then, is that Marines are positively forbidden to help fellow Marines who might be wounded in the ambush. Such is the danger to the lives of the entire unit that the first priority is to kill the ambushers. “But,” I asked SSgt. Wilder, “if a Marine braved the rifle fire and grenades to help a wounded Marine would he be considered a courageous hero or a guy who failed to honor a tactical principle designed to save the entire unit?” He smiled wryly and said, “I guess it would depend on how the counter-ambush turned out!” (Fieldnotes, June 27, 2007).

My hypothetical question revealed that an ascription of “courageous hero” or “betrayer of principles” might turn on the simple fact of whether or not the action achieved a positive outcome, the actor’s intention, or a salubrious impact on larger events. If this is indeed the case, the moral risk and moral ambiguity to acting in situations of apparently conflicting ethical values is tremendous given that judgments about the actor’s moral standing are made *ex post facto* apparently at the potentially unqualified discretion of the audience! I say this because in some cases, it is in principle unclear whether or not the actor’s intention was realized, and even if it was, it may have had an indeterminate or negative effect itself or on other events. It would seem that this sense of the quality of an action and actor being dependent on a positive outcome is endemic to situations of risk and ambiguity. It also seems to be pervasive enough to Americans to be presented in film. In *Enemy of the State* (1998), approaching the climactic scene where the character portrayed by Will Smith is about to risk his life (and his moral standing) and that of the character portrayed by the actor Gene Hackman by tricking murderous government officials into a lethal confrontation with a mafia boss, Hackman’s character says to Smith’s character, “You’re either incredibly smart or incredibly stupid.” Smith’s character replies, “We’ll see in a minute.”

As a consequence, in my view, MAIT tie-in’s present a constricted discursive space in that they limit the range of possibilities for “answers.” In short, the only real possibility for answers to questions about why some soldiers act in particular ways on a battlefield is to *affirm* a rather simplistic association of action with value where the content of that association is already assumed or given. While this approach may fit well with the Marine Corps’ need to keep things simple in training given the vast variety of persons inducted into the organization (in terms of background, world view, values, physical and mental competence, education, and so forth) and with the training program’s pedagogical choice to try to infuse the trainees with preferred values,

it risks what may be a productive realism about combat that might otherwise serve as an excellent, added layer of challenge to the mental and character disciplines in training.

The ironic relationship of Staff Sergeant Demster's concern about whose morals should be used in overt ways during training to his lack of concern for whose morals were being affirmed during his tie-in presentation offers ethnographic evidence that it is possible *simultaneously* to see and not to see movement as an expression of values. This is not an indictment of SSgt. Demster in any way. He is an excellent leader of Marines in my opinion and taught me much about the Marine Corps, MCMAP, and the MACE. Rather it suggests that there is substantial opportunity for, on the one hand, the social sciences to correct the traditional mistakes in thinking about human social action that they have permitted and promoted in the worldview of Americans and Westerners; and, on the other hand, for Marines to "live into" the ethics that are already present in their training program. By the former I mean that traditional social scientific mistaken theoretical perspectives that embed semiotic content in biological functioning or in an idealized linguistic realm. By the latter I mean that the Marines can, and perhaps should, be more explicit about the character discipline and what they expect of Marines in and through MCMAP training. This is easier said than done but one good place to start would be in identifying some of the values already being expressed in their training, a project to which I hope I have contributed in writing this study. To do so, of course, requires the shift in theoretical framework that is included.

The second obstacle to overt discussion of morals in MAIT training raised by Staff Sergeant Demster in his comments (besides his *lack of authority*, as a Marine trainer, to demand a certain kind of moral standard be met) is his perception of the demonstrated *lack of consistency* among the Marines in holding themselves to a moral code. This obstacle is based on the recognition of individual Marines having a choice about how and when to act and why they act. In short it is based on the recognition that Marines are agents who can and do change their actions through time and across situations. But, as most of the IT's at the MACE tacitly agreed, there is no way to *force* Marines to do exactly what the Marine Corps wants them to do either in all situations or at all times. Discipline and offering resources for self-discipline are both ways to direct Marines toward, but never to guarantee, prescribed action.

I want to engage this second obstacle and its implication for the ethics of training Marines to be ethical warriors by turning to the efforts of former Marine captain Jack Hoban, one

of a small cadre of important advisors to Lieutenant Colonel Shusko and the MACE staff. We encountered him in the last chapter as an advocate of the tie-in pedagogy. Though not a combat veteran, Hoban is a highly accomplished martial artist who has spent years studying and practicing personal combat with and without weapons. In his advising MACE staff and Marine trainees, Hoban advances a conception of the ethical Marine warrior based on an explicit value system.

Hoban's conception, which he calls the Ethical Warrior concept (capital "E" and "W") is founded on his encounter with the approach of former World War II Marine combat infantryman, attorney, and statesman Robert L. Humphrey toward inter-cultural conflict resolution. In his book, *Values For a New Millennium* (2005), Humphrey uses a wide-range of empirical data focusing on his attempts to remedy disastrous American interactions with foreign cultures. The case studies Humphrey offers range from the inter-cultural violence and poor relations resulting from the generalized American service personnel view of our Vietnamese allies as "gooks" to violence and poor relations resulting from the generalized American service personnel resentment toward the way Italian men treated American women. Given this data and drawing on the work of the Scottish philosopher Frances Hutcheson, Humphrey argues that the source and solution to violence and poor relations is to be found in respect for, or failure to respect, the universal value of life amongst human beings. The ethical concept is that "human equality is almost synonymous with the basic life value in the natural order of values" (2005:51).

Humphrey conducted hundreds of studies with thousands of respondents in over a dozen cultures. From this effort, and in light of the natural philosophy offered by Hutcheson, Humphrey found that the "basic life value" is actually a Dual-Life Value. Humphrey puts it this way, "Life is humankind's strongest earthly value. And species-preservation (*the lives of my loved ones*) is the top half of the value. Self is only a close second, *even in strongly individualistic America*" (2005:58). The hierarchical relationship of species-preservation over self is mirrored in the relationship of the dual-life value to other values. The taken-for-granted status of the dual-life value among most people is symptomatic of its being foundational in our species. Values like freedom and equality are by way of contrast, secondary and "conscious," but are important in their function as protections against tyranny and bigotry (2005:59).

One of the ways the primacy of the dual-life value and the slight edge in prioritization of the value of the lives of others over one's own life was translated directly into the MAIT course

during a presentation on developing a combat mindset. “Combat mindset” refers to the state of mental preparedness, focus, commitment, and determination to execute an attack on an enemy and follow through with whatever actions are necessary to eliminate the enemy. Gunnery Sergeant Friend requested that the trainees visualize a snarling grizzly bear. He asked, “Is the bear dangerous?” A general chorus of “yeah” and “oo-rah” followed.⁴ “Now, picture a grizzly bear with three cubs,” he continued, “is the bear more or less dangerous?” A general chorus of “more” and louder “oo-rah’s” followed. “Yeah,” said GySgt. Friend, the bear is more dangerous when protecting her cubs. That’s what combat mindset is all about.” (Fieldnotes, June 26, 2007). Here the value of the lives of others over one’s own life was being given a basis in the powerful example of a parent protecting its young. This serves to ground the principle in a natural(ized), familial structure and to that extent render it obvious, inarguable and unquestionable. The trainees were supposed to think about their role in executing violence in terms of being a protector in the same way that a bear protects its cubs. Being violent in protecting one’s family is a deeply held American cultural value and I suspect the notion is that that cultural value is rooted in the natural example offered by the bear and his/her cubs.

This example depends on the presence of a generalized threat. GySgt. Friend made no attempt to ask the Marines to visualize another animal, another bear, or even a human hunter as a specific threat. Nor did the trainees indicate any concern with why the bear was snarling before being asked to visualize the cubs. The success of the thought experiment then depends on an assumed external threat that provokes the bear. Bears don’t snarl unless provoked. The logic seems to go that Marines kill others only when provoked or when those whom the Marines are dedicated to protecting are threatened. Much of the ethnographic evidence about combat and killing offered in this study demonstrates the strong emphasis on the disciplined use of force achieved through intelligent, active embodied judgment on the part of the Marines in the service of protecting, at the very least, other Marines. If not examined in depth, Marine actions seem to support this genesis story for the Marine way of combat and the genesis story seems to support Marine ways of combat.

Though the moral message of protecting others at, perhaps, the risk of one’s own life is one of the distinctive ways of being for Westerners, Americans, U.S. Marines, and combat infantry, we are still faced with important question remains about the *legitimacy* of the naturalistic example used, apparently, as an explanation of legitimate violence. What I mean is

that we have already seen in great detail that the attendant, authoritative air of evolutionary authority in this kind of naturalistic analogy creates a dynamic that *justifies* but does not *explain* the use of violence when a human combatant is provoked and, especially, when a human combatant is protecting one's family or young. Ethological analogies, in fact, are subject to what I take to be a fatal objection: wild animals are *not* the right kind of thing to be used as a source model for understanding human behavior. Harré argues that

Territoriality, ritualization, displacement, aggression, and so on, have been studied in feral conditions and treated as analogous to human institutions like war, property, defense, urban living and so on. But of course, human beings are not wild animals. They are domesticated by the work of mothers, psychiatrists, priests, policemen, teachers, and so on. The appropriate analogies, to my knowledge, have never been explored. No one has asked how closely are those human life practices similar to the life forms of pussy cats, pet dogs, cows, horses, gerbils, budgerigars, and the like. It is to the social psychology of farm animals and pets that we should be looking for useful analogies to sources of patterns of lives of human kind. And by parity of reasoning these considerations suggest that the forms of life of domesticated animals are much more dependent on those of their human masters than they are on genetic endowment. [1979: 339]

Even with the “right” source model—domesticated animals—Harré is skeptical, and rightly so, about any attempt to suggest that the behavior of such animals should be considered evidence of how human beings “really behave” since the source of that behavior is the social intervention of people and not the genetic make-up of the animals.

More support for my interpretation, and more evidence of the dependence of the ethical system on a naturalized view of cultural values emerged in further conversation about the dual-life value with Mr. Hoban. He clarified the application of the system by contending that in “using Aristotelian logic, if someone is alive, then ‘A is A’ and they want to be alive. This means that everyone everywhere who is alive values being alive, whether they demonstrate it or not. This is the one and only value that is universal. All other values are culturally relative, like wearing a burka or not. What is moral (by contrast with what is of value) is defined by whether or not the action in question preserves or destroys life; if it preserves life it is moral, if it destroys life, it is immoral.” According to this ethical system, in the case of a suicide we would say that something “misfired.” People who indiscriminately kill others like sociopathic serial killers are “broken” (personal conversation, January 18, 2010).

Hoban asserts that all human actions should be assessed by their moral status—whether or not they preserve life—not their cultural value, which can be relative and so misleading. Moreover, *the* universal standard for assessing actions is whether or not they preserve *all* life, not just some lives. This approach protects against the freedom to kill others based on relative values, which is immoral. Marines do not kill others because those others are Muslim or because of the color of their skin or because they think they’re “dirty.” Marines kill others whose lives are dedicated to the death of others, for example, suicide bombers. Suicide bombers remove the ability of their targets to live lives whose content might challenge or contradict that of the bombers. I take this to mean that Marines kill others who demonstrate a personal commitment to ending the lives of others whose lives, in turn, *do not* threaten the lives of anyone else. In the case of people whose goal is causing the death of others (immorally) or in the case of a sociopath, it would be *immoral not to kill them*.

It is important to clarify what Humphrey and Hoban mean by the terms “life” and “lives.” For them it is the material, physical state of the organism being alive. Harré (1979) makes a useful distinction on exactly this point by arguing that for human beings, the organismic state of being alive is qualitatively different than living a socio-cultural, value-based life. Within the socio-cultural realm, moreover, Harré further differentiates the practical matter of staying alive with the expressive matter of living a life. In parallel with Humphrey and Hoban, Harré argues that the latter is more important issue: people can and will end their lives voluntarily to express a prized value. But there is an important difference too. For Harré, valuing life, whether one’s own or that of others, *is an expressive, not a practical, matter*.

Applying these ideas to Humphrey and Hoban’s ethical system, we can see that they are advancing a formulation of ethics built on the *sine qua non* matter of survival, not existence or expressiveness. There is, however, no such thing as valuing one’s life in any pre-cultural, non-expressive way as Humphrey and Hoban seem to argue. There is no universal regard for life *per se*. If there is a universal involved here at all, it is the fact that the expressive quality of one’s life and the expressive quality of the lives of others are what counts. While it is true that without a living human body there is no person, as Harré points out, this is a secondary, not a primary, concern, especially for Marines. As I demonstrated in the last chapter, ideally, the life of a Marine is not *for the Marine* but *for other Marines*, at least within the contexts of the battlefield

and the Corps. Even as a practical matter, being alive is subsumed by cultural value expression of living a life:

It is indisputable that every human being from time to time feels thirsty. But the drive to satisfy that bodily need, when it appears as a felt want, comes under the control of a meaning system and thus enters social life only through the meaning it has for members of a particular social group. For example, according to those who adopt a form of social life in which mortification of the flesh is a dominant social good, thirst will be only barely satisfied and on special occasion not satisfied at all. [Harré 1979: 338]

Life itself is subject to the expression of values. Beyond Harré's example, and that of the U.S. Marines, former U.S. Army Chaplain Captain James Yee (2005) recounts a carefully timed mass suicide attempt by Muslim detainees at U.S. Naval Station Guantanamo Bay (GITMO) in 2003 as a response to the purposeful defiling of their Qur'ans by guards. The plan was for one prisoner to hang himself (all the detainees were male) every fifteen minutes in order to overwhelm the capacity of the guards and medics to respond and save their lives. Twenty-three prisoners tried to hang themselves over several days. In trying to end the suicide attempts, Chaplain Yee consulted with a noted scholar of the Islamic tradition who was also stationed at GITMO. While Yee knew that it was not permissible for Muslims to kill themselves, his consultant told him, "The solution to this problem is to address the root causes of that which drives these men to want to take their own lives. Simply telling them they are disobeying the laws of Islam will likely not stop these desperate men, who surely understand that already" (2005:116). The detainee's survival was subject to their ability to lead an expressive existence as good Muslims. Faced with the removal of their ability to be a good Muslim, their practical lives were forfeit, useable only, perhaps, as indirect weapons to shame their captors.

These observations suggest the need for a more thorough, critical analysis of the Humphrey-Hoban vision of the ethics of being an Ethical Warrior. To begin, we can juxtapose it to a similar argument made by U.S. Army intelligence officer and combat veteran of World War II J. Glenn Gray. In his book *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle* (1970) Gray argues

Preservative love, or concern, is clearly observed in combat in a soldier's care for life other than his own.

The impulse [to preservative love] is not restricted at all to those whose official duty it is to preserve [like doctors and corpsmen]; it sometimes becomes a general passion and finds a place in the majority of soldiers. Waifs and orphans

and lost pets have a peculiar claim on the affections of combat soldiers, who lavish upon them unusual care and tenderness. For the most part, there is little affinity between protector and protected in these cases. The soldiers are moved by the impersonal compassion that the fragility and helplessness of mortal creatures can call up in most of us. This frequently extends to enemy wounded. Medical men will risk their lives on occasion to rescue wounded enemy soldiers, and doctors in field hospitals will fight obstinately for the one as the other. The distinction between friend and foe has here been erased by the recognition of the helplessness of a creature whose life is threatened with extinction.

Superficially, this concern for preserving life other than one's own appears to be separated by a deep gulf from the instinct for self-preservation. The one begins, many will say, only when the other is assured. Yet this is not so. Often on the battlefield the desire to persevere in our being and the preservation of other life are seen to be closely related below the conscious level. The thousand anonymous acts of concern for the life that is exposed to shot and shell is testimony to an ultimate unity between these impulses.

Whether the concern is for one's own being and chances of survival or whether it is directed to the preservation of other life, I doubt that if its nature is altered. The object of one's care is less essential than the presence of the need to take care and to preserve. [1970: 83-85]

Gray is less optimistic about the supposed universality of selflessness as expressed in acts of care and tenderness but shares with Humphrey and Hoban the notion that the origination of such acts is biological since he uses terminology like "impulse" and "instinct." Gray differs with the Humphrey-Hoban formulation in terms of what that biological basis means, however. In the latter, "species-preservation" defined as "the lives of my loved ones" forms the basis for exercising preservative action while Gray offers ethnographic evidence preservative action is not focused on "loved ones." Rather, it is based on a species-wide, yet not universal compassion that is triggered by a perception of "helplessness." The value of life *per se* and its universality is not the point in Gray's formulation because both are situational. Preservative action occurs in situations where there is helplessness and fragility, but not necessarily and not all the time.

