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2014

Movie: "Fury." A Representation of Altruistic Sacrfice and Just War Theory

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In reading the reviews of the movie "Fury," I am reminded of Mahavira's advice to his followers (Mahavira was the founder of Jainism, a most elegant, and profound, religion).

> What a person thinks is true depends to a large degree on
> where he is standing and on what he has been taught
> to think is true. This view I illustrate with a parable.
> As an experiment, an Indian prince once ordered six blind
> men to touch various parts of an elephant and then describe their
> sensations. One man thought the elephant's leg was a tree
> another that its ear was a large winnowing fan, another that
> the tail was a broom and so on— but of course,
> none imagined the whole elephant.
> Let's call this the "Doctrine of Maybe."

I make no claim here of imagining the movie "Fury" as the whole elephant. But I do say that the part I do imagine has been "untouched" by most, if not all, reviewers of the movie. The part of the elephant I want to lightly touch here is its language and symbolism from Christianity and the (implied) message of altruistic sacrifice (and perhaps just war theory). All religions, as well as much fiction and many philosophies, employ a language to create the realities we want and to open the wonders elsewhere—

that is, to go beyond a representation of the here and now to what may lie beyond the here and now. Names for such a "place" include "utopia," "the transcendent," "heaven," "paradise," nirvana," "peace" and the like and are embodied in the scripture of all religions and in secular works like Plato's *Republic*, Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. As a linguistic artifact, the wonders elsewhere appear chiefly by means of modal verbs, "should," "ought," "could" and the like and with the creation of things that do not exist (Sherlock Holmes, Beowulf, the ghost of Hamlet's father, Goldilocks) but objects can still talk about.

Christianity makes its appearance in "Fury" in three different forms, (1) as palpable objects, a crucifix attached to the grill of a truck, the crossroads at the end of the film, as the cruciform posture of the dying Don (his head turned right, his outstretched arms), the white horse (see *Revelations* chapter 6); (2) in the Christ like sacrifices of the crew of the tank, especially that of Don, Bible and Norman and (3) in Biblical language, especially this spoken by Don: "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever (1 John 2:15-17).

Recall that one of the thieves crucified with Christ was saved—not physically, but spiritually. Of the tank crew only Norman, an Episcopalian, was saved from the stand at the crossroads (a sign of the cross but also signifying a decision presented and act of altruistic sacrifice—an act for a greater good.

All of this alludes to, on a global level, an affirmation of WWII (from an American perspective) as a just war, and to the individual acts of the tank crew, especially Don, as examples of altruistic sacrifice—both intrinsic parts of the Christian tradition. In this tradition, following Christ's example, one sacrifices oneself for a good higher than oneself—peace, for example, in the case of war. "God presented Jesus as a sacrifice for sin (Romans 3:25; see also Hebrews 9:28). Christian altruistic sacrifice thus differs, where death in battle is the issue, from the classical tradition. Recall that in the Homeric presentation one's achievement in battle, the act is its own justification and a valiant death its own reward. Nothing else is expected or needed by the warrior and his culture. So had Don and his crew acted like Achilles we would look for their death only as "valiant," not suggestive of anything whose meaning transcends the death itself. Everything would have been predicated on the "why" of death as an expression of individual value.

Just war theory is perhaps as old as warfare itself. We find it, for example, in *The Bhagavad Gita* in which Lord Krishna tells the warrior Ijuna that he must fight against his kinsmen because the cause is just—it is also a part of the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*. In the Christian tradition just war theory appears primarily in St. Aquinas *Summa Theologica* (Part 2, Question 40), St. Augustine's *City of God* 1:2 and *Romans* 13:4. Augustine identifies a just war as right conduct in behavior before, during and after a war. (*jus ad bellum), (jus in bello)* and (*jus post bellum*). For Aquinas, there are three conditions of a just war, the authority of the sovereign, right intention, and defense of one's land. All of these presuppose the absence of the qualities of an unjust war, lack of proper authority, wrong intention (an offensive rather than a defensive war) and an unprovoked invasion, typically of one's neighbors.

One can argue that Tom Brokaw's *The Greatest Generation* rests on just war theory and a Christian culture and not on the generation of Achilles. Of the generation his book is about, Brokaw has said: "it is, I believe, the greatest generation any society has ever produced… these men and women fought not for fame and recognition, but because it was the right thing to do."

For a generous account, both religious and secular, please see: *www.iep.utm.edu/**justwar/*** (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy).

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We use films and fiction to create the realities we want and to open the wonders elsewhere. The realities of war are up close and personal in the movie "Fury," mainly in close-ups of the faces inside and outside the tank and relationships between the characters. But what about the "wonders elsewhere"? Do we find them in "Fury"? By definition what is elsewhere is not here and now. One cannot simply point to it, name it, call it, smell it, taste it, draw a picture of it. It is, in linguistic terminology, non-deistic.

Elsewhere It can only be represented by the language of elsewhere and On these aspect of the film, plus references to other film representations, David Denby bases his review of the movie ("The Critics," October 27). But where are the wonders elsewhere?

Especially, the wonders of peace? We find them, I believe, in what is missing from Denby's review; namely, the symbols and undertones of Christianity, the white horse, the crucifix attached to the grill of a truck, in the behavior of Norman, an Episcopalian, in Don dying like Christ with his arms outstretched and his head turned right—and especially the last scene at the crossroads and Brad Pitt's character reciting 1 John 2:15.

Denby calls the film "a great war movie." I agree as to its greatness. But I would call it a great movie about a *just war* and the sacrifices necessary to wage it. What is a just war? Please consult St. Augustine, who named and defined it (*The City of God*), St. Thomas Aquinas (*The Just War*) who first established its three criteria—and *Romans* 13:4.

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But I claim that "Fury" is much more

Add Just gun battles in western movies: One-eyed jack (Marlon Brandon & Karl Malden) John Wayne (Man who Shot Liberty Valence. Alan Ladd kills Jack Palance in Shane. Etc.

[15] Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever. 1 John 2:15-17.

"Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. Mathew 10:34.

If you put five movie reviewers in a room and they all agree on the meaning, significance and entertainment value of a movie you know that something is wrong.

Someone in the group has either browbeaten the others into agreeing with h/h, has bribed the others or has threatened the others, in some way, into agreeing with h/h. With reviews that I have read of the movie "Fury," this (sometimes) comes close to being the case. Evidence of this occurs, as we might expect, at what linguists call basic-level language—with words with high imageability and audibility "grisly," "bloody," "clang," "thunder," "heavy," and the like. Along with these features come a frequent use of negation, what "Fury" fails to do: "it takes us to no place new or illuminating," "it is heavy and mechanical," "the closing (of the film) does tremendous disservice to the film" and so on.