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Drawing Parallels between Morality and Conflicts in context of Russia-Ukraine War

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Abstract

In war, what is ethically right and wrong? Despite decades of study into moral psychology and intergroup conflict psychology, it is commonly believed that social psychology still falls short on this topic. It is, nonetheless, a crucial issue since the conclusion will affect military activities, public policy, and international law. As a result, we analyze the current scenario of the Russian-Ukraine conflict, morality of war, combining the strengths of philosophical just-war theory with experimental methodologies and concepts established expressly for the psychological study of morality.

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Introduction

A mummified body was discovered buried in the ice by two hikers in the Italian Alps in 1991. It came out that the Iceman had perished almost 5,000 years ago. Archeologists first concluded he died after falling in a snowfall. Then they discovered scrapes and bruises all over his body, as well as an arrowhead lodged in his shoulder. Blood was also discovered on the stone knife he was holding. He was most likely killed in combat.

Humans are a squabbling species with a proclivity toward fighting. She claims in her book *War: How Conflict Shaped Us* that violence is so deeply ingrained in human history that we are hardly aware of its ramifications.

With the evolution of mankind from forest dwellers to beings of the highest order, one of the major factors has been the development of conscience and coordination to form a “natural law” which is an instinctive idea of ensuring the survival and thriving of the species, progeny, and self.

Moral philosophy is the branch of philosophy that contemplates what is right and wrong. It explores the nature of morality and examines how people should live their lives about others. So basically, a percentile system that measures the morality of a person based on what would be considered acceptable by society. Moral science and social science are correlated. They are interdependent and can never be separated. Thus, whilst studying social science there might be instances wherein we stumble across moral science or the science of right and wrong according to the social customs prevalent during that time. The study of morality has been prevalent since yore. But, many philosophers disagreed on their views on morality.

WARS AND HUMAN EVOLUTION

The function of battle in human development is a hot topic in anthropology. According to some scholars, warfare originally occurred between 200,000 and 100,000 years ago, expanded widely, and had a significant influence on human social evolution. Others think that warfare is a recent phenomenon linked to the advent of agriculture and that it is primarily explained by cultural rather than evolutionary factors.

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The theory explains how well-known traits of warlike behavior, such as gang fighting, originated. It even indicates that the collaboration skills we've had to develop to be successful combatants have developed into our contemporary ability to collaborate toward a common goal.

Now, a new argument is finding traction that debunks the generally accepted view that warfare is a product of human civilization and hence a recent occurrence. For the first time, anthropologists, archaeologists, primatologists, psychologists, and political scientists are coming to a consensus. They say that conflict is not only as ancient as humanity but that it has also played a crucial role in our evolution.

Primatologists have known for a long time that chimps, our closest relatives, engage in organized, lethal fighting. Intergroup violence is nothing like current pitched warfare, whether it is between chimps or hunter-gatherers. Instead, it frequently takes the form of rapid raids with overwhelming force, leaving the aggressors unharmed. "It's not like the Somme," argues Richard Wrangham of Harvard University. "You go out and make a hit, then return." The aggressors profit from opportunistic violence by weakening rival groups and thereby increasing their territorial authority.

JUST WAR THEORY

Fair war theory is a mostly Christian concept that aims to balance three factors:

- (I) It is immoral to take human life.
- (II) States are responsible for safeguarding their citizens and upholding the rule of law.
- (III) The use of force and violence is sometimes necessary to defend important moral beliefs and save innocent human life.

The concept puts out criteria for deciding whether or not a war is justifiable, as well as combat procedures. Although it was primarily developed by Christian theologians, it may be used by people of many religions.

Just War Theory's purpose is to provide a road map for governments to follow in the case of a conflict. It only applies to governments and not to individuals (although an individual can use the theory to help them decide whether it is morally right to take part in a particular war).

Individuals and political groups can debate possible wars using Just War Theory as a framework. The objective isn't to justify wars; rather, it's to prevent them by demonstrating that going to war until necessary is unethical, driving governments to find other ways to solve issues.