An additional difference occurs in Gray's presentation of the equal, not hierarchical relationship between preserving one's own life versus preserving the life of another. The need to care—compassion—is at the heart of Gray's formulation, not life *per se*. To me this difference between Gray and Humphrey-Hoban is decisive in two ways. First, it exposes the lack of any clear basis for choosing between either Gray's or Humphrey-Hoban's formulation since each depends on an implied biological basis that is, in itself, implausible as the ground for a universal human value, and second, both are equally grounded in ethnographic evidence. This dilemma

replicates the problem encountered in chapter 3 when we found anthropologist Sherry Ortner claiming that anthropologists see human agency in action in their ethnographic work while anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss claimed that he saw just the opposite, ethnographically speaking. The lesson there was that the choice of frameworks for understanding and interpreting the world is a theoretical, not an empirical problem because experience underdetermines theory. It then follows that empirical data exist only in light of a conceptual or theoretical framework. The theoretical problem in turn, as defined as the extent to which a framework is scientifically plausible.

I will focus most of the following comments on the Humphrey-Hoban formulation since it is the one being advanced at the MACE. If the source of the species-specific human dual-life value is our biology then the content of this study and its attendant conclusion that no such ethical content can be thought to exist at the level of human biology means that the formulation cannot be maintained in any scientifically plausible way. Evidence of the implausibility of the formulation emerges in the use of certain key terms in critical positions within the framework. People committing suicide are thought to be “misfiring,” and the dual-life value is said to require “activation.” For Humphrey, the dual-life value is not taught, it is “reinforced,” because it pre-exists within the “natural” human conceptual and behavioral repertoire (2005:58). The mechanical causal and deterministic sense of these terms is what carries their power to be convincing. They serve to bridge the gap between empirical and theoretical frameworks by removing the person and so his or her agency from the equation. In doing so the terms suggest the replication of the contradiction between biological explanation and agentic description under examination in this study. The terms, essentially, mask the contradiction and permit a false sense of the universality of the value of life *per se* not by explaining, but by *explaining away* empirical exceptions like suicides. Such persons are predefined as mechanically broken and so are not properly considered exceptions to the rule. Gray, it seems to me, was less convinced of the universality of compassion and the value of life *per se* because these were not always evident in the actual fighting he witnessed. While biologically-based, his formulation comes across as context-dependent and so situational.

There may be excellent reasons for maintaining the meaning and value of the dual-life value, and perhaps even substantive reasons for us to think that it is shared in some form by all human beings. But those differences in form could be decisive and the variability of the

ethnographic record suggests we should expect it to be so. We might, therefore, want to reformulate the dual-life value in a more culture-specific way: that Marines kill and die in order to preserve the physical survival of all people instantiates the historical and cultural fact that Americans believe that all people are entitled to the pursuit of an expressive existence. But that entitlement is not universal. Those who commit their lives—both practical and expressive—to the destruction of the lives of others, who, in turn, do not share key beliefs, forfeit the entitlement. This reformulation exposes what cannot legitimately be advanced, namely, the idea that the dual-life value is natural, universal, and pre- or a-cultural. To persist in using dual-life value conceived in this way as a lever to promote moral, or life preserving, action toward oneself and others then must be considered an ideological and so morally problematic endeavor.

A Comparative Case: Michelle Z. Rosaldo's Universal Standard for Assessing Gender Relations

An interesting parallel to Humphrey and Hoban's universal standard for assessing action from within anthropology emerges in Michelle Z. Rosaldo's work on gender. Though over three decades old, her theoretical formulation of a universal framework for assessing action, in her case the status of men and women relative to one another, provides a comparative case to the work of Humphrey and Hoban. I want to use the comparison as a way to transition into a discussion of what some scholars have identified as a close competitor to the biological as a site for "obvious" gender differentiation: warfare. In training for combat at the MACE, we will see, gender differentiation was used as a counterpoint to being a good Marine. "Marine," that is, is the more important category compared to "man" or "woman."

In a proposal for an institute on gender and war at Dartmouth College in 1990, faculty members Lynda Boose, Lynn Higgins, Marianne Hirsh, Al LaValley, and Brenda Silver offered an understanding of what seems to be a traditional assumption about the military.

A culturally produced activity that is as rigidly defined by sex differentiation and as committed to sexual exclusion as is war points to a crucial site where meanings about gender are being produced, reproduced, and circulated back into society. After biological reproduction, war is perhaps the arena where division of labor along gender lines has been most obvious, and thus where sexual difference has seemed the most absolute and natural. [*In* Cooke and Woollacott 1993: ix]

Given the active use of naturalizing discourses, mostly in terms of the bio-reductive framework, we might expect this understanding to be borne out in the ethnographic evidence. But, the edited volume resulting from the institute, *Gendering War Talk* (1993), “challenge[s] existing images, for example, that women are pacifists and that they are Patriotic Mothers; that men are essentially aggressive, or that they are threatened by their lack of aggressivity” (Cooke and Woollacott 1993:ix). In my ethnographic evidence too, the situation is much more complicated and unsettled. Rosaldo, I think, was dedicated to the same kind of unsettling of assumed absolute and naturalized gendered identities. A central component of Rosaldo’s work in this effort was her “public/domestic dichotomy,” a formulation that the socio-cultural anthropologists Alejandro Lugo and Bill Maurer assert is the basis of Rosaldo’s contribution to today’s feminist anthropology; as they put it, Rosaldo’s relevance today can be traced to her “elaboration of the public/domestic dichotomy to explain women’s subordination” (2000:18).

In *Women, Culture & Society* (1974) Rosaldo argues that

An opposition between “domestic” and “public” provides the basis of a structural framework necessary to identify and explore the place of male and female in psychological, cultural, social, and economic aspects of human life. “Domestic,” as used here, refers to those minimal institutions and modes of activity that are organized immediately around one or more mothers and their children; “public” refers to activities, institutions, and forms of association that link, rank, organize, or subsume particular mother-child groups. Though this opposition will be more or less salient in different social and ideological systems, it does provide a universal framework for conceptualizing the activities of the sexes. The opposition does not *determine* cultural stereotypes or asymmetries in the evaluations of the sexes, but rather underlies them, to support a very general (and, for women, often demeaning) identification of women with domestic life and of men with public life.

Although the fact that women give birth to and nurse children would seem to have no necessary entailments, it appears to provide a focus for the simplest distinction in the adult division of labor in any human group. [1974: 23-24]

Like Humphrey and Hoban, Rosaldo claims that there exists *a universal standard for assessing action*: the opposition between “domestic” and “public.” I mean that Rosaldo is claiming that the opposition is a tool by which the researcher can, on the one hand, pick out what counts as important or what counts as evidence among the phenomena of the socio-cultural world, and on the other hand, interpret the meaning of what is picked. In short, the opposition promotes, as Dr.

Lugo and Dr. Maurer state, “the analysis of gender cross-culturally” (2000:18). The opposition, then, provides a way for us to understand women’s subordination universally while the dual-life value provides a way for us to understand what is moral universally. In addition, evidence for the existence of the opposition is, like (the value of) the dual-life value, to be found in the cross-cultural ethnographic record.

Rosaldo, however, is careful to claim that the opposition is not a-historical. She writes

It should be stressed that, whereas a number of the empirical observations put forth here might seem to support those theorists who have claimed that men, as opposed to women, have a biological propensity for forming social “groups” (e.g., Tiger, 1969), my point is that what universals can be found in the social organization and position of men and women can be traced to social rather than biological considerations. The universal association of women with young children and its various social, cultural, and psychological implications are seen as likely but not necessary (or desirable) outcomes, and they are more readily derived from organizational factors than from biology. [1974: 23, fn 5]

Rosaldo specifically rejects a biological basis for the universal ethnographic fact in favor of a social organizational basis. Instead, she thinks that the biological “underlies” and “supports” the general conventional association of women with domestic life. This is a key point in her formulation and I would like to offer two observations about it.

First, the formulation *appears* to avoid the problem of embedding socio-cultural values and content in our biology, and so it presumes to fend off deriving any kind of a deterministic understanding of the “necessity” for all human beings, as a species, to behave socially in the same way, that is, to subordinate women.⁵ This of course opens up the possibility for agentic, personal intervention in changing the value system from subordination of women to equalization or super-ordination of women (relative to men). Equalization of men and women’s status was a political goal central to Rosaldo’s work as a feminist. Dr. Lugo states, “In 1974 Michelle Rosaldo had a clear and definite political agenda: “to understand the nature of female subordination and the ways it may be overcome” (2000:56). The theoretical and political are intimately tied here, but we must ask, on what basis?

Once again, terminology becomes critical. Rosaldo claims that the source of the ethnographic fact of universal women’s subordination is “the [biological] fact that women give birth to and nurse children [and while this fact] would seem to have no necessary entailments, it appears to provide a focus for the simplest distinction in the adult division of labor in any human

group” (1974:24). Rosaldo’s formulation leads her to claim that a universal biological fact—women give birth to and [have the capability to] nurse children—“leads” to a universal socio-cultural interpretation of that fact—women should be considered domestic and so subordinate. This is the problem of the relationship between biology and culture writ small. For her to claim to have in her possession a plausible and legitimate tool for universal assessment and understanding of human social, gender relations across cultures she needs to specify the nature of the relationship between biological fact and socio-cultural universal interpretation.

Rosaldo puts forth this relationship and therefore the basis for the “universal” part of her claim by implying a “necessary entailment” between biological fact and socio-cultural, universal interpretation. In so doing, she, in effect guarantees it. But what is the nature of this guarantee of a “necessary entailment?” The only available candidate for a species-wide, species-specific, shared socio-cultural meaning *is* a deterministic biological structure that functions (in both males and females apparently) to deliver the meaning. In short, Rosaldo is offering some kind of instinct theory. As parallel cases, both Stephen Pinker (1994) and E.O. Wilson’s (1999) claim a species-specific “language instinct,” the existence of which “entails” that human beings “necessarily” will “produce” and “perform” language. But Rosaldo, rightly in my estimation, denies that option when she claims “biology becomes significant only as it is interpreted by human actors and associated with characteristic modes of action” (1974:23). Rosaldo’s view here resonates with what we have already seen: *that* we are built to be semiotic does not entail *what* we mean in being semiotic. *That* we are built to be interpreters and meaning-makers does not therefore specify *what* we must mean in generating our interpretations and meanings. Nevertheless, perhaps in support of her political agenda, or perhaps out of respect for what she sees in the ethnographic record, she formulates the claim, albeit reluctantly, using words like “appears,” “underlies,” and “supports” to connect the biological with the socio-cultural. This might have been the best she, or anyone, could do at the time. Today, however, we can see that Rosaldo’s terminology tends, along with the terminology used by Humphrey and Hoban, to obscure the fact that there can be no scientifically plausible or morally legitimate conception of the relationship between biology and culture such that biology in any direct or indirect way “supports,” “underlies,” and hence “leads to,” in short, *determines*, socio-cultural meaning.

Second, the theoretical concerns raised above provide the basis for us to be skeptical of Rosaldo’s reliance on her perception and interpretation of the meaning of the ethnographic

record. Without overt or covert reference to some mechanism to guarantee universality, like a biological structure for, or even an autonomous, socio-cultural structure for, the idea that all people everywhere, over time and through situations, could or will interpret the biological fact of child-bearing or the socio-cultural practice of child-rearing, in terms of the content of Rosaldo's domestic/public dichotomy is implausible. This idea is susceptible to the same in-principle objections I detailed in chapter 3 with reference to Sherry Ortner's radical and naïve empiricism in her attempt to generate a claim that anthropologists see the same thing—human agency in action—due to their position “on the ground.” The counter-example to Ortner's claim was the interpretation of the ethnographic record by Claude Levi-Strauss wherein he saw nothing of the kind. One counter-example is enough to show that the issue is not ethnographic or evidentiary but theoretical. These concerns together suggest that that any claim to the existence of a universal interpretation of a biological fact of human species reproduction in an ethnographic record that holds exceptions to that very interpretation is not legitimate. Rather, it is ideological. The implied question here of whether or not theory legitimately can be ideological is another matter. At the very least this question has to do with one's theory of objectivity, and also with a theory of the conflicting points of view between theorist and native.

Rosaldo eventually changed her position about the basis of the opposition. She argued that the dichotomy was actually a historical product of Victorian ideology and thus explicitly denied that the source of the dichotomy in empirical detail (Rosaldo 1980). Instead, in *The Use and Abuse of Anthropology: Reflections on Feminism and Cross-cultural Understanding* (1980) she grounded “the inevitable ranking” of men's over women's activities in “the categories, biases, and limitations of a traditionally individualistic and male-oriented sociology” (In Lugo 2000:64). Changing the source of the opposition, however, according to Rosaldo, does not change the fact that the inevitable ranking is *nevertheless correct*. This is truly a strange argument. While Rosaldo's historicization of the source of the domestic/public dichotomy in Victorian tenets and Enlightenment political philosophy and practice and hence its relocation in the “individualistic and male-oriented sociology” emergent from it further distances her from any plausible basis for claiming it as a universal fact of ethnographic reality or a universal tool for interpretation of the ethnographic record, she persists in calling its existence necessary or inevitable.

In moving even further away from a biological basis for the opposition to a socio-cultural—and in Rosaldo’s terminology, “ideological”—basis for the opposition, she further undermines any plausible ground for the existence of a universal human behavior like ‘the interpretation of women’s place as domestic and status as subordinate.’ Given these concerns in sum, the use of the domestic/public dichotomy as a universal tool for assessing gender relationships must be considered, potentially, as much an ideological imposition by a researcher as the enactment of the dichotomy was, perhaps to the people living it. What I mean is that to the extent that the scientific assumption of the universality of the opposition is implausible, its use as a framework for the researcher’s thinking about the meaning of any particular ethnographic instance of male/female relationship must carry the substantial risk of reducing the meaning of the action involved to the terms of the theoretician’s dichotomy, rather than to the meaning of the action according to the participants.

Here, then, the conflict between the theoretician’s and the native’s point of view has been resolved in favor of the former. In short, given the reasonable question of its plausibility, the dichotomy is likely to be an imposition of meanings associated with the conceptual structure of the opposition. What we should not expect in this case is interpretation grounded in, or insight into, actual gender relationships. There is nothing in the formulation that assists the researcher in controlling for the bias the opposition imposes. It seems to me that the opposition’s explanatory usefulness is fatally compromised on this basis. As such, the dichotomy is probably better understood as a proposal for a way of interpreting, not an explanation of, ethnographic reality. This, I want to argue, is exactly how we should regard the Humphrey/Hoban formulation of the dual-life value.

Gender and MAIT Training: Are Women Subordinate to Men?

If Boose, et. Al., are right in contending that war, after biology, is “perhaps the arena where the division of labor along gender lines has been most obvious, and thus where sexual difference has seemed the most absolute and natural,” then, to the extent that training to be a warfighter is a process of socialization into a value system, military training should be a rich site for examining the ethnographic details of gender and labor differentiation. While Boose, et. Al., found the actual fact of the matter to be much more unsettled than the absolutist and naturalizing

discourses would lead us to expect, training for hand-to-hand combat was not a focus for any of their work after their institute. For me, training for combat is the most difficult and the most telling case for examining gender relationships since the “talk” is from the body, not about it (objectivist) and not of it (subjectivist). It is the kind of talk that *performs* identity, not the kind of talk that focuses on—and this is an overused, pseudo-scientific phrase among some socio-cultural anthropologists concerned with identity—“the conditions for” the emergence of identity as if this topic was the most important in understanding identity.

Rosaldo’s work is provocative against this assertion since she points at the heart of the matter: how men and women *act*. Dr. Lugo recounts Rosaldo’s conception of women’s subordination as “sexual asymmetry embodied in ‘the fact that male, as opposed to female, activities are always recognized as predominantly important, and cultural systems give authority and value to the roles and activities of men’” (2000:57). More specifically,

The dichotomous categories (public and domestic) “underlay” the local “evaluations of the sexes”—that is, the culturally specific values attached to male and female activities. The cultural values given to the sexual asymmetry were in themselves sources of power. They could work either against women as sources of domination and oppression or, as Rosaldo would prefer for women as sources of empowerment and transformation. [Lugo 2000: 58].