COLD WAR: THE SOUR RELATIONS BETWEEN US AND USSR

World War II, the most prominent event of the 20th CE ended with the two most powerful states defeating the Third Reich but not collectively. What started between the United States and the Soviet Union, stretched into a decades-long battle to establish supremacy. It was around the Potsdam Conference, that there arose tensions regarding the joint occupation of Germany. The pro-communist regimes set up by the USSR in Eastern European nations fueled the tensions between the East and the West. To prevent the influence of the communist ideology in the Western European nations of France and Italy, the United States gave up its traditional reluctance of being uninvolved with European affairs and subsequent presidencies became more involved in the fight against the communists in Europe. To win over the hearts and minds of the newly emerging nations, the United States and the Soviet Union engaged in hypocrisy fueled battle. The philosophical ideas that guided those times will help us understand more about the discrepancies between the nation's ideologies as well as the self-contradictory actions of the superpowers. A common adjective associated by the Soviet Union's propaganda with the political ideology of the United States was 'imperialism'. Soviet journalism had painted the American government as expansionist as well. Taking into consideration not only the Cold War, but it is also pretty prominent how the United States uses moral concepts such as humanity, civilization, and peace as a means to advance their political ambitions in other conflicted nations. Advocating peace post-WWII, the United States was not the best role model in staying out of other nations' internal affairs. A fight against communism in Vietnam and the violation of the 38th parallel line leading to the Korean War, emerged into one of the bloodiest battles, losing soldiers in huge numbers on both sides. During those times, the truth about the PoWs and the American men serving overseas was hardly ever known by the families back home. The real picture was never painted for them. The hardcore PTSD and wounds inflicted while serving in the wars in the Asian countries made it difficult for most veterans to return to normal lives. The treatment of the war veterans by the United States government also wasn't up to the mark, thus underlining the hypocrisy of the US government that is otherwise portrayed as a caretaker of all. On the other side of the world, the Soviet Union was predominantly attached to the socialist or communist ideology. Whilst criticizing the United States' capitalist regime, the Soviets portrayed the USSR as a haven for the oppressed workers. Whereas the truth was far from it. The first hints of the real deal of what the Soviets had in mind were reflected in the violent Hungarian Revolution which led to brutal civilian bloodshed. While on one hand, the Soviets demonstrated power-

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sharing amongst the commoners, on the bloodier hand; they installed a totalitarian regime in their territories that massacred their people. The USSR masqueraded the same ideology for the betterment of several European nations. The intentions of the Soviet Union were quite clear in how they felt about the West when they decided to build the 'Berlin Wall' in the 60s. Dividing a city and its citizens by an actual wall that not only divides them geographically but also geopolitically seems harsh even now. Post-WWII, after watching almost 8.7 million men of theirs die in the harsh winters fighting the Nazis, the Soviet Union still resorted to immoral techniques to gain an advantage over their foes. These were the techniques that mostly led to the bloodiest battles or the sufferings of the citizens where the conflict was prominent.

RUSSIA UKRAINE WAR ANALYSIS

Background

As the Soviet Union crumbled, Ukraine gained independence in 1991.

- Ukraine was a member of the Soviet Union until 1991 when it disintegrated, and Russia has sought to maintain Ukraine in its sphere of influence since then.
- A separatist rebellion in Ukraine's eastern industrial heartland, known as Donetsk Basin, began in 2014.
- Russia has gained a maritime advantage in the region with the invasion and annexation of Crimea.
- As a result, both the US and the European Union have pledged to safeguard Ukraine's borders.

Importance of Ukraine to Russia

- For hundreds of years, Ukraine and Russia have shared cultural and linguistic links.
- Ukraine, after Russia, was the most powerful country in the Soviet Union; it served as a hub for commercial sectors, factories, and defense manufacturing; it provided Russia with access to the Black Sea and a vital connection to the Mediterranean Sea.

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Reasons for Russian Aggression

The chief reasons for Russian aggression are discussed below.

➤ Economic Factors

- Given Ukraine's economic importance, Russia requested Ukraine's inclusion in the Eurasian Economic Community (EAEC), a free trade deal that was established in 2015.
- Ukraine was expected to play a significant role due to its large market and advanced agricultural and industrial output. Ukraine, on the other hand, refused to sign the pact.

➤ Geo-Political and Strategic Factors

- Russia claims that NATO's eastward expansion, dubbed "enlargement," has jeopardized its interests, and has asked NATO for official security guarantees.
- NATO wants to deploy missile defense systems in Eastern Europe, including Poland and the Czech Republic, to fight Russian intercontinental missiles, led by the United States.

➤ Russia's demands

- Russia has urged that NATO membership be restricted to countries that border Russia, such as Ukraine and Georgia. Russia has asked that NATO cut military deployments to 1990s levels and limit the deployment of intermediate-range missiles near the border. Russia has also asked NATO to restrict military cooperation with Ukraine and other former Soviet republics.

➤ The response from the West

- The US has said it would not change NATO's "open-door policy," implying that the alliance will continue to grow.
- The United States has declared that it will continue to send training and weapons to Ukraine.
- The US is said to be open to negotiations over missile deployment and a reduction in military drills in Eastern Europe, while Germany has warned Russia that if it invades Ukraine, the Nord Stream 2 pipeline will be shut down.

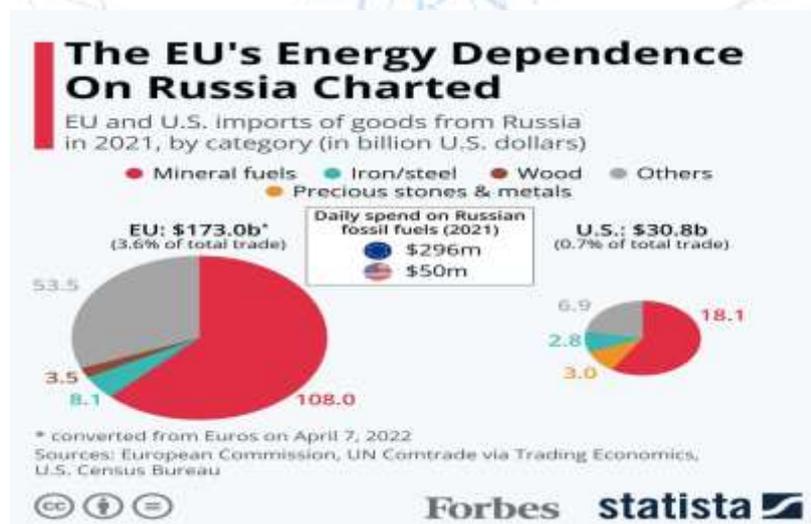
RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR: MORAL SCHOOLING VS TRANSACTIONS

The US and its European allies' sanctions against Russia, which now include an American embargo on Russian energy imports, are the most severe ever imposed on a major economic power. The speed with which they were executed was incredible when compared to a country with one of the world's top twelve economies.

The sanctions are so harsh that French Economy Minister Bruno Le Maire referred to them as an "all-out economic and financial war," a forthright and potentially provocative comment that he soon removed.

The sanctions, which target Russia's financial system, prominent people's money, and Russian fossil resources, are meant to punish Vladimir Putin and the oligarchs who support and rely on him while also suffocating the Russian economy. They make it hard to do normal business in Russia.

This implies a significant economic decline shortly: The Russian stock market has been closed since the invasion, and many Russian companies with shares listed abroad have had their equity values practically wiped out. Since the war began and sanctions were implemented, the Russian ruble has plummeted to an all-time low. The United States has been acting as a leader of the lobby against the Russian action by introducing and imposing bans. However, historic considerations of American actions in the Middle East and African countries remain unchecked.



EU dependence on Russian energy supply. The EU has been Very proactive in levying sanctions against Russia.

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US PERSUASION ON INDIA

India asserted its nuanced and independent position on the Slavic conflict, persuading the US to accept it and continue elevating bilateral ties with a gentle smackdown of the narrative that New Delhi is somehow uncritical of Moscow over its invasion of Ukraine due to its defense and energy needs.