From this conception, Dr. Lugo shows the development of Rosaldo’s political agenda toward an idea based on an ethnographic insight into gender relationships among the Ilongot.

We must, like the Ilongots, bring men into the sphere of domestic concerns and responsibilities...the Ilongot example...suggests that men who in the past have committed their lives to public achievement will recognize women as true equals only when men themselves help raise new generations by taking on the responsibilities of the home. [*In* Lugo 2000: 61]

For Lugo, there is substantive worth in pursuing what he sees as an inherent if unacknowledged strategy offered in Rosaldo’s formulation that focuses precisely on embodied action. That strategy is to challenge what Rosaldo called “the aura of authority” that men generate in their sacrosanct public activities by “bringing men into the household” (Lugo 2000:64). Specifically, the aura of authority is mitigated when the activity of making public decisions occurs in the realm of the domestic women can have a legitimate public role.

Problematically, however, Rosaldo's political agenda is susceptible to a serious criticism described by psychologist Suzanne E. Hatty in *Masculinities, Violence, and Culture* (2000). She focuses on feminist theorists who argue that

Social inequities or harms directed at one gender by the other could be remedied through resocialization. Such solutions have been proffered in many areas; for example it has often been suggested that the way to alter problematic behavior exhibited by men (e.g., violence, lack of nurturance, or other expressive behaviors) is to change socialization practices. There have been calls, therefore, to involve men in childrearing, or to raise boys in a way that does not instill extreme masculine values or reward exaggerated masculine behaviors.

According to [philosopher Moira] Gatens (1983), these approaches are premised on the idea of a neutral body, of the arbitrary coupling of gender and sex.

The proponents of resocializing (or de-gendering), according to Gatens, base their argument on *a rationalist view of consciousness and a belief that it is possible to alter individual experience through substituting one set of cultural practices for another*. For these proponents, the sex/gender distinction mirrors the body/mind distinction; socialization theorists are thus positioned within the parameters of the dualistic notions of the body. [2000: 115, emphasis added]

Barring any plausible basis for understanding human movement as fully socio-cultural—as semiotic a process as vocal discourse—as provided by, for example, semasiology, Rosaldo's formulation is open to this criticism. The criticism exposes Rosaldo's formulation to the criticism that it is disembodied. As such, there is no way to determine if or when Rosaldo's political agenda is effective, essentially because there is no way to distinguish *genuine* instances change. For example, even as he cites the recent United States-based, middle-class phenomena of bringing men into the home as perhaps quite influential in producing whatever autonomy women now enjoy, Dr. Lugo argues that this “does not mean that these new men and new women escape the hegemony of domestic/public discourses” (2000:61).

With the semasiological framework in hand, however, Rosaldo's work can be revitalized at least as a strong hypothetical statement against which to measure ethnographic reality. I want to argue that not only can we identify clear cases, we can use them to critique inappropriate generalizations about the nature of gender relationships based on putative “hegemonic discourses” like those that can sometimes be found within the military. In doing so we can honor the spirit of Rosaldo's political agenda without looking over our collective shoulders, as it were. The management of gender relations among the Marines in my MAIT training class is one such

instance.⁶ While the “aura of authority” may be thought to be in its strongest form in a traditionally masculine organization like the U.S. Marine Corps, there is an inherent risk in training that subverts authority *constantly*. To see this process in operation, however, requires a semasiological perspective since the subversion is primarily embodied.

Training is fundamentally designed to challenge the agency of participants in terms of their embodied performance. Embodied performance is the primary modality by which character is assessed. Every training drill presents an opportunity to fail or to succeed in meeting the standards for embodied performance and so suffer a negative assessment of character. On the first day of MAIT training in 2007, the trainees—including two women second lieutenants—were introduced to the staff’s expectations for performance in the course. Master Gunnery Sergeant Franklin asked the class if there was anyone who “didn’t want to be there,” and that if there was, “don’t wait and whine about injuries or other bullshit; don’t be a girl and frickin’ whine about it, frickin’ don’t be afraid to get out, don’t hit on no injuries, have a sack.” He added, “in deference to the girls in the room; they’re Marines, not girls” (Fieldnotes, June 11, 2007). MGySgt. Franklin added that “big boy rules apply,” that “you shouldn’t do stupid shit, go out and get drunk, stuff to get you in trouble, cause you could be dropped from the course.” Moreover, “if there is anyone on Creatin or other kinds of performance-enhancers, that shit isn’t allowed since it can shut down your kidneys” (Fieldnotes, June 11, 2007). Since a lot of the Marines were staying at the local Days Inn, on the government’s money, and that the Days Inn was providing them laundry service and breakfast, “you should have some common decency and not throw your shit around in your room at the hotel, don’t leave your shit ‘adrift’.” Finally he warned them “don’t go out and blow all your money, put some away” (Fieldnotes, June 11, 2007).

Being a man, in MGySgt. Franklin’s terms, is defined as being opposite to being a woman; that is in terms of acceptable responses to enduring the rigors of the course and, especially, injuries. Women’s action is constructed as primarily avoidant: they refuse to look at themselves critically and accept responsibility for who they are or are not. Fear about how a lack of commitment would reflect negatively on one’s character, and covert plans to use an injury (real or fabricated apparently) to mitigate that fear and hide that lack of commitment are constructed as a typical women’s strategy. Being a man is constructed implicitly as employing the opposite of the typical women’s strategy. It is constructed metaphorically through reference

to Marines (somehow) *choosing* to have male genitalia, specifically a scrotum. Here, it seems, we have a classic example of what Rosaldo identified, albeit relative to men, not women. A typical activity of men is valued while a typical activity of women is devalued. But the story is much more complex.

Importantly, and ironically, the construction of proper activity for men is metaphorical, and not literal. Having a scrotum—biological maleness—is neither required nor a guarantee of acceptable performance since the implication is that Marines need to choose to have one! That is, they need to choose to honor and enact the kinds of actions that the Corps values. Just because men are involved in the public activity of training for warfighting, and by extension the public activity of actual combat, does not mean that they will succeed and so have that activity valued by other men. Any sense of an easy or necessary association of men's public activities with men's biological equipment and socio-cultural activities is further unsettled by, as we have seen, the malleability of what counts as success in training and in combat. Success depends on the context and the values being employed and pursued. For example, my success in training was, at one time, measured in terms of a comparison between my capabilities associated with my age (forty-two years old) and my fellow trainees' capabilities associated with their age (mid-twenties on average). In assessing my squad's group performance after an iteration of the Combat Conditioning Exercise (CCX), IT Staff Sergeant Wyman said he'd give us a seven out of ten on the performance scale after the second round. He said we were weak in the beginning, but started coming together in the later stages. Giving 100% was what it was all about, and that if we weren't going to give 100%, we could come back in on Saturday and run the room again. He pointed at me and said "his 100% is probably half or 5% of yours, but he was giving 100% for where he's at. That's what we want!" Do we need to come back here on Saturday? No?! OK" (Fieldnotes, June 19, 2007).

Members of my squad, Gunnery Sergeant Blanchard, Corporal Torcello, and 2nd Lieutenant Dalton, all echoed SSgt. Wyman's assessment by saying, "Good job, sir" (Fieldnotes, June 19, 2007). Lead IT Gunnery Sergeant Friend approached me later that day and, in front of SSgt. Wyman, said, "You did real well" in the room and asked if I was glad that I stepped into the ring [part of the CCX includes using a range of techniques in a boxing-ring type of space]. I said, yes, absolutely, "it was the right thing to do" (Fieldnotes, June 19, 2007). He said that giving 100% was all that was asked, so even though I could hardly lift my arms (during the fight

given other exercises we had been executing), that that's what it was all about. He added that IT Master Sergeant Coleman also commented that I did well for not having prepared for the course (in the way the Marines were expected to). GySgt. Friend added that Master Sergeant Coleman rarely said anything like that (about Marines, no less nasty civilians). He also told me that I was the first civilian ever to be permitted in "the room" (a shorthand way of referring to the CCX). Though I clearly failed when measured against the physical conditioning requirements that would have otherwise permitted me to lift my arms and fight the IT's in the ring during the CCX, I succeeded when measured against my pushing myself to my physical and mental limits. Note too that what counts as "100%" is also malleable and susceptible to situation-based interpretation on the part of the person authorized to make such judgments. Though I was close, I hadn't, for example, pushed myself to the point of rendering myself unconscious, as was Gunnery Sergeant Friend's expectation and requirement during the pool drill.

Given these considerations, Rosaldo's opposition is too general to be of much use in discerning the complexity of intra-gender relationships. But it would need to be if it was going to be used in the context of the military. American men have constructed a socio-cultural realm in which the aura of authority that surrounds their public activities and so character is publicly undermined and brought into question pending successful enactment of embodied standards of performance. This situation was made more interesting from an anthropological and gender point of view by the presence in my training class of two women second lieutenants trainees and one woman IT whose rank was sergeant.⁷ Women being invited into the public space to, potentially, outperform men, created a new kind of risk for *both* the men and the women. On the one hand, the men might be "beat by a girl," and so emasculated and on the other the women might be beat by a man and so shown to be unworthy of having been invited into "the man's world." I overheard, for example, a male Marine captain heatedly emphasizing the importance of top-notch performance, at the level of or beyond that of the men, to one of the female second lieutenants (Fieldnotes, June 12, 2007). Not having heard the entire conversation, I was not sure if the second lieutenant had expressed doubt about or was referring to an actual sub-par performance. Having heard other bits of the conversation, the impression I was left with was that the captain was as much concerned with the issue of rank as with that of gender: the all-male non-commissioned officers in the training class would be watching and assessing the female second lieutenant as an officer as much as if not more than as a female.

Women, in this sense, might indeed have to carry the extra burden of being a female *but not categorically and not all the time*. In establishing their willingness to give one hundred percent and to pursue the values of the organization, the men had no grounds for criticizing them or treating them differently without exposing themselves to a counter-criticism of not being a good Marine. This is exactly the benefit I received. The baseline ethical standard for being an ethical Marine was to measure performance against a sense of whether or not a Marine had “put out” one hundred percent. Since the context was training, there was no need to die in the process, only to achieve near or actual unconsciousness as a measure of the selflessness at the heart of being a Marine. In a sense, any Marine would be thought to be importing an illicit standard for measuring Marine-ness if they judged other Marines in any other way during training. Of course this does not necessarily stop the Marines from doing so covertly and perhaps thinking less of women generally. Nor does it mean that all Marines, even IT’s will be fully cognizant of the bases or meanings of their actions, judgments, and reactions *all the time*. But the explicit goal for the Marines was to be a Marine.

This analysis brings up the question of whether or not being a Marine is equivalent with being a man. In short, are “masculine” and “Marine” coequal? Another way to ask this is, “Are females Marines insofar as they are masculine?” My answer is no. There were two structural aspects of the MAIT course that clearly marked women as such. One drill included an exercise where a forty-five pound iron plate usually used on a weightlifting bar was held in both hands at chest height while standing and “pressed” outward from the chest, fully extending the arms. The male trainees used these forty-five pound weights while the female trainees used twenty-five pound weights. The other aspect was that the female trainees as well as the female IT were required to wear their flak jackets any time that forceful physical contact with other trainees could occur in order to protect their chests. In light of Rosaldo’s work and political agenda, these two structural aspects would be excellent grounds for the emergence of discourses of subordination like, “The women can’t ‘hang with the men,’ they’re weak.” Or, “Women are not built to be fighters, they need chest protection.”

While the lighter weights and flak jackets did mark and emphasize physical differences between men and women, no male authority-establishing discourses, either vocal or embodied, came to my attention during either summer of training. Similarly, I found no vocal or embodied discourses expressive of women’s subordination during either summer’s training course. How

might we explain this absence? I think one plausible interpretation is that the male Marines actually thought it was not appropriate to treat the females differently. While I did not set out to explore these issues specifically in this project, I think the basis for this equality of treatment could be located in the explicit tone set by Master Gunnery Sergeant Franklin when he defined being a good Marine as a category of being unto itself, regardless of the sex, gender, or, by extension, ethnicity, religion or any other category. The depth of this commitment can be appreciated by a particular kind of tattoo that I saw among, especially, some of the white, male, non-commissioned officers who are often called “the backbone” of the Marine Corps illustrated in Figure 11 (see Figures section at the end of this chapter). In the tattoo, the actual skin of the Marine is presented as torn-open to reveal the iconic Marine digital camouflage underneath. The graphic is a powerful demonstration of a commitment not to, for example, the way of being stereotypically associated one’s skin color, whether white, black, brown or some other color, but to the Marine way of life. The graphic is especially powerful given the permanence of the tattoo and the body as the primary resource for the embodied practice of being a good Marine.

We can see support for the basis of equality in gender relations in the recognition of common vulnerability among the male Marines. Men, as well as women, for example, required groin protection in the form of strapped-on padding. In fact, in one drill, the trainees were required to kick other trainees, and to be kicked by other trainees, in the groin. The point of the drill was to undo the expectation of “incapacitating pain” when struck in the groin and disassociate that expectation with the culturally prescribed reaction: curling into a fetal position and falling on the ground. In this case the *men, not the women, were more vulnerable*, yet the women did not begrudge the men their protection nor did the men seek to excuse the use of the protection. The clear and constant lesson was that vulnerability was common for both sexes/genders though in different ways in different situations.

In a similar vein, it was readily recognized by both genders of trainees and IT’s alike that any particular group will contain Marines with a wide array of competencies in the physical, mental, and character disciplines. In some drills some male Marines turned out to be demonstrably weaker, physically, than the female Marines. Yet the males did not jeer the weaker Marines based on their lack of performance relative to the women. It seems to me that this outcome rested on a notion we encountered in the last chapter: the expectation is not some idealistic absolutely perfect achievement, but rather one hundred percent effort. Moreover that

effort realistically is relative to the capabilities of the individual. This was the basis for me being used as a positive example to the “real” Marines. My age and lack of equivalent physical conditioning meant I was incapable of higher absolute output, but I did achieve one hundred percent output relative to my capabilities. In the drill called the Bear Pit that I introduced in chapter 6 (video in Appendix A), the female trainee took a basic lesson of the MAIT course—never go “strength on strength” with an opponent no matter how well rested or strong you are—and applied it when fighting against two male Marines. She let the two male Marines fight it out and then attacked and won against the weakened winner of that fight. As a consequence, the variability in performance among men, relative to other men and to women, presents a serious obstacle to any attempt at claiming a super-ordinate position based on putative “necessary entailments” from the fact of difference in biological structure.

This strong combination of an organizational ethic and demand to *live* the category of “Marine” as distinct from any other identity-political category, however ironically expressed by Master Gunnery Sergeant Franklin, as well as the constant exposure to common vulnerability, and finally the regular vicissitudes of embodied performance conspire to undermine the assumption of an aura of authority not only of men over women, but of men over men. Looking back on my time with the Marines, offering a subordinating critique of women would have been strange because it would have been beside the point of any of the relevant experiences and lessons of the MAIT course. This idea is illustrated by comments about the female second lieutenants in my training class offered by the class’s lead IT, Gunnery Sergeant Friend.

The women lieutenants in the class are real good, they’re picking our brains all the time about how to command their Marines, not what their Marines want, well, a little of what they want. Good lieutenants know that there’s a big difference between what officers do and what I [meaning non-commissioned officers] do. Lieutenants command Marines, we [non-commissioned officers] lead Marines. What’s a lieutenant gonna do if a Marine doesn’t want to do something? Put ’em in detention? No. Write ’em up? No. They don’t have nuthin’ and if they run and tell the captain, who are they gonna back? A lieutenant with one year or a Gunny with twelve years? But the female lieutenants are good. I told [one of the female lieutenants] that she has three problems in the Marine Corps. First, she’s a woman; second, she’s a young lieutenant; and third, she’s a good looking woman, and in our culture, in our society [Gunny Friend put a serious, knowing look on his face] there’ll be males, guys, who come after her, hit on her, younger guys, older guys, guys who should and do know better will do it. [Fieldnotes, June 27, 2007].

In the way Gunnery Sergeant Friend seems to have meant these comments, he conveys the notion that women carry an additional burden as young commanders of Marines: being a woman. They also bear an additional burden if they are physically attractive.