According to a news conference conducted after the (2+2) meeting between their senior foreign and defense officials, all sides decided not to let concerns over the Russia-Ukraine issue stymie a larger collaboration



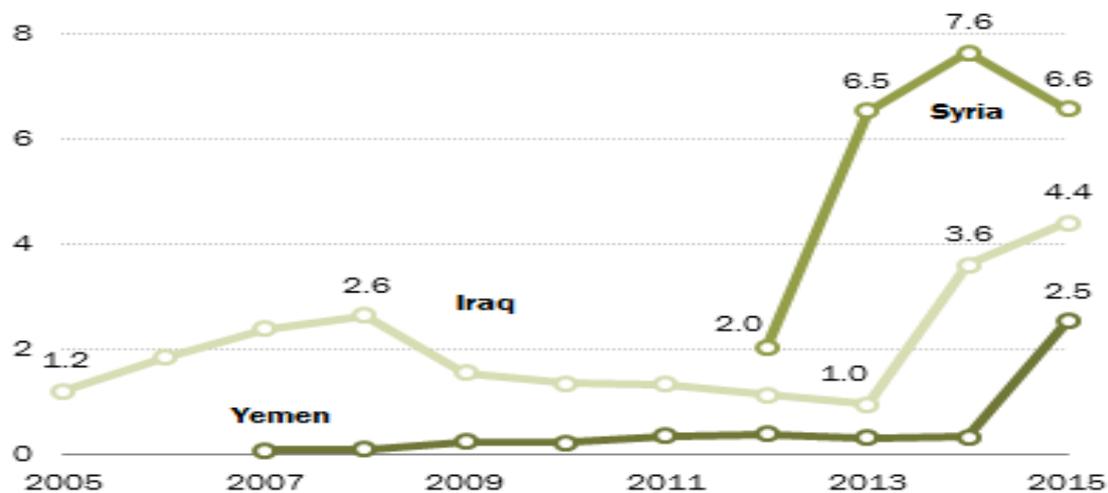
WESTERN HYPOCRISY AND TRAIL OF DESTRUCTION

Western Hypocrisy

The Watson Institute at Brown University in the United States has been documenting and analysing 21st-century wars since 2010. Over 929,000 people were murdered by direct violence in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, and Pakistan in the first two decades following 9/11, according to a recent estimate, including at least 387,000 civilians. According to the institute, many more people perished as a result of indirect effects like starvation, malnutrition, freezing to death, and disease, which is not unexpected considering the 38 million people who were displaced.

Syria, Iraq and Yemen see rapid rise in displaced populations within their countries in recent years

Internally displaced persons, in millions



Source: Pew Research Center analysis of UN data. See methodology for details. "Middle East's Migrant Population More Than Doubles Since 2005"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Several of these wars were begun and fought by the US and its coalition allies, including Britain, including those in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya. Depending on the approach employed, the overall number of civilians killed in Iraq since 2003 ranges from 186,143 to 209,349 people

Some would argue that the West's more recent war, its sustained air assault on ISIS in Iraq and Syria between 2014 and 2018, successfully destroyed the group. But even that 'success' is now

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looking tarnished, as ISIS survives and remains active in both countries and, along with other extreme paramilitaries, is entrenched across the Sahel, has a presence in Mozambique and the DRC, impacts on Kenya and Uganda, and has links with groups in Somalia.

Put bluntly, states such as the US and UK, which now expect global support for their stance on Ukraine, have, in the view of many around the world, two decades of blood on their hands.

With that in mind, when President Biden talks of the moral imperative of democracies challenging the Russian autocracy, it is all too likely to fall on deaf ears. People simply contrast the president's stance on Putin's regime with Western links to autocracies worldwide, not least in the Middle East and North Africa. In 1986, to take but one example, during a spat between the US and New Zealand over nuclear-armed US warships visiting local ports, the US ambassador in Wellington, career diplomat Paul Cleveland, was moved to comment: "Sometimes it is more difficult to deal with a messy democracy like New Zealand than with some Asian dictatorships."