Some (not all) Marines can and will fail to enact their obligations to her rank as an officer, basing their choice to enact subordinating discourses perhaps on features of Western gender relationships that Rosaldo writes about. I suspect that the belief in the structuring of human social relationships as deterministically based on evolved biological bonds between male and female must go some way toward enabling the kind of arrogance and self-indulgence that constitutes the meaning of a denial of respect for a female lieutenant. If this suspicion is borne out, it would go some way toward exposing, as Rosaldo sought, the *sources* of those instances of female subordination. But, and this is a key qualifier, this occurs not because of a universal necessary entailment, but because the offending Marine decides not to honor his commitment to the ethic of being a good Marine. My point is that this situation, and GySgt. Friend's identification of the problems facing the female lieutenant can only occur against a narrative within the Marine Corps that proscribes exactly that kind of action by men (and, conceivably, other women).

Again, this does not mean that there are not situations in which women are treated as subordinate based on their gender that ought to be rejected by the military generally based on the principle of equality of genders presented by Marine leaders, especially if that principle is to apply to the embodied activities that define the purpose of the Marine Corps: warfighting and training to be warfighters. This is not, however, a situation without serious challenges. At the 2009 Inter-University Seminar on Armed Forces and Society, Karin K. De Angelis, a discussant on a panel for "Gender Issues in the Force" spoke about her research with graduates of the U.S. Air Force Academy and their perceptions of the Academy's agenda for changing problematic attitudes among cadets and Air Force personnel generally. She noted that *operational effectiveness*, the military standard for measuring the fitness of individuals, equipment, and systems for achieving military goals, was one way to assess who gets to occupy a Military Occupational Specialty (MOS), like a "bomber pilot" or "bulk fueler" or "radio technician." While seemingly gender neutral in the sense that both men and women can become Air Force officers, De Angelis stated that this standard, "fails to touch on the alarming levels of rape and

assault on women” (Fieldnotes, October 23, 2009). As a result, she argued, “Women don’t report rape or attempted rape because it might harm the effort to keep them in the military,” and the discussant adopted the role of a hypothetical male saying, “See, you’re more vulnerable, you shouldn’t be in the military” (Fieldnotes, October 23, 2009). According to the discussant, women in the Air Force Academy specifically and the U.S. military generally face this moral dilemma since the military is constantly testing allegiance to its values as a way to highlight and promote those values. Women are challenged by the organization to constantly demonstrate their allegiance by “not rocking the boat” (Fieldnotes, October 23, 2009). The clear implication is that the general structure and value system of the military prohibits women from challenging those instances where they have been wronged or violated. The women, then, were seen as equal to men as Air Force officers on the one hand and on the other hand seen as “dating material” (Fieldnotes, October 23, 2009). In terms of actual behavior, De Angelis reported that in common meetings, both sexes claim women are equal, but in private, women say the men don’t listen to them when they speak [in classroom environments].

What I take from this comment is that the neutralization of gender discourses in the generation of (non)gendered military identity may in some cases provide opportunity for women and at other times hide serious faults in organizational values guiding gender relationships. To the extent that organizational leaders *mistake* traditional masculine discourses as *identical to* the values of the organization, they promote a contradictory vision of women. In the case of the Marines, the vision would be simultaneously “Marine” and “date.” Similarly, to the extent that organizational leaders *mistake* the military endeavor as one that prohibits organizational self-criticism, they promote an idealism that is antithetical to the critical realism that has made Western militaries so effective on the conventional battlefield. For example, should a Marine not be wearing his cover (hat) as regulations require, any and all Marines are required to bring the problem to the attention of the offending Marine regardless of rank. Captain Teresa Ovalle of the Marine Corps Public Relations Office explained this to me and recounted her own experience as a lieutenant correcting a male Marine Colonel. I had a similar experience. I walked into Raider Hall, the building that houses the MACE on my first day of my own training while wearing my cover. According to regulations, covers are not worn indoors except in special circumstances. The first words out of Gunnery Sergeant Friend’s stern mouth were not, “Hello,” or “Welcome,” but “Take off your cover.”

We encountered a corollary of this principle in the comments of Master Sergeant James Coleman in Chapter 5. In talking about the Marine preference for killing the enemy at a distance he noted that he was open to suggestions on how to attack a position from his subordinates. Together, both principles, one oriented toward Marine decorum and the other oriented to actual combat, suggest a unified organizational commitment to critical self-reflection. So, while I have suggested that it is both difficult and contrary to traditional Western and American thinking, gender-neutrality in terms of training for warfare and in fighting is possible with strong organizational leadership that assumes a professional, not a masculine or patriarchal, value system. Critical self-reflection would appear to be the strong basis on which such efforts are already under way. Master Gunnery Sergeant Franklin's (albeit clunky) comments illustrate this point. Such critical realism has permitted us to see that *men too* face challenges that bring their masculinity and status as members of the group into question. In the mutual acceptance of shared embodied challenge and vulnerability for common value is perhaps the basis for gender equality.

I think that an aura of *professionalism*, not an aura of *authority*, permeated the MAIT course. As such, the ethics of being an ethical warrior and so focus on being a good Marine remained at the forefront of the minds of the trainees. To be insubordinate to, or to subordinate, any of the female Marines based simply on her gender would have been recognized as cheap and self-serving, a way of excusing one's own lack of performance. Given the substantive commitment to selflessness at the heart of being a U.S. Marine and a (potential) combat infantryman, it would generate a multi-layered betrayal of what it means to be a Marine. Similarly, I would argue, at the Air Force Academy, assuming De Angelis has it right. The point is that the leadership, intentionally or not, was permitting a mistaken value orientation—"not rocking the boat"—based on a commitment not to critical realism but to idealism. This enables if not promotes the self-indulgent treatment of women as ancillary or irrelevant. Even if this was an informal organization value of course, leaders in the military, in the best American fashion, are *still* accountable.

Now, to be perfectly clear, it is not that disregard of the realities of training and combat in terms of common vulnerability and variable performance is not possible or that any particular Marine is not capable of holding to contradictory ethical tenets simultaneously. We have seen over and over again that dismissing reality in favor of an ideological position and holding

contradictory positions simultaneously are both possible, and in some cases, preferred, by the proponent. Moreover I am not denying that there should be some level of righteous anger over the additional burdens women bear while laboring under a scientifically implausible and so morally illegitimate ground for assessing their status (the bio-reductive framework, if my suspicion is borne out). Rather, my point is that, ethnographically speaking, I never heard or saw evidence of either subordination of any of the females in my training class or insubordination toward females of higher rank. There appears to be no reason to think that the Marines were either overtly or covertly establishing an aura of authority or subordinating women during the vocal and embodied practice of their way of being, even as they recognized and marked biological difference between the sexes. A reason can be fabricated, of course, in spite of what we have learned both about theories of human social action and about the realities of being a Marine if one assumes an otherwise illegitimate ideological position on the matter, such as choosing to employ a classical Freudian framework that licenses interpretive authoritarianism,

In fact, if we use a logic-based approach to the ethnographic situation we come to what might be a surprising definition of masculinity: if being masculine is identical with being a Marine and being a Marine (combat infantryman) is identical with being selfless, then being masculine as a Marine is being selfless. Discourses connecting masculinity and prescribed and prohibited actions were cited, in this sense as a means to accomplishing the end of being a good Marine defined as a selfless warrior-protector. Whether or not this constitutes the installation of a form of patriarchy requires additional analysis for which I lack space.

While Rosaldo's dichotomy as a universal framework for assessing human action, specifically the relative status of men and women, is a provocative hypothesis against which to measure ethnographic reality, it illuminates its own limitations and fundamental flaws when applied to the detail of Marine MAIT training. This training *should* be one of the most powerful ethnographic examples of the truth of Rosaldo's claim, but it has turned out not to be so. Both intra- and inter-gender relationships are defined by an ethic of selflessness that, barring individual commitments to implausible and ideological frameworks, permits the Marine Corps as an organization to promote a vision of gender relationships as equal under the category "Marine." Women, in fact, can be and are positive exemplars of valued activity. We would expect this valuing of women's activity to be present in the ethnographic record given Master Gunnery Sergeant Franklin's presentation, however ironically expressed: there is no necessary

entailment between biological fact and interpretation of, or valuing of, either men's superordination or women's subordination. In Dr. Lugo's presentation of Rosaldo's work the point is that men must participate in effecting positive change by entering the domestic sphere, thereby undermining their ability to create an aura of authority. In the case of the U.S. Marines, however, men can and do choose to modify their aura of authority and risk being out-performed physically, mentally, and in character by women, *in the public sphere*.

If masculinity is thought to be "behind" the Marine Corps' ethic for being an ethical warrior then, it will have to be shown exactly how it assumes a primary and defining role when, as it is employed in the generation of Marine identity, it questions and undoes itself as it is enacted. Since I did not set out explicitly to examine gender relationships, further research would be required to fully examine questions that have occurred to me since my fieldwork. Questions about gender relationships that might fruitfully be explored include whether or not male Marines deploy a responsibility-alleviating deterministic discourse in enacting subordinating or insubordinate actions, and, whether or not female Marines see their burdens as in any way unique to their gender or as simply another of the many kinds of challenge that Marines face.

Figures



Figure 11: U.S. Marine tattoo showing torn-open skin revealing Marine digital camouflage underneath.⁸

1 The import and power of the military chain of command is expressed in Canadian Forces Lieutenant General Roméo Dallaire's (2003) account of Belgian peacekeepers who were being ordered to leave Rwanda as the mass killing there increased. "When I announced the imminent withdrawal of the Belgians, the Belgian staff officers felt embarrassed, betrayed and angry. They had been with me since November, and now that things were desperate they would be ordered to abandon Rwanda to its fate. The military ethos of loyalty to the chain of command was sorely tested that morning" (2003: 296). In being ordered to leave Rwanda at a moment of crisis, the purpose and identity of the officers—as military officers and peacekeepers—was *rejected* by the organization that trained them to have that purpose and identity *and to give their lives for either or both*. Contextually, Dallaire makes it clear that the officers realized that unarmed people would be slaughtered without their presence and protection. It wasn't simply their purpose and identities that were at stake, but the lives of many Rwandans. This adds a further layer of meaning to the sense of betrayal, and puts the officers in an impossible moral situation where they would have to suffer one of two moral deaths. Either obey orders and leave people they were there to protect to die or disobey orders and betray their loyalty to their chain of command.

2 Here is an example of a citation. It is for U.S. Marine Private Alvin La Pointe who won the U.S. Navy Cross.

THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY
Washington

The President of the United States, takes pride in presenting the NAVY CROSS to:

PRIVATE ALVIN S. LA POINTE
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

for service as set forth in the following:

CITATION:

For extraordinary heroism while serving as a rifleman with Company C, First Battalion, Seventh Marines in Quang Ngai Province, Republic of Vietnam, on 28 March 1966. While engaged in a search and destroy operation against communist insurgent forces. Private La Pointe's platoon came under an intense volume of well aimed automatic weapons fire. While engaged in vicious hand-to-hand combat, Private La Pointe observed an enemy antiaircraft weapon raking his squad with a murderous volume of accurate fire. Facing almost certain death, he heroically crawled across the fire swept slope toward the enemy bunker armed only with his bayonet and hand grenades. Within ten feet of the emplacement, he fearlessly and aggressively leaped into the position and, landing astride the gun, stabbed and killed the gunner. Seeing his comrade killed, the second Viet Cong fled into a tunnel within the position. Courageous and oblivious to the imminent danger, Private La Pointe unhesitatingly followed and killed him. Through his extraordinary initiative and inspiring valor in the face of almost certain death, he saved his comrades from injury and possible loss of life and enabled the platoon to seize and hold the vital enemy position. By his personal bravery, indomitable fighting spirit and devotion to duty, Private La Pointe reflected great credit upon himself and the Marine Corps and upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.

For the President,
Secretary of the Navy

3 Thirty years ago sociologists of science Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar (1979) alerted the social scientific community to the notion of defined ways of presenting important data about valued work within a sub-culture that omits what social scientists might otherwise consider critical detail. Natural scientific papers often excise a great deal of information about the actual conduct of experiments as performed by scientists. While I disagree fundamentally with Latour and Woolgar's conclusions about what this means for the construction of scientific facts, I see a similar attempt to concisely illustrate what is real and what is really important for the military in its citations for bravery. In both cases what social scientists take to be important if not critical information about the actual practices of the people they are studying is omitted. I hasten to add, however, that this does not mean that the social scientists are either a) right, or, b) have in fact identified data that radically challenges the (self) perception of the people they are studying.

In the case of military award citations exclusion of detail is a way of bringing into bold relief the embodied actions of a combatant and the values expressed by them.

4 "Oo-rah" is a vocalization among Marines that signifies assent or agreement with a statement, action, or event. The U.S. Army's vocalization for assent or agreement is "Hoo-ah." The tone and volume of the vocalization is important in conveying the speaker's meaning. A very loud "oo-rah" signals strong agreement.

5 We can detect an anticipatory tension here should a biological basis for women's subordination be proposed: are only men "built" to subordinate women? If so, where, exactly, in their biology should we locate the presumably evolved source of their behavioral differentiation from women? What happens when we find, as we should expect to given the variability of the ethnographic record, women subordinating women, or women subordinating men? These concerns are, of course, symptomatic of the implausibility of the bio-reductive framework.

6 There were no women in the summer of 2008 MAIT course in which I was a guest IT.

7 I want to note that I am setting aside the issue of rank differences within the training class in considering inter-gender relationships. The women second lieutenants were required by formal rules in the military generally that prohibit close “fraternization” between officers and other ranks like non-commissioned officers and privates. They were required to maintain a certain social distance between themselves and their squad mates who were not only men but predominantly non-commissioned officers even as the training was expected to generate solidarity amongst squad mates. More research is required for full consideration the dynamics of this situation, but I want to suggest, speculatively, that the women lieutenants’ ability to manage this tricky ground takes a similar form to the men’s management of inter-gender relationships given the women’s presence. Consideration of the latter will emerge in the pages below.

8 From: <http://www.checkoutmyink.com/tattoos/devildog2092/digital-cami-skin-tear>

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

Courage and Fear

If courage on the battlefield in an abstract and penultimate sense is expressed in “engaging and dominating the enemy,” then fear can be a primary obstacle to that embodied achievement. The Marine Corps, on its website, claims that “Courage is not the absence of fear. It is the ability to face fear and overcome it. It is the mental, moral, and physical strength ingrained in every Marine. It steadies them in times of stress, carries them through every challenge and aids them in facing new and unknown confrontations.”¹ Fear can be both positive and negative from the standpoint of a combat infantryman. For example, in one training exercise we were wading and slipping along a rock-filled riverbed in thigh-deep water carrying about 100 pounds of gear. We had been moving and conducting competitive drills for about four hours when Gunnery Sergeant Blanchard, my training squad leader, asked me how I was doing. I said that my back was killing me. He smiled and said, “Complacency is what kills Marines. You start hurting and you’re concentrating on hurting and you try to think about something else and you get complacent” (Fieldnotes, July 25, 2007). Fear, in this situation, can be *positive*. It can help keep a Marine focused not on his or her pain, but on the riverbank where a hidden enemy might lurk.

Conversely, fear can be negative, an obstacle to action. In a preparatory briefing, IT Staff Sergeant Sudbrock told the training class about the physical effects of getting sprayed with OC (Onion-Cinnamon chemical irritant or “pepper spray”), “Your eyes slam shut, burning sensation ensues, involuntary movement of hands to the face, tightness in the chest, mucus secretion” (Fieldnotes June 11, 2007). He also told us about the psychological effects, “There is anxiety, fear, possibly a panic attack where people flee without thought for obstacles,” and here SSgt. Sudbrock showed us a short video of a Marine getting sprayed with OC and running straight into a wall. In this case, the fear of what the OC feels like it is doing to your eyes (not what it is actually doing to your eyes) coupled with an inability to disconnect the irritant and one’s eyes

invites the Marine to focus almost completely on the experience of the burning pain. *This* is the kind of response to fear that Marine training considers not only inappropriate but also *unnecessary*.

I listened carefully to SSgt. Sudbrock's insight when he said to "get rage, get pumped up, stay focused and drive hard...[experiencing the spray] is a way to test the mental attitude, teamwork. You may want to drop to the ground in[to] the fetal position in front of thirty-two other Marines, but you don't because they're there" (Fieldnotes, June 11, 2007). In my own case, my fear of potential embarrassment in front of the entire Marine training class helped me to focus on executing the drills that were required *after* being sprayed with OC. While I'm not sure this is properly thought of as "teamwork," although it may be the work of community expectation, the mere presence of the other Marines watching my decisions about how to act after being sprayed constituted a risk to my moral standing with them. I did not want them to think I was selfish, that I could think only of my own pain and discomfort and not the execution of the assigned drills. The implication is that in combat I would not think about them and their safety but my own discomfort or pain. This is a form of betrayal.

This presents another way in which "thinking" is inherently embodied and irreducibly tied to combat: knowing, not knowing, suspecting, and assessing risk. In other words combat infantry exercise dynamically embodied agency in situations of fundamental value conflict, such as, "should I concentrate on the fact that my eyes feel like they're melting or execute the drill of disarming a pistol-wielding enemy who threatens the lives of my fellow Marines."² That exercise of agency itself generates risk even as it is designed to manage risk. The risk is of moral and physical death or damage to oneself or to others. Since human agency is open to the spontaneous redirection of the person, and situations are themselves dynamic, especially when they include armed enemies, the outcomes are uncertain. Combat infantry, intuitively or rationally, *know* that other soldiers have "frozen" as did Sergeant Desamours, and that knowledge is an invitation to question one's own anticipated actions. Suspecting the possibility of a confrontation with the enemy in a situation of inherent value conflict that requires near instantaneous resolution (e.g., the experiences of Sergeant Stevens and Staff Sergeant Bellavia) is an invitation to question one's ability to "make the right decision." Not knowing where or who the enemy is can lead one to doubt one's ability to decide in an instant whether or not to pull the trigger. Knowledge, lack of knowledge, and suspicion of risk are all invitations to fear. Fear

represents the (wrong) focus in combat. It is a focus on oneself and potentially negative outcomes for oneself and for others. Considering this discussion I propose we amend the definition of courage offered on the Marine Corps website. Fear is not only an obstacle to overcome, it is potentially an aid to staying alive and is itself another risk factor to be managed by combat infantry. The phrasing might read, “Courage is not the absence of fear. It is the ability to face fear, *overcome it, and either ignore it or use it as the situation requires.*”

Some Insights into Studying Human Social Action

I structure my remarks in this section in the form of a critical response to comments made about my proposed study. These comments provide a good example of misunderstanding the capabilities of human beings as organisms and as persons. This needs to be resolved *before* it is possible to appreciate the simultaneously visible and invisible relationship between a) dynamically embodied human movement and b) courageous action as a socio-cultural value. The reviewer wrote,

I'm not sure the author will be in a circumstance to observe courage. Much of his research methods rely on recording the movements of soldiers in fine detail. What are the chances of observing courageous movement in a training class? Under controlled conditions I would assume courageous events to be few and far between.

It also seems unlikely that the author will be able to accurately record the types of subtle movements that seem so crucial to this approach. He proposes to use Labanotation (a way of recording body movements as a grammar). As an example, on page 6 he talks about the tilt of the hand and the rigidity of the palm and fingers [in a military salute]. Will all observations of movement be to this level of detail? I question his ability to act as an instructor and record these movements at the same time.

I will identify three main conceptual failures in these comments as a way of highlighting key findings in this study. The confusion that attends such misunderstanding emulates what we found in trying to understand the basis for the powerful American image of courageous action on the battlefield. I suggest that the power of this image emerges from the purposeful and selfless exercise of personal agency in situations of fundamental ambiguity that carry the threat of moral and physical death. Moreover, as an exercise of personal agency, the action of combat infantry

fundamentally contradicts the American (and Western) cultural fascination with bio-reductive theories that consider human behavior to be determined by internal or external forces. As a result the enactment of personal agency is viewed as somehow *unnatural* for it also contradicts the correlative bio-reductive thesis that selfishness (self-interest as against other/group-interest) is instinctive and so natural and automatic. In the bio-reductive way of looking at it, the action of combat infantry described above *seems impossible*.

The reviewer's concerns convey a similar kind of doubt. They describe an inability to imagine the researcher possessing the requisite perceptual capabilities, but on what basis? While the pronouncements are *ex cathedra* and stem, apparently, from the reviewer's "common sense," they are actually conceptual. Aside from my specialized training in the anthropology of human movement systems, plus the perceptual and conceptual skills afforded by my becoming literate in a movement script such as Labanotation, *that* human beings are capable of detecting "subtle movements" is not extraordinary. In everyday situations like driving a car, for example, ordinary people make split-second decisions based on identification of small details, like a "glint" off the windshield of an approaching vehicle. In the military arena, likewise, soldiers decide to kill or not to kill, spontaneously, depending on a perceived "look" in the eyes of a potential opponent. In both cases, while seeing a "glint" or a "look" is made possible by the biophysical capabilities of the human eye and nervous system, the ability to perceive them as such and therefore understand what they mean is a conceptual issue.

The reviewer characterizes the training environment as "controlled" in order to ground a *rejection* of the possibility of anyone observing courageous action. In the scientific sense (which the reviewer appears to convey by using the term), however, controlled environments are created in order to promote observation of details. So, are we to conclude that the researcher lacks the capacity to detect subtle detail in a controlled environment that itself promotes the observation of subtle detail? This is not just sloppy thinking. It represents a failure of imagination that is theoretically relevant. The reviewer's assumption that controlled conditions cannot produce courageous action suggests that behind this lies the notion that fighting has to do with instincts. Key here is the belief that the conditions, not the actions of the persons, are the proper focus of the researcher's interest. My suspicion is that the reviewer believes that the expected behavior cannot be elicited without the appropriate triggering conditions! This is a classic behaviorist

construction of human social action that I have analyzed and rejected in this study as scientifically implausible and morally indefensible.

In sharp theoretical contrast I have confirmed and affirmed ethnographically that people can perceive *that* something is going on at different levels of detail in or out of controlled environments. *Refining* that perception and generating a workable understanding of what is going on, moreover, is a social matter of negotiating and using concepts that are available to the observer, such as what kind of movement and organization of soldiers constitutes a military patrol or that an airplane can land on a river. The reviewer's related doubt about the researcher's capacity to instruct and record movements simultaneously (if not on paper then in mind) is flatly contradicted by the success of just about any physical training program like that at the U.S. Marine Corps Martial Arts Center of Excellence. The Martial Arts Instructor Trainers routinely instruct and 'record' subtle movements of trainees in the sense of 'registering' action in great detail in order to correct the embodied techniques of trainees. While these observations are not recorded on paper in the moment, they are used later for diagramming action in, for example, training manuals.³ In fact, this capability provides the basis for any substance that is contained in the Marine mantra, "train like you fight, fight like you train." The reviewer's doubts in both cases, then, emerge from the twin failures to understand a) the biophysical perceptual capabilities of *homo sapiens sapiens* and b) the necessary and critical role that a conceptual framework plays in directing perception.

The ability to detect "subtle movements" that express socio-cultural values, which the reviewer apparently takes for granted, is made possible through conceptual resources, in the form of cultural conventions that underwrite the semiotic capabilities of persons in their local socio-cultural realm. This is a matter of the neuro-physiological agency of human beings and the socio-cultural (linguistic) agency of persons. We saw in chapter 2 that a critical realist, scientifically based conception of causal powers in the natural world provides a theoretical framework for the ontological freedom of humans in that natural world.⁴ A critical realist, linguistically based conception of vocal and embodied powers in the social world provides a theoretical framework for the conceptually-based political freedom of persons in socio-cultural worlds. This realist approach yields the clarifying distinction in forms of talk, namely, talk *about* the body (objectivist), talk *of* the body (subjectivist), and talk *from* the body (semasiological) (see Farnell 1994). It is 'talk from the body,' a concept traditionally absent from anthropological

discourse that has enabled this serious examination of dynamically embodied human movement as the primary modality in, and through which, “courageous action” is expressed on the battlefield for American (and Western) combatants. Ethnographically, analysis of the expression of values in and through movement has to do with understanding the cultural conventions assigned to them by the local community, the intentions of the actor, and the local context of the action. The better the researcher commands knowledge of each of these areas, the more subtle his or her perception of important (i.e., constituent) movements and his or her conception of the meaning of that movement. My goal in this study has been to detect such subtlety in the pursuit of clarity of meaning, and, if clarity is impossible in principle, as in, for example, the values to be expressed or denied in hand-to-hand combat, then the identification of fundamental ambiguity is itself clarifying.

In short, the semasiological principle that respects human agency in both its ontological and socio-cultural formulations connects human movement with meaning. This principle is necessary for realizing that the ability to detect subtlety in an actor’s dynamically embodied expression is actually made possible when the researcher is competent in the actor’s movement system and practices. Increasing competence in the movement system increases the researcher’s ability to detect subtlety as well. This situation is analogous to vocal expression. Detecting subtle variations in spoken expression and so subtle variation in meaning using the ear (versus the eye and kinesthetic sense in moved expression) depends on the recognition that people normally ‘mean’ when speaking. To detect the subtlest variations depends on increasing pragmatic knowledge in the language. Likewise, in adopting a conceptual framework that defines people as dynamically embodied semioticians, the researcher increasingly develops the ability to detect not simply gross movements, but to discern which details *count* as ethnographically important to the actor generating meaning.

I submit that this study has provided a correction to deleterious consequences of a traditional objectivist approach to the body in anthropology, which is exemplified by the reviewer’s comments in two particular ways. First, without critical realism’s appreciation of the relationship between perception and conception underwritten by a plausible causal powers theory and ontology of human beings and human persons, the reviewer has no way to account for agentic human social interaction. As such, the reviewer assumes that participant-observation occurs without any social interaction between the researcher and his informants. This means that

the reviewer cannot *imagine* the possibility of informants *teaching* the researcher what movements to look for and why, thus providing a means to learn to detect those subtle movements that are relevant as constituent elements of action-signs.

A second and more telling corollary is the reviewer's assumption that participant-observation occurs without the kind of participation that requires the researcher to monitor his own actions—his own body—against the model offered by his informants, thereby alerting him to small and large details in his attempt to master the performance. As MACE IT Staff Sergeant Sudbrock said to me on my first day of training, “The best way to observe is to participate” (Fieldnotes, June 11, 2007). Embodied being is a *sine qua non* for participant-observation (see Jackson 1989: 135).

Without a plausible, grounded theory of human social action in hand, the reviewer is left with a severely circumscribed objectivism with which to assess any semasiological study of human movement. That objectivism provides absolutely no means by which the researcher can conceive of his or her active role in participant-observation. The final consequence is that the researcher has no principled way of checking whether or not his or her interpretations faithfully represent informants' semiotic practices. In sum, frameworks like the reviewer's that lack a robust, plausible theory of human social action probably misrepresent informants and their meaning because the source of human agency is mislocated in some supernatural or imaginary power. The consequences range from superficiality to incomprehensibility.

Insofar as the reviewer above is representative, the U.S. Marine Corps far outstrips much of the professional social scientific community in its appreciation of human social action. They embody, I think, Paul Tillich's insight that “Courage is an ethical reality, but it is rooted in the whole breadth of human existence and ultimately in the structure of being itself. It must be considered ontologically in order to be understood ethically” (1952: 1). We saw that human beings as persons are executive; they direct their power to do things in the world through language in both vocal and embodied forms. These are best conceived as linguistic signs and action-signs, culturally convened meanings of vocal and kinetic embodied actions. Not running away from insurgents in Iraq, for example, means the same thing as vocalizing the sentence, “I'm staying here.” Fighting insurgents in Iraq means the same thing as vocalizing the sentence, “(In staying here) I'm going to kill or incapacitate you, or die trying.”

We saw that the risk to life and moral standing involved in these situations is found in a domesticated form in training. Upon informing Lieutenant Colonel Shusko of the reviewer's assumption that courageous events were few and far between in training, he looked incredulous and shook his head from side-to-side adding a comment about "100-pound heads." The reference is to imaginary persons who are all head, all thinking, and no body, no acting. The implication is that such disengagement with fully embodied action cripples their ability to fully appreciate reality. The Marines know courage when they see it. They may not acknowledge it as such (by using disclaimers such as, "I was just doing my job," or "I was doing what any other Marine would do for me") or they may not understand *why* they see it or they recognize that they contradict their own descriptions of it when they try to explain it "(i.e., [insofar as fighting and courage are nearly identical] it's in our DNA").

Some Insights into Courage

The issues facing Marines in understanding their core value "courage," and our attempt to understand it and them in relation to it, find their roots in the foundations of the Western cultural tradition. Tillich (1952) formulates this concisely.

In the course of [Plato's dialogue *Laches*] several preliminary definitions [of courage] are rejected. Then Nicias, the well-known general, tries again. As a military leader he should know what courage is and he should be able to define it. But his definition, like the others, proves to be inadequate. If courage as he asserts, is the knowledge of "what is to be dreaded and what dared," then the question tends to become universal, for in order to answer it one must have "a knowledge concerning all goods and evils under all circumstances." But this definition contradicts the previous statement that courage is only a part of virtue. "Thus," Socrates concludes, "we have failed to discover what courage really is." And this failure is quite serious within the frame of Socratic thinking. According to Socrates virtue is knowledge, and ignorance about what courage is makes any action in accordance with the true nature of courage impossible. But this Socratic failure is more important than most of the seemingly successful definitions of courage (even those of Plato himself and Aristotle). For the failure to find a definition of courage as a virtue among other virtues reveals a basic problem of human existence. It shows that an understanding of courage presupposes an understanding of man and of his world, its structures and values. Only he who knows this knows what to affirm and what to negate. [Tillich 1952: 1]

In this study we found that courage can be defined as risking one's physical and moral existence in dangerous contexts. Ascribing courage to action is a judgment on the part of the viewer and so indicates that values and conceptual frameworks are being employed. As such, which values and frameworks are employed in making judgments are critical to the outcome of the judgment.

Courage, we have determined, is not a thing or quantity of a person. It is neither a part of a Marine's "make-up" nor a quality of the mind. Instead, courage is a social event, constituted in and by ways of moving in pursuit of prized values ranging from protecting the lives of Iraqis to advancing the security interests of the United States. Coupled with the definition of courage offered above, we can conclude that there are different *degrees, if not kinds, of courage*, because different situations carry different kinds and degrees of risk. Charging a combat-experienced enemy operating a machine gun is an entirely different risk level than lying in a deep bunker while light mortar shells rain down. Knowing where the enemy is before acting in his presence is quite different from not knowing where the enemy is and nevertheless acting. The term "courage" then is a kind of abstract placeholder whose content is linked necessarily to the concrete action event(s) that generate its ascription. That concrete action can be analyzed productively using the idea that the smallest comprehensible movement, that is, the shortest "phrase" soldiers "speak" with their bodies while in combat, is value laden, intersubjective, and cultural. In fact, it is at this level of the smallest comprehensible movement phrase that we located courage.

In this examination we encountered the provocative question whether or not "courage" is identical to "masculine" in order to offer some preliminary conclusions about the relationship(s) among men and women in the U.S. Marines. Were women "equivalent" to men in the public activity of training for warfare? Women are indeed equivalent to men in the sense of contributing genuine, embodied performances of prized Marine values. In that the Marines' primary modality for being a good Marine is embodied performance, whether that body is biologically male or female is irrelevant. We saw this captured in the use of the term "Marine" to signify a category of being that was neither male nor female, nor, for that matter, black, white, brown or any other representative ethnic/racial color. This conclusion was supported by the inherent risk in the requirement for constant and consistent public performance. The construction of masculinity in this sense was found to be publicly self-subverting in the service of the larger cultural value and performative goal of self-sacrifice. That goal is not gendered. In

its concentration on action and performance of dynamically embodied values, Marine discourse *uses* gendered discourses about being a man or a woman as a means to actively promote a conception of organizational and cultural values that is gender-less. This situation, perhaps, has its roots in the experience of combat. Marine combat infantry choose to accept and actively pursue the potentially rule-less situation of combat, and especially hand-to-hand combat in pursuit of or in honor of the values for which they exist as Marines. In doing so, whether man or woman, they bet their own lives that they can manage it.