Even so, there is still the argument that Russia's brutal tactics in Ukraine, of reducing towns and cities to little more than rubble, transcend anything done by Western coalitions in the Middle East and South Asia. The problem is that this does not stand up to scrutiny; quite aside from US violence in Vietnam or rendition and torture in Guantanamo, there are plenty of more direct examples, not least from Iraq.

Take just three. In April 2004, a US supplies column to a forward base in the Iraq city of Fallujah was ambushed and it took hours of battle and reinforcements for those involved to escape to

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safety. There were casualties but no deaths, yet that night the Marine Corps called in the devastatingly effective AC-130 gunships and leveled six blocks of the city, in what was openly described as a punitive action. There is no record of the number of civilian casualties in the densely packed city.

In November of the same year, the Fallujah 'problem' was finally solved when the US took control during an all-out assault on the entire city. Thousands were killed, most of the public buildings were razed, and more than half of all the houses in the city were destroyed or severely damaged.

For many, Russia's actions resemble those of previous US-led coalitions.

The most challenging mission in the US-led assault against ISIS was capturing a crucial ISIS stronghold in northern Iraq's western Mosul, notably the old city (2014-18). After a heavy aircraft and artillery bombardment, the US achieved their goal, but at the expense of the city's near-total devastation and innumerable casualties.

The savage Russian shelling of Ukrainian villages and towns is depicted to Western viewers because of near-round-the-clock coverage in the Western media. Many of these viewers are unaware that during the Iraq War, comparable material was accessible 24 hours a day, seven days a week. For example, Al-Jazeera published full details of the injuries and deaths caused by Western forces, including graphic images that were mostly hidden on Western networks.

In short, there is rightly much anger across the West at what Putin's forces have been doing and will continue to do in Ukraine. Many people living outside Western states are also appalled but, for them, what Russia is doing is not desperately different from what has been done by US-led coalitions in wars in South Asia, North Africa, and especially the Middle East. If people are at a loss to understand why much of the world is not more forthright in its condemnation of Russia, that is where to look.

Some argue that the West's most recent war, a long-running air campaign in Iraq and Syria from 2014 to 2018, was successful in eliminating ISIS. But even that "success" is now contaminated, as ISIS is active in both countries and has spread throughout the Sahel, with bases in Mozambique and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as ties to Somalia-based groups.

Put bluntly, states such as the US and UK, which now expect global support for their stance on Ukraine, have, in the view of many around the world, two decades of blood on their hands.