We saw in this study that the Marine and combat infantry conception of courage not only posits and depends on a conception of agentic action, that is, dynamically embodied action, it also posits and depends on a conception of persons as intelligent and capable of self- and other-directed learning. The Marine approach to training demonstrates that intelligence is both abstract-conceptual and embodied-conceptual. By the ‘abstract-conceptual’ I mean that learning to conceive of an Obstacle Course as a domesticated form of combat that presents some degree of risk or danger, as well as a task that faces the trainee with a difficult challenge to be overcome is an imaginative *achievement* toward which the trainees must work. By the ‘conceptual-embodied’ I mean that learning to enact a series of martial techniques in ways that challenge a trainee’s kinesthetic sense of proper directional movement of one’s body relative to impending physical or moral pain is a conceptual achievement.

Intelligence and learning are directed toward becoming competent in the embodied idiom of Marine-style combat—aggressive, effective, efficient, forward-oriented, and professional. That competence is in the service of increasing the resources of Marines not only for fighting, but also as they are called upon to modify their usual role as shock infantry to include activities such as peacekeeping, crowd control, infrastructure building and maintenance, community and inter-cultural negotiations, and so forth. In short, through training, Marines are learning in both abstract and embodied forms not only how to kill, but whether or not they should kill, and if so, why, when, and how. This means that their abstract and embodied intelligence and learning are also directed toward developing personal judgment that uses principles and values ranging from “the value of life” to “the spectrum of force” to “hostile intent.”

The Marines’ knowledge of courageous action is based on a keen sense of the reality of the agency of people in both its physical and socio-cultural forms. This knowledge has not faded completely from the general American cultural milieu despite the powerful folk wisdom holding

the bio-reductive framework as the only and best explanatory resource for accounting for human behavior bequeathed to them by misguided social scientists (against, my guess is, a pseudo-religious supernaturalism that offers accounts in terms that predate the scientific revolution). The dynamically embodied action by which they can “tell” if a Marine is being courageous is the mental and physical effort directed toward the achievement of prized goals, such as protecting the lives of those who should be protected, according to American cultural values, or sacrificing one’s life both physically and morally for that value. Their training tacitly demonstrates their firm commitment to the enculturation of dynamically embodied movement as a value and for these values. Training, we can say, would not be necessary, or even possible, if agency were not a fact.

We also saw that the body is the primary resource for being a good Marine. If necessary, it is to be sacrificed despite it being the means and the end of their value system. We concluded on the basis of this examination that Marines referring to “DNA” or “instincts” or “genes” in locating the source of fighting and combat action had to be *justifying*, not *explaining* such actions. More field research is necessary but we can hypothesize that such justification is a resource for Marines to engage with and kill others, a way, perhaps, of helping Marines generate the kind of focus and commitment to killing that is sought in the context of lethal warfare in order to ensure survival if not victory.

One serious and fascinating issue regarding Marine focus and commitment that arose in this study had to do with moral obligation and moral ambiguity in hand-to-hand combat. The lethal “all-or-nothing” quality of hand-to-hand combat may abrogate responsibility to, for example, the Uniform Code of Conduct and the Geneva Convention. Yet, in the Marine ability to “flip the switch,” that is, to decide spontaneously to kill in one moment and to not kill in the next, we find no basis upon which to entertain the idea of a point beyond which human beings are incapable of amending their intended action. The issue requires more research, but it may be that a combatant may not *want* to amend the intended action in order not to risk a change of heart on the part of a surrendering opponent. Yet another possibility is that amending the intended action violates a cultural conception about the rightness of killing those who either seek to kill or who simply should die.

An issue that appears to be related, and certainly supports the idea of the Marine Corps spending more time discussing a formulation of their moral code, is that of training Marines how

to live with killing and how to live with the fact that Marines die. The inherent ambiguity of combat and the sometimes novel and unique moral contradictions faced by soldiers can be deeply disturbing. Shooting while simultaneously not wanting to shoot a sixteen year old boy with an AK-47 assault rifle on the roof of a house in an Iraqi city has serious potential to cause severe psychological distress given a larger American, cultural allegiance to respect and preserve life. Beyond the issue of moral ambiguity in combat, there seems to be a point in training for combat in which expectations for action cross over from being a difficult challenge to impossible. This is the dividing line between realism and idealism. In Marine training, we saw an expectation that Marines exert themselves toward accomplishing their mission until they come close to or actually achieve unconsciousness. This is a domesticated form of a combat “last stand” and realism is present as a limit to what is expected. Marines are not supposed to kill themselves in training for combat as a domesticated form of combat death.

Conversely, a line seems to be crossed when an expectation is taken too far individually or by the organization, intentionally or not. I had the honor of training for a few weeks in July of 2007 with Staff Sergeant Travis Twiggs, a veteran of four combat tours in Iraq and one in Afghanistan. SSgt. Twiggs’ commitment to the Marine Corps was, in my opinion, unquestionable. He sported one of the tattoos illustrated in the last chapter showing Marine digital camouflage under his skin. I learned over time that SSgt. Twiggs was suffering from severe Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). He was at the MACE training to be an IT. The staff told me that Lieutenant Colonel Shusko “found him a home at the MACE as a way to keep him in the Corps” and perhaps allow him to work through his condition through training with fellow Marines. He eventually related his story to me, which I will paraphrase since I did not think it appropriate to take notes.

On his last tour, he lost two of the Marines under his leadership. He wrote to the dead Marines’ families. He led them to believe that their sons had died in combat. His intention was to spare them additional emotional pain since they actually died from an explosion of some sort and their caskets were closed, meaning that it was not recommended that the family view the remains because of the extent of the damage. Unbeknownst to SSgt. Twiggs, a Marine officer (inappropriately, apparently) related the true version of their deaths to the families. Upon arriving back in the United States, he was questioned by the dead Marines’ families. At this point in relating his story, SSgt. Twiggs had to fight to keep himself composed. His face

contorted into a grimace. Not only did he have to admit that he had misled them about how their sons died, he was obligated to admit to them that he had lost their sons; Marines who he had promised to bring home alive. It was at this juncture that I grew puzzled: I had thought that the American military principle of “bringing everyone home” demonstrated the cultural commitment to the deep bond amongst and deep respect for combat infantry killed in combat (wonderfully portrayed in the HBO Films movie *Taking Chance*).

I did not think that the principle of “bringing everyone home” meant that they all were to be brought home *alive*; realistically, after all, it *is* combat, and people die. SSgt. Twiggs, however, concentrated on, and repeated to me whenever we talked about it, that he had failed in his duty to bring his Marines home, and that he had failed in his promise to his Marines’ families to bring them home. He meant he had failed to bring them home *alive*.⁵ He doubted whether he had “done enough” as their leader. He did not elaborate. While I did not and have not learned the exact circumstances of the deaths of his Marines (which could be decisive in trying to understand the situation), SSgt. Twiggs positioned himself as an agent *whose capabilities, perhaps, were out of line with reality*. It is not that he was not in some way responsible as a leader; rather, it is that in his discourse he implied that the standard for self-criticism was his sense of being responsible *absolutely*. He appeared constantly to hold himself totally responsible for circumstances over which he appears not to have had absolute control. His sense of ethical obligation, it appears, crossed into an impossible idealism that he worked hard to maintain, and so positioned, generated moral angst over an absolute failure.

I saw him some days during training, sweating profusely, sitting, alone, after having exercised himself. One day I asked him what he was doing. He said he had just run through the Endurance Course and it was his habit to find an unwieldy, gnarly log to carry on his shoulders, but that he always thought that he should be carrying a heavier one, so he would find a bigger log and run with it. In a realistic context, this would be a commendable demonstration of striving to grow stronger to be the best possible combatant and Marine. In the context of his impossible idealism, it seemed to me that SSgt. Twiggs was exercising as a way to prove to himself, over and over again, that he was in control and that he was a good Marine. Some of my fellow trainees and a few of the MACE staffers were concerned about him but no one had much of an idea about how to help, or if help was even possible.

My question became, “How does an experienced combat veteran well aware of the realities of combat, generate such an impossible expectation of himself and then work so hard to maintain it?” Was this the “actual issue” or an issue that served as a placeholder for a host of issues? Did the Marine Corps invite or promote the content of this kind of thinking in the politico-military concern for, for example, “force protection?”

SSgt. Twiggs was “authoring” his self-talk when he identified himself as absolutely responsible for circumstances that are perhaps not entirely in anyone’s control. Even if they are, it is impossible to think that such circumstances are controlled *absolutely* in war. This is human and personal agency regarded ideally, not realistically. *This is not to blame SSgt. Twiggs’ for his condition (although some Marines did), but to locate the source of it: him, not his psychology or biology.* PTSD, at least as exemplified by SSgt. Twiggs’ case is a *social and ethical* matter of conscious self-talk, not a private and psychological matter of unconscious forces. Here I want to draw a comparison with the outlook on hand-to-hand combat offered by the Sandones (see chapter 6). SSgt. Twiggs apparently discounted the same situational physical, social, and moral ambiguity that the Sandones suggested was endemic to (hand-to-hand) combat and so alleviated responsibility for moral obligations for the enactment of cultural values. For me, this more than anything points to his impossible idealism.

Taken together, the ethnographic demonstration of combatants’ generally similar views of combat as a space of physical, social, and moral ambiguity that nevertheless results in radically different regard of that space in relation to ethical decision-making suggests that the U.S. military in general and the U.S. Marine Corps could usefully focus more training on this very topic. As this study demonstrates, it is not a matter merely of medicating soldiers (although this may be necessary initially to create a space of different self-talk), it is a matter of teaching them how and why they can and should live with their actions. Psychologizing the problem, as does Lieutenant Colonel Grossman in *On Killing* (1995, see chapter 2 for discussion), is a fundamental mistake since the problem is psychological because it is first social, not the reverse. Against a critical realist ontology of human being, Skinner’s behaviorism, which grounds Grossman’s approach represents fails to provide a scientifically plausible ontology of human being and so generates a mistaken framework for understanding human social action. It would be a further mistake, then, to rely on the core of his work for any such project undertaken by the U.S. military or the Corps.

SSgt. Twiggs had been writing publicly about PTSD and his struggles with it. He offered to talk to me further off the base, at his home. He reported that his wife, Kellee, upon learning that I was an anthropologist who studied Americans (not Iraqis or Afghans) said, “It’s about time we’re looking at ourselves” (Fieldnotes, July, 2007). He invited me to a bar-b-que at his home, but the date came and went. I tried contacting him twice immediately afterward but he did not return my calls. He did not recall anything about the arrangement when I saw him later on base. I had heard he was on medication for his condition, so I did not pursue the issue. I did not see SSgt. Twiggs after the MAIT course ended. In May of 2008 he shot himself and his brother. The existence of PTSD as a matter of one’s personal sense of ethical and social responsibility and in its potential consequences should, at the very least, add to our appreciation of what Western combat infantry risk in the name of prized cultural values.

Some Insights into Views About Soldiers

This study allows us to appreciate the intent and character of certain discourses about soldiers and their way of life. For example, we can appreciate just how wrong and unjust the Nobel Prize-winning theoretical physicist Albert Einstein was when he wrote,

This topic brings me to that worst outcrop of the herd nature, the military system, which I abhor. That a man can take pleasure in marching in formation to the strains of a band is enough to make me despise him. He has only been given his big brain by mistake; a backbone was all he needed. This plague-spot of civilization ought to be abolished with all possible speed. Heroism by order, senseless violence, and all the pestilent nonsense that goes by the name of patriotism; how I hate them! War seems to me a mean, contemptible thing: I would rather be hacked in pieces than take part in such an abominable business. [2006: 14]

While it is one thing to denounce *war* as “a mean and contemptible thing,” it is another thing entirely to demean combat infantry in the service of making that point. How does this happen? We can use the insights we generated in this study to find out. On the one hand, soldiers are portrayed as if they were lower animals and so unintelligent, despite their species-differentiating nervous system that provides the real, material, and unique basis of human intelligence. On the other, soldiers are held out as objects of contempt. In acting as if they were lower animals and

unintelligent, soldiers apparently fail to see what Einstein sees and so revel in martial activity instead of rejecting it with their entire being. In failing to use their intelligence in the service of a critical outlook, Einstein has indicted soldiers as *ideologues*. Apparently, if soldiers used their intelligence and judgment, they would conclude, as Einstein does, that the mean and contemptible thing that is war ought to be rejected even at the price of their own lives. Certainly Einstein is principled in his stated commitment, but we have seen that soldiers are too.

An ideological commitment to militarism is not what most soldiers engage in producing. As this study has sought to demonstrate, combat infantry generally are realists who pursue ideals intelligently, however imperfect they may be in execution. Those ideals include prized cultural values such as selflessness and self-sacrifice especially when expressed in the defense of those whose lives are considered valuable or inviolate. Experienced combat infantry in most cases *agree* with Einstein that war is mean and contemptible. But they engage in it despite that fact because of *their* principled commitment to values beyond themselves. We saw this especially in chapter 7 where we saw that the Durkheimian *social fact* of Marine cultural determinism is constituted by the fact of each Marine's social interactional determination. The generalized and the significant other are fused as each individual Marine and all Marines are simultaneously the source and the target of taking the role of the other in the service of each other. The person and the collective become one unit of action in pursuit of the principle of reciprocal sacrifice. Caring for the other in this culture is expressed in the ultimate act of dying for the other. As a corollary point, we can see here a new way to engage with the topic of military unit cohesion (i.e., why do some groups 'stick together' while others disintegrate?). The individual-society dichotomy that underlies much of the consternation and mystery about unit cohesion is replaced by an agentic schema focused on the choice by individuals to act in principled ways for the benefit of others, that is, the group.

On what basis, then, does Einstein deny soldiers their principled commitments? Einstein, who clearly knows better, exploits the fact of the ontological difference between humans and other animal species to improperly attribute roboticism to soldiers. Failing to maintain a realistic view of the ontology of persons might lead to an ideological view of people and social action. Purposefully ignoring a realistic view of the ontology of persons, as does Einstein, is the exemplary activity of an ideologue. His, not theirs, is the problematic use of intelligence and judgment.

The following quotation exemplifies the consequences of this kind of misperception of combat infantry. NBC News reporter Peter Jeary posted a story on January 27, 2010 about an artist in London, England, who has hand-drawn almost every one of the 5,158 American dead from the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. The drawings are in a gallery open to the public. Jeary cites Wldemar Januszczak, an art critic at London's Sunday Times newspaper as writing that the artist's work is a "powerful...and grim memorial to wasted life." In response, a blogger named "VET FT. Bragg" wrote

As a member of the military and a veteran of these wars I am offended that when we die we are called "wasted life." Ever have your buddy rescue a child from a blast? Then you die the next day stopping one that would have hurt many others? That's what happened to a great many over there. "Wasted life." Whoever wrote that must be dumb or something.

[\[http://worldblog.msnbc.msn.com/archive/2010/01/27/2185754.aspx\]](http://worldblog.msnbc.msn.com/archive/2010/01/27/2185754.aspx)

The lack of understanding and appreciation of combat infantry that this study has sought to address leads to this kind of failure to appreciate the values for which combat infantry live and die. Januszczak's appears less malicious than Einstein's, but even in this more palatable version, such lack of understanding can be offensive. It suggests too, some questions about Einstein's formulation. Though written in 1931, should we, as Einstein suggests we ought, condemn as "senseless" the warfare and the violence by the Allies against Nazism in the upcoming Second World War? Should we condemn as "senseless" violence used in defense of the lives of children "senseless?"

While, given this study, it is difficult to imagine *any* violence enacted by persons as "senseless," what Einstein seems to have meant is that violence and warfare ought to be foregone since it is clear that people are capable of using their intelligence to set aside temporarily their most treasured beliefs in order to consider peaceful conflict resolution. But, as history demonstrates, not all persons are so equipped or are so inclined to assume the kind of critical approach in which people hold in abeyance their deepest beliefs in order to discover perhaps a new or better way of being. The West, I think, has learned this particular historical lesson quite well. But Einstein's own position exemplifies just such a lack of criticality since he himself fails to use his intelligence as he attributes to soldiers a lack of intelligence that he knows is not possible, given their bio-physiology: they do have brains and they use them. Einstein's own

scientific knowledge should have given him pause. Acting *as if* one is unintelligent does not mean that one *is* unintelligent categorically. In presenting soldiers and their way of life (and death) unjustly, I think Einstein's formulation would go some way toward inviting the violence he says he abhors. "No justice, no peace," as the American civil rights saying goes.

In this study we saw the threat to a rich conception of courage as a self-claimed core value for one globally important American socio-cultural organization, the U.S. military generally and the U.S. Marine Corps in particular. Courage disappears from the ethnographic record if placed within a framework of bio-physical or bio-psychological forces that putatively control peoples' behavior. Alternatively, it is ignored or twisted at the whim of a researcher's ideological or political agenda.

A semasiological framework brings substantial clarity to the kind of vocal discourses *about* courage as opposed to discourses of courage that we see in the battlefield actions of combat infantry. Vocal discourses about courage include the following responses of two Marine trainees, Staff Sergeant Stephenson and Sergeant Terrazas. I asked them what courage was. They responded that it was "three things—doing what needs to be done even if you're afraid, doing what needs to be done even if it's dangerous, doing what needs to be done to accomplish your mission and/or to help the Marine to your right and left" (Fieldnotes, July 23, 2007). SSgt. Stephenson, moreover, thought that different people define courage differently, that organizations like the Marine Corps, have their own definition just like individual people do. Other examples come from an anonymous survey I gave to my fellow trainees. In it I asked, "What is courage?" One Marine answered:

I believe true courage comes when a man is faced with adversity. I think it comes out in Marines every day in combat environments. I constantly have people telling me, "Marines are stupid. Who moves towards enemies firing?" The only answer I can come up with is every Marine wants to be in the fight. [Survey, July 23, 2007]

Another wrote,

It's to do the right thing no matter where you are or what you are doing. To never give up in anything you do whether it be on your mission, your buddies, or your country. Courage is the commitment to uphold your honor at all times. [Survey, July 23, 2007]

Finally, “Courage is a reaction to fear. Knowing the danger of the Marine’s action, but pushing through the fear” (Survey, July 23, 2007). I have suggested a particular interpretative stance to take when encountering this kind of talk about courage that should help the reader or listener distinguish it from embodied discourses of courage.

I offer the general conclusion that social scientists in general and anthropologists in particular would be well-advised to revisit the polarizing divisions between description and explanation, biology and culture, and science and humanism from a critical realist philosophy of science perspective. At risk is the clarity, integrity, and meaning of the lives and deaths of those we seek to understand and represent. Also at risk is a potential grounding for the value of life and freedom in both their ontological and political senses. Human beings have bio-physical agency; in short, human beings move. The freedom to move appears to be a goal that promotes what the human organism is built to do. Persons also have socio-cultural agency through their semiotic abilities, which are both vocal and kinetically embodied; in short, persons act expressively. The freedom to act expressively appears to be a goal that promotes what persons do. Preferring an agnostic approach to the relationship between biology and culture promotes the implausible, immoral kind of formulation about human social action exemplified by the reviewer, the malicious, ideological formulation exemplified by Einstein, and the innocent but insulting political formulation exemplified by Januszczak. In the entailed derogation or demotion of the value or worth of the existence of the targeted persons is the invitation to violence.

Relevance of this Study to Anthropology and Possibilities for Further Research

For socio-cultural anthropology, this study suggests one way of relating theory to ethnography in productive and responsible ways. I used three interrelated theory-families: critical realism, a theory of causal powers, and semasiology were chosen as the best candidates for developing a robust conception of the relationship between biology and culture. I needed to specify that relationship needed, not only to render comprehensible the actual discourses of Americans in general and U.S. Marines in particular, but also to offer the same for anthropologists engaging in ethnographic research. My point was, and is, to monitor the use of predicates and so help the researcher a) honor the scientifically more plausible agentic

framework for interpreting consultants' lives, b) avoid invitations to reification, and c) develop a standard for deciding if or when an ideological position was being used surreptitiously to impose meaning on consultants' lives.

Within a larger disciplinary frame, my attempt to specify the relationship between biology and culture is part of a persistent though substantially de-emphasized conversation in current anthropology, one that I believe could be productively brought to the fore in appropriately theoretical terms such as those suggested here, un-inflected by concerns over what some consider to be preceding categories of identity such as race, ethnicity, gender, and so forth.

By focusing narrowly on how and why the U.S. Marines use their bodies as their primary semiotic resource in training and in combat, I have articulated a standard by which they, and we, can assess their actions against their most treasured values. There are numerous anthropological applications and questions that arise for further ethnographic research. For example, my conclusion in chapter 8 that stereotypical, gendered discourses are used in ways that *promote* what appear to be gender-less embodied values would be an excellent means for engaging the issue of sexual orientation in the military. We might ask military personnel who object to gays in the military, "If the Marine in question embodies prized Marine values in training and on the battlefield, to what is the objection directed?" This kind of question is directly linked to the aforementioned topic of unit cohesion in that a common, popular refrain is that gays would disrupt that cohesion. This kind of question could also, therefore, help refine the terms of the conversation and so provoke new insights and new political stances.

Similarly, the valorization of gender-less embodied performance in training and in combat could provoke more detailed research on the complexity of gender relationships if, as Karin K. De Angelis contends and Pentagon statistics confirm, rape and other forms of sexual assault occur at substantially increased rates in the military. If De Angelis is right and her comments are applicable to the Marine Corps, it may be that larger cultural notions of gender and power relationships are not being addressed sufficiently in Marine training generally, given the centrality of training for operational effectiveness and the general definition of that concept in terms of combat capability.⁶ The social and cultural value system of gender construction in the United States may be too central to the construction of American identity for the value system of operational effectiveness to replace it entirely, especially when the context changes

from 'training,' or 'combat,' to 'off-hours' or 'firm-base.' These remarks, though speculative, may be applied to other topics such as ethnicity, sexual orientation, and so forth.

Another intriguing extension of this study would be to examine the role of religion, especially Christianity, as a *source* of some of the values that comprise the core values of the Marine Corps. The Christian doctrine of Christ's sacrifice provides a powerful model for selflessness in the name of others and in the name of larger values for the West. Beyond the potential for ethnographic study of religious belief as a source of prized military values is the question of religious explanations in soldiers' and Marines' accounts of their actions in training and in combat. While this study has focused primarily on countering the bio-reductive model of explaining human social behavior, religious accounts may place the locus of agency not in persons or in their biology, but in God. We might ask, "How does religious discourse align with the ascription of 'courage' to individuals and combat units?" Versions of the contradiction between description and explanation might increase in number as a result, or we might find a serious tension between religious and bio-reductive accounts of courageous action.

Finally, new configurations of the relationship between technology and warfare make this study directly relevant to larger anthropological questions about realism, embodiment, and life 'in context'. For example, the use of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV's or 'drones') piloted by men and women in air-conditioned trailers in the Nevada desert and aiming to kill Taliban fighters in Afghanistan certainly protects the operators from physical or moral risk *in the local context*. There is emerging evidence, however, that this kind of killing, while disembodied, is not without risk or necessarily 'pure' or ideal in the sense of being relieved of the ethical dilemmas confronted in hand to hand combat. Digital Nation reporter Caitlin McNally posted the following story on May 13, 2009.

One of the most poignant parts of the story for me was the description by a Lt. Col. of the disconnect between his days as a UAV pilot and his life at home. He told *60 Minutes*: "To go and work and do bad things to bad people ... and then when I go home and I go to church and try to be a productive member of society, those don't necessarily mesh well." In this new kind of warfare, it seems that the idea of a "band of brothers" is completely redefined. Although drone pilots at Creech suit up in flight gear and are part of a traditional Air Force squadron, their experience of war must differ enormously from troops on the ground. Without physical immersion in the intimacy and camaraderie of the battlefield, these pilots gain the clarity of distance and stay out of harm's way, but can they also be insulated from the risk of mental injury?⁷

Not only is the radical daily change from military (killer) to civilian (productive member of society) problematic for the Lt. Col. but the embodiment of military values as discussed in this study is at the very least different, perhaps radically so. Indeed it is unclear if what UAV pilots do can, or should, be considered “combat,” as McNally identifies. Disembodied warfare through advanced technology may solve some emotional, social, and physical problems faced on modern battlefields, but it may do so in exchange for entirely novel problems or, perhaps, simply exacerbate those that already exist. There is the potential here for an ethnographic comparison among different kinds of combatants on the basis of bodily proximity or distance (e.g. infantry versus pilots), and their values relative to killing. We may uncover here entirely different and complex ideas of what counts as courage.

¹ http://www.marines.com/main/index/making_marines/culture/traditions/core_values

² I am not suggesting that this kind of narrative is being spoken inside a Marine's head as she acts. The linguistic philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1953) argues that this would be a mistake. Embodied actions are not "echoes" of internal language use.

³ While diagrams are helpful, they are not entirely clear since diagrams underdetermine the range of possible ways of executing even basic actions. Labanotation is a far superior way of capturing the details of action from the actors point of view.

⁴ "Critical realism" is the terminology used to capture the approach to realism I introduced in chapter 2.

⁵ SSgt. Twiggs wrote this note to one of his Marines, Lance Corporal Robert F. Eckfield, Jr.

I just finished writing a letter to Jared and it applies to both of you as does this one. I know you are at peace where you are, but I wish you were here with your family and your Lady. I wish that I could erase that horrible day from my memory...but I can't. I feel responsible and always will for not bringing you both home. Kellee and I pray daily that your family can find peace. I miss you brother.
Twiggs Family of Quantico, Va. (<http://www.fallenheroesmemorial.com/oif/profiles/eckfieldjrrobertf.html>)

"Jared" is Lance Corporal Jared J. Kremm, the other Marine killed in the explosion.

⁶ A March 8, 2010 article in Time Magazine by Nancy Gibbs states

The Pentagon's latest figures show that nearly 3,000 women were sexually assaulted in fiscal year 2008, up 9% from the year before; among women serving in Iraq and Afghanistan, the number rose 25%. When you look at the entire universe of female veterans, close to a third say they were victims of rape or assault while they were serving — twice the rate in the civilian population.

[<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1968110,00.html#ixzz0kWjJ5Zhi>]

⁷ <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/digitalnation/blog/2009/05/a-new-kind-of-stress.html>

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APPENDIX A

VIDEO FILES

1. MAIT 03-07.wmv is a commemorative movie made by IT Sergeant Betts consisting of still photos and short video clips from major events during the Martial Arts Instructor-Trainer class in the summer of 2007.
2. Warrior Mindset.mov shows a class on the relationship of mind to action by IT Staff Sergeant Wilder during the summer of 2007.
3. Bear Pit.mov depicts two female 2nd Lieutenants in hand-to-hand fighting with male Marines.

APPENDIX B

U.S. MARINE ENLISTED AND OFFICER RANKS

Enlisted Marines are inducted into it by virtue of the authority of the Corps itself. Enlisted ranks above Lance Corporal (see Figure 14 in Figures section below) are considered “non-commissioned officers” (NCO’s). They are given their office, and therefore their command responsibilities, through the authority of the Corps. Marine NCO’s are promoted up through the ranks after starting as a private. Marines at the upper levels of the enlisted rank structure often have spent fifteen to thirty years in the Corps. Marine officers, on the other hand, are commissioned into the Corps by the President of the United States and confirmed by the United States Senate. They outrank all enlisted Marines despite the fact that they may be only twenty-two years old at the end of Officer Candidate School (OCS). This makes for fascinating interpersonal dynamics: in the Marine infantry, a twenty-two year old 2nd lieutenant with one year of experience in the Corps and no combat experience might be in command of a staff sergeant thirty-three year old staff sergeant with fifteen years in the Corps and three tours of combat duty overseas. The third class of Marine is the Warrant Officer. They are commissioned and confirmed like regular officers but stand as a distinct class due to the specialized knowledge and responsibilities of their positions. They are subordinate to regular officers but superior to enlisted ranks. See Figures 12 and 13 in the Figures section below for graphical representations of the Marine Corp rank structure.

Figures

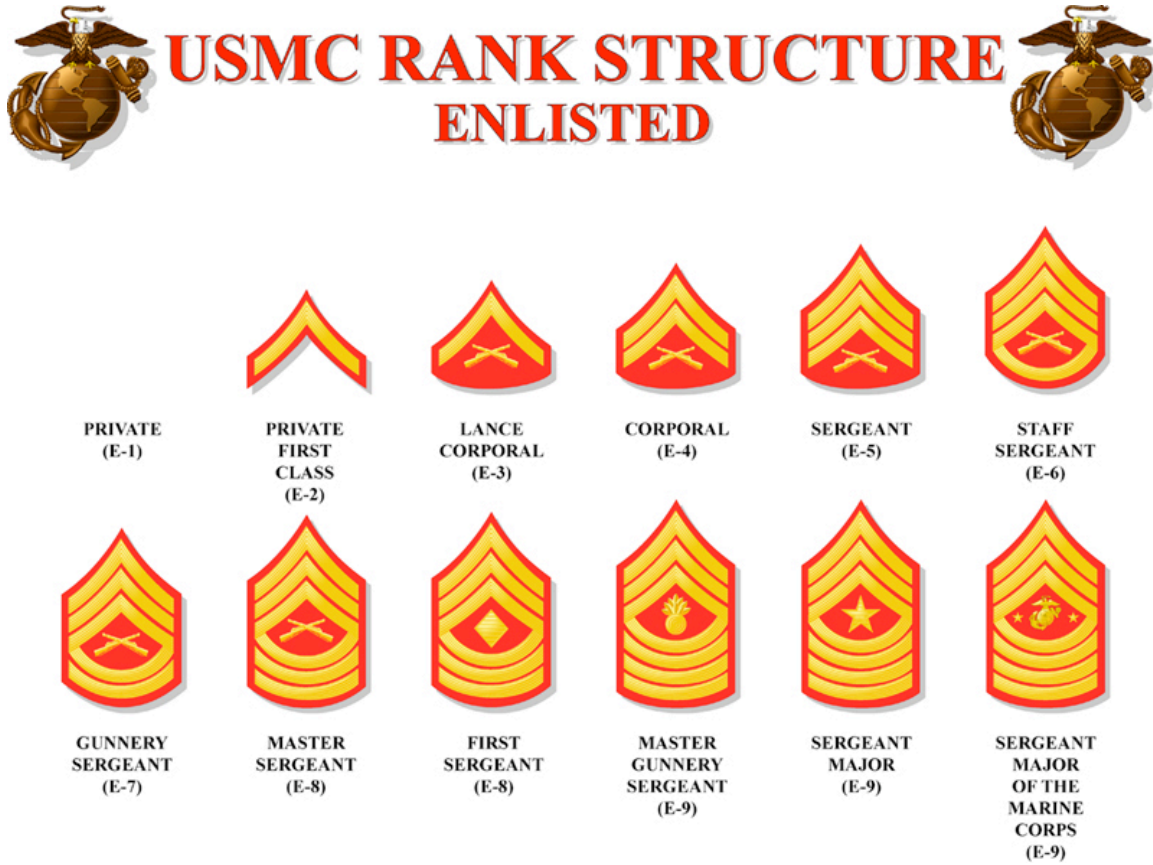


Figure 12: Enlisted Marine ranks in ascending order from top left to bottom right. From http://www.leatherneck.com/forums/showthread.php%3Ft%3D78555&h=627&w=899&sz=267&tbnid=bbcodaRbB32M:&tbnh=102&tbnw=146&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dus%2Bmarine%2Bbranks&hl=en&usg=__dXSwfkstRxEBLyKGe2cCj5trMVY=&ei=SYmJSrqvB5W8NoWwmfsO&sa=X&oi=image_result&resnum=7&ct=image

USMC RANK STRUCTURE

Officer

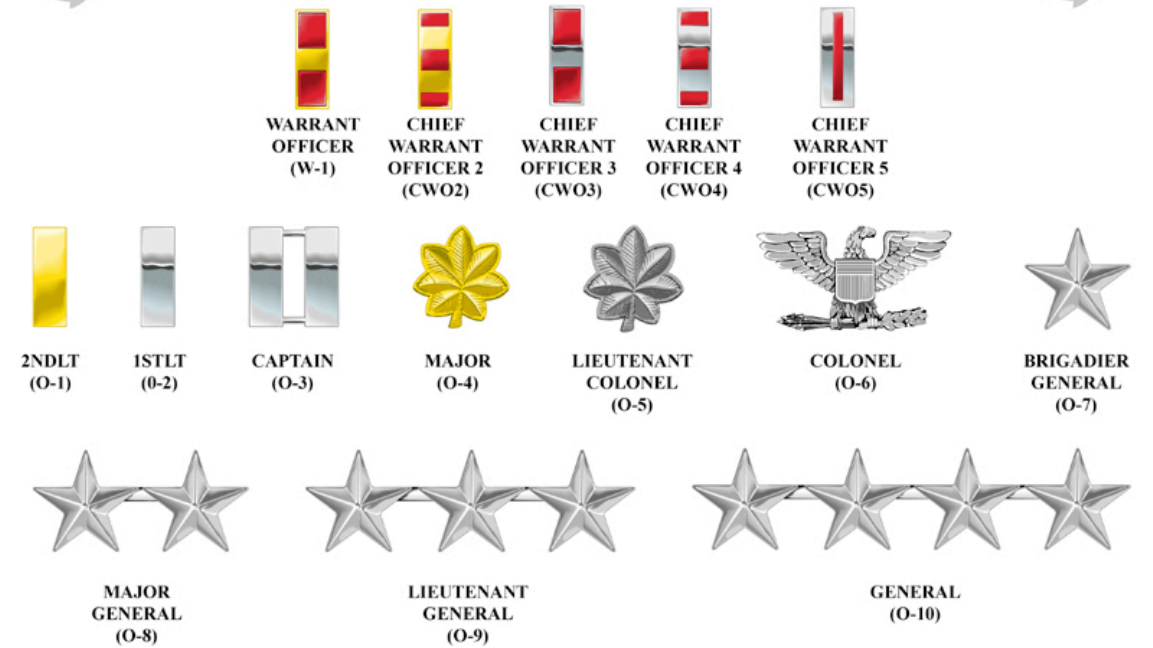


Figure 13: Marine officer ranks in ascending order from top left to bottom right. From http://www.leatherneck.com/forums/showthread.php%3Ft%3D78555&h=627&w=899&sz=267&tbnid=bbcodaRbB32M:&tbnh=102&tbnw=146&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dus%2Bmarine%2Bbranks&hl=en&usq=_dXSwfkstRxEBLyKGe2cJ5trMVY=&ei=SYmJSrqvB5W8NoWwmfsO&sa=X&oi=image_result&resnum=7&ct=image

APPENDIX C

A CLOSER LOOK AT MAIT 03-07

The training class in which I participated started June 11, 2007 and ended July 27, 2007. The class began with thirty-four Marines; twenty-five finished the course. The MCMAP Instructor Trainer course is the most challenging out of the training repertory at the Martial Arts Center of Excellence. The perception of high quality and substantive challenge meant the course was in high demand, and some of the Marines I spoke with had been trying for over two years to get into the course. The Marines all had to apply to attend the training, which included, significantly, a letter of recommendation from their commanding officer attesting to consistent quality in their "Fitness Reports" which is essentially a review of all aspects of the Marine's performance. Especially important was the commanding officer's guarantee of the level of physical fitness of the Marine attendee. As one of my squad mates, Sergeant Judice, put it to me, "Sir, you're dealing with the studs of the Marine Corps" (June 28, 2007). It became apparent quite quickly, however, that not all guarantees could be taken as such. Two Marines were nearly dropped from the program the first day because of their inability to perform runs and obstacle courses in allotted timeframes.

Generally, the MAIT course targets non-commissioned officers, who, in most cases, represent the rank level responsible for the actual training of Marines in their home unit.¹ In MAIT 03-07, unusually apparently, there were four commissioned officers. Two were captains whose performance had led them up through the ranks and into officer candidate school. The Marines call such officers "mustangs." Two were new second lieutenants. These second lieutenants were the only females in my training class. The ethnic composition of the course was 1 African American, 17 Hispanic Americans, and 14 Anglo-Americans.² The oldest trainee was 37, the youngest was 20, and the average age was 25.

The Marines came from a range of Military Occupational Specialties (MOS's), such as a Fixed-Wing Aircraft Flight Engineer or a Bulk Fueler and from a range of duty locations, such as Okinawa, Japan. All but three of the Marines in my training class had deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan at least once, and about one-half had some form of combat experience. All ten IT's assigned to lead or support my training class were combat experienced, with multiple overseas

tours. Each trainee class is broken down into “squads” of eight to ten Marines who, for the most part, were meeting each other for the first time. Each squad had assigned to it a Squad IT, meaning a member of the MACE staff who was directly responsible for the squad’s training. My squad’s Squad IT was Sergeant Brandon Meng. Squad IT’s were responsible for planning and executing portions of the training specifically targeted at squad (versus individual, buddy, or whole-class training). Additionally, Squad IT’s had to plan and execute the training as a whole in cooperation with the other Squad IT’s. The Class IT led the Squad IT’s (in my case Gunnery Sergeant Brantley Friend) and had overall responsibility for training the class.

The squad and class IT’s were mirrored by a trainee squad leader and trainee class commander. Gunnery Sergeant Timothy Blanchard was the squad leader for my squad. Gunnery Sergeant Gonzalez was the class leader for the class. The mirror leadership structure permitted trainees to discuss issues within the training class prior to or instead of bringing them to the attention of the IT’s. This gave the training class and squads a measure of self-governance as well as a structure of working out performance issues of squads and individuals. For example, one squad had a particularly problematic Marine who, according to, especially, his squad mates, consistently failed to meet his responsibilities during some training exercises. This failure was expressed in sometimes very loud, vocal, expletive-filled criticisms of his failure to act promptly to meet challenges facing the squad. The interpretation was that the Marine “didn’t get it.” His squad leader had attempted to speak with him in privately and, failing that intervention, the squad itself took the matter up, often publicly. The squad sought to police the Marine’s actions *in situ* during training events. There was a degree of frustration being expressed in these public criticisms that, on the one hand appeared to suggest a lack of self-control among the Marines, but on the other, did not fail to bring home to the Marine that his actions could, in a combat situation, get other Marines killed. These ministrations often were observed but not interfered with by the Squad IT’s and the Class IT.

A typical training day can be seen in Figure 14 (see Figures section below), taken from my second summer at the MACE. The day started at around 6:30 AM as the Marines arrived at the MACE from their off-base hotel (some Marines stayed in the barracks on base but most who were from out of the area were put up at a local Days Inn). The Marines would go into a classroom and get instructions on changes for the day or updates on open issues and then would exit the building. “LZ-6” stands for Landing Zone 6 and refers to a large open area near the

MACE used for helicopter landings. The area served as training ground as well. The IT's and trainees used it to conduct exercises and events. On this day the point was to stretch and warm up muscles in preparation for running to the Stamina Course. The Stamina Course is a trail through wooded, hilly, and broken terrain that is designed to test and increase the user's stamina. Other courses included the Obstacle Course and the Endurance Course.

The two and one-half hours devoted to the event called "The Last of the Mohicans" are designed to substantively challenge the trainees' use of bayonet techniques against multiple opponents in a free-ranging series of fights. The title of the event refers to the 1992 film of the same name in which occurs a climactic sequence following Daniel Day-Lewis' character as he fights and overcomes multiple enemies while running along a mountainous trail using a variety of weapons. This exercise from my training class in 2007 is captured in the latter part of the MAIT 03-07 video on the DVD located in Appendix A. Individuals and teams of Marines in protective gear practice a whole-body movement called a "combat glide." The combat glide is a distinctive way of moving in the context of a battlefield. The Marine assumes a partial crouch and moves quickly and purposefully toward a target location or an enemy. The Marine wields a wooden bayonet trainer called a *mokuju*. *Mokujus* approximate the shape and length of a rifle with a hard rubber tip. In the exercise, teams of two Marines move along the course and engage one, two, or three enemies who are played by IT's. The teams do not know how many enemies they will engage, how many times, or if they will be hidden or in a visible position. The enemies, on the hand, are armed with a range of weapons from plastic training knives to *mokujus* and engage the approaching Marine teams in a wide variety of ways. Engagements ranged from aggressively attacking the Marines to assuming a ready stance to await the actions of the approaching team.

The staff used "IT Time" each day to talk to the different trainees either individually or as squads. Issues such as individual or squad performance, conflicts within squads or between trainees, clarification of course goals and drills, and proper nutrition and hydration were often covered.

Figures

Time	Subject	Location	Gear/Uniform	Instructors
0645-0700	Formation/Morning Report	Raider Hall ³	U	Class Commander
0700-0730	Warm Up/Movement to Stamina Crs.	LZ-6	U, FH	SQD IT's
0730-1000	Last of the Mohicans #1	Stamina Crs.	U, FH	Sgt Kaiser
1000-1200	Chow	TBD	U	Class Commander
1200-1400	MAIT 07 Continuum of Force	Classroom	U	Sgt Davis
1400-1500	Brown Nonlethal Baton	LZ-6	U, F	SSgt Demster
1500-1600	Brown Knife Techniques	LZ-6	U, F	Sgt Thompson
1600-TBD	IT Time	TBD	U	SQD IT's

Figure 14: Example Training Day, Martial Arts Instructor Trainer Course 04-08, Tuesday, July 15, 2008

¹ Non-commissioned officers (NCO's) get their rank through appointment by a commissioned officer. NCO ranks include for example, "corporal," and "sergeant." Commissioned ranks include "lieutenant," and "captain." Commissioned officers receive their rank through approval of the U.S. Congress. See Appendix B for U.S. Marine rank charts.

² Having studied a number of works on ethnic and gender relations during my graduate coursework, I was expecting discourses of ethnicity and gender not only to be present during the training, but perhaps defining. Interestingly, the overt ethnic and gender talk that I encountered was generally secondary to discourses focused on being a good Marine and performing in training in ways that honored the conceptions of being a good Marine implicit therein. Whether you were white, black, brown, man or woman, the question was, did you perform? If so, to what level and in what ways did your actions impact your team, your squad, your training class, yourself. If not, why not? A follow up question was whether or not you were going to not perform at or above standard in the future. I hasten to add two points. First, I was not privy to all the relationships and conversations among the Marines in the training class, either as a trainee in 2007 or as guest Instructor Trainer in 2008. Second, and I warn the reader that this is speculative, the conception of what counts as a "good Marine," is, perhaps grounded in a white, middle class, Christian ethic. Such speculation requires further study, but the notion that what you meant by how you moved in training was what counted.

³ "Raider Hall" is an alternate name for the MACE. The Marine Raiders were a unit of Marines trained in martial arts and close combat for action against the Japanese in World War II. The MACE building serves simultaneously as the MCMAP administrative center and a museum of artifacts from the World War II Marine Raiders.

APPENDIX D

POOL DRILL, JUNE 14, 2007

The following is an excerpt from my fieldnotes.

I was pretty apprehensive about the pool, especially since I was hurting, aching, so much from the first few days. There were lots of IT's, including MCWIS IT's, and that was both reassuring and threatening. I didn't want to sink to the bottom of the pool and have to get saved. We went to Ramer Hall as a class and all of us had on our cammies. Some of the guys were clearly concerned. While they were hell on land, in the water, things were different. Later, in talking to Gunny Friend, he said that, "Yeah, the program is about finding out strengths and weaknesses. Some Marines are good on land, others are good in the water. Since the MAIT's train instructors, they have to be certified up to a certain level in water survival." Throughout this event I was relying on SSgt. Twiggs to give me pointers and help adjust the equipment. In some exercises, he told me to keep the flak jack loose so that I could have better range of movement, while in others he told me to keep the Kevlar tight and lean backward and into it so that it acts like a float for your head. The most important thing was to remain calm, and use explosive breathing (short, powerful breaths that do not entirely deflate the lungs) in order to assist in staying afloat. Forgetting technique and getting tired would be a real problem since, if you got tired and did not keep your back arched on a float, or if you got water in your mouth and breathed it in and panicked, your body would come out of alignment and instead of conserving energy by having a low profile in the water, you would waste energy by trying to stay above water and would not be moving forward.

We were told to take our boots off. Our first task was to get into the water and swim across the pool (Olympic size) using one or more of the five approved strokes that the MCWIS instructors demonstrated. I used the sidestroke. The water was warm, and the exercise actually felt pretty good after feeling so sore. The second task was a simulated "abandon ship" drill. We had to get up on the high tower (about 15-20 feet high) and step to the edge in groups of four. Put your toes over the edge, cross hands over shoulders, look up (to make sure no one is jumping off the ship above you), look down (to make sure no one is jumping off the ship below you and to identify any possible debris in the water) and then take one thirty-inch step outboard, cross your legs, come to the surface, get to the wall of the pool. After the class did this, we were

divided into groups of 8 and required to float for four minutes using one of four approved techniques including turning your pants into a life vest by taking them off and tying the ends, turning your blouse into a balloon by curling the collar and blowing into it, simply treading water, or holding your breath, floating just under the water, and then popping up for air when necessary. I just tread water. My shoulders were aching badly by the three minute mark.

Next we had to put our boots on, repeat the tower jump, and this time swim across the pool using one of the five approved strokes. I used the sidestroke again. Next, we had to don Kevlar, flak, canteen belt, mock M-16, and a pack (with some sort of floatation, perhaps foam, in it). At port arms, we had to jump into the pool at the shallow end, walk across the pool, sling arms, walk back across the pool, then float on the back and do a combat crawl (bicycle the feet/knees for stability and sweep hands from belt out to sides toward shoulders for propulsion) down the length of the pool and then across it.

Next we had to jump off the lower tower, maybe 8 feet high, with the combat load on, surface, un-sling the rifle from the shoulder and re-sling it around your neck. Then combat crawl about 7 meters, take the pack (your float!) off, and bring it around to your front, hold it under your chest and use it as a float, then swim the rest of the length of the pool.

The next exercise was to remove the pack (no floatation!), but keep on all the combat gear, get in the pool at the right side, walk 5 metres to a cone, and then swim the rest of the length of the pool, across the width, and then about 2/3 back down the other side to another cone using sidestroke, backstroke, and/or breaststroke. This was a killer since I was tired from the first exercises and my arms hurt. I started off pretty well, once again using sidestroke. By this time the IT's were pretty sure I was ok in the water and they said so, "No problem, stay relaxed, pull". Some of the guys just couldn't make it however, and they were thrown either a life ring or a long, foam float. In the case of ring or float, the Marine requiring one failed the exercise. If any of the Marines does not pass the swim test, s/he cannot pass the MAIT course! I just about made it around the pool before my strength gave out. Doc Young told me that I was not "exploding outward" with my arms during my sidestroke, and toward the end, as he watched from poolside, he could see that I was using a lot of energy staying afloat instead of moving forward.

The final exercise was a buddy tow. Your buddy, in all the combat gear, grabs two of the floatation packs and floats on his back with his feet on the edge of the pool. You, without any

floatation, but with all the combat gear, grab him (palm up, so that you don't start pulling him underwater if you're using an overhand grip and start getting tired) by the flak jacket handle (at the top of the rear collar) and tow him the length of the pool. He is supposed to lay back, arch his back, and cross his feet, to give the best profile in the water, thus making your tow much easier. I was the "victim" first and my buddy successfully towed me across. But in doing so, my arms, already tired from the last exercise, and then tired even more from actively grasping and keeping in close to my chest the floatation packs, became really spent. On my turn to tow, we made it about ½ way down the length of the pool and, as I got more and more tired, so did my buddy, whose arms (I imagine) were also pretty spent. He seemed uncomfortable laying back fully and so when I kicked, at times I kicked a piece of his equipment, like the M-16 or his belt. SSgt. Twiggs said he saw my buddy doing this and starting to let his butt droop down into the water. He wasn't keeping good form and this was slowing me down. I was so tired that I was going to use my buddy to rest a second, and as I turned to move toward him, he dropped the two floatation packs. This set both of us to sinking, and the IT's were hollering to get back in control, to not touch the bottom of the pool, to keep going and so forth. They also started yelling at my buddy, "What's THAT staff sergeant?" I finally got to the end and was told that I had been "buddy fucked" where your buddy lets you down. Doc Young said so, as did many of the IT's who saw it! They didn't blame me for having to touch bottom to get the rest of the way across. Of course, my performance doesn't count either way, but they were quick to point out that the failure was, in their eyes, not my fault.

I felt very happy with my performance in the pool. I felt comfortable in the water, and though I was, in my mind, seeking a way to NOT do the exercises when it came to having the combat load on, I tacitly went ahead anyway. I was afraid that I would embarrass myself or worse, panic in the water. Looking back at this and other events, my fear comes primarily from a lack of confidence in my physical abilities. This is an example of what the course is designed to "cure." My mental strength is compromised by my perceived lack of expertise in handling myself physically—and vice-versa!