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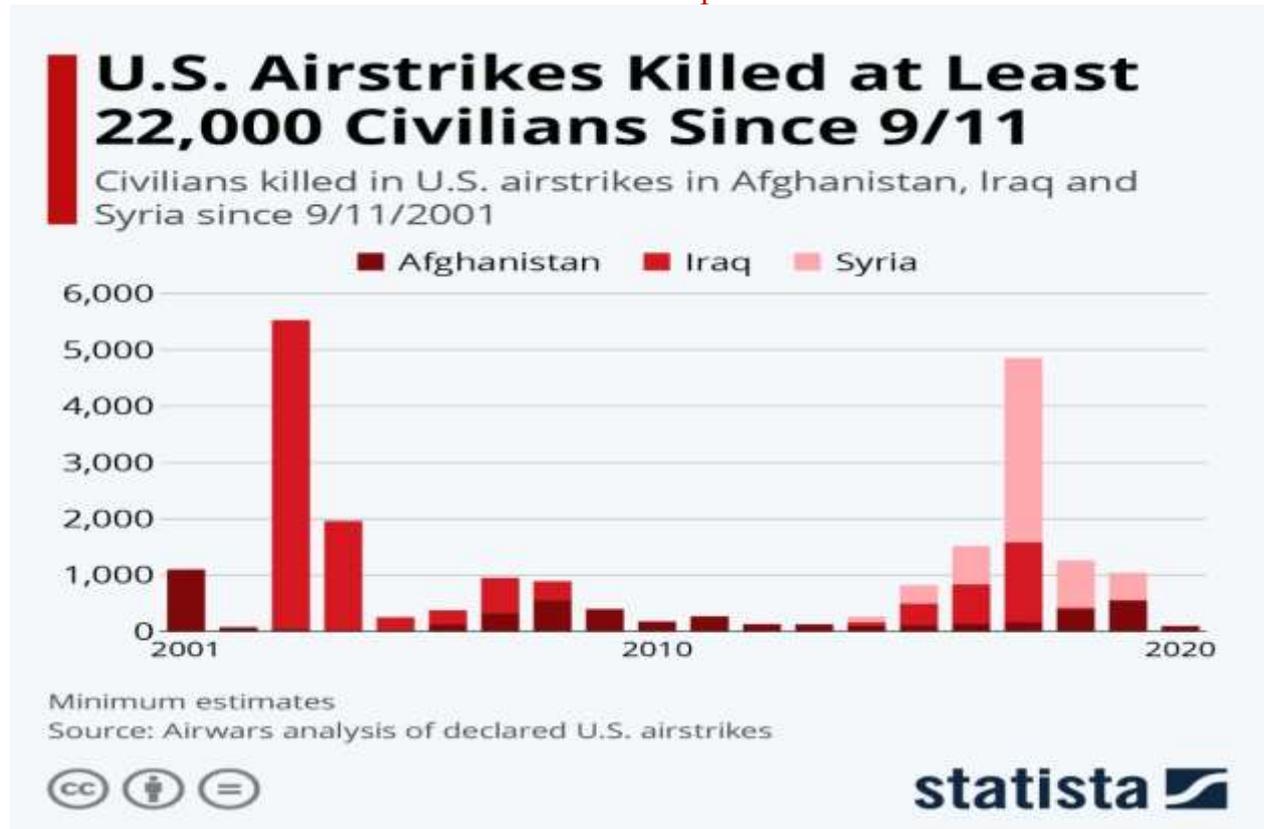
With that in mind, President Biden's statements about the moral necessity of democracies battling Russian autocracy are likely to fall on deaf ears. People just compare Trump's stance on Putin's authoritarianism to Western links to autocracies across the world, notably in the Middle East and North Africa. "Sometimes it is more difficult to deal with a messy democracy like New Zealand than with some Asian dictatorships," career diplomat Paul Cleveland, the US ambassador in Wellington, was moved to say during a spat between the US and New Zealand in 1986 over nuclear-armed US warships visiting local ports.

Others believe that Russia's merciless tactics in Ukraine, which have left towns and cities in ashes, are superior to anything done by Western forces in the Middle East or South Asia. The problem is that, aside from US atrocities in Vietnam and rendition and torture at Guantanamo, there are numerous more direct examples, including Iraq.

Simply take three. In April 2004, a US supply caravan on its way to a forward position in the Iraqi city of Fallujah was ambushed, and it took hours of fighting and reinforcements to get everyone out alive. Even though no one was killed, the Marine Corps sent in the lethal AC-130 gunships that night and destroyed six blocks of the city in an openly punitive strike. It is uncertain how many individuals were murdered in the densely populated city.

Fallujah's 'problem' was finally resolved in November of that year, when the US took control of the whole city following an all-out assault. Thousands of people were killed, most public buildings were destroyed, and more than half of the city's dwellings were destroyed or seriously damaged.

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CONCLUSION

According to psychologist Albert Bandura, our traditional moral ideals and religious beliefs, even when held honestly, fail to prevent us from rationalizing immoral behavior during conflict.

People tend to describe their actions in morally neutral or positive terms, using euphemistic language that does not trigger moral red flags, making it more difficult to implement moral standards. "People often do not engage in harmful behavior until they have convinced themselves of the morality of their actions," Bandura says. People have an innate drive to justify their actions, and they commonly justify immoral practices by defining them solely in terms of ethical goals. As a consequence, someone who is morally opposed to bombing civilians may accept the action if it is explained as "fighting terror" or "stabilizing a region." By analyzing existing battles, identifying their moral justification, and specifying which components of warfighting contribute to that justification, men and women of conscience have accumulated the ingredients of the just war tradition. We must continue to investigate recent wars to maintain this important ethical inheritance and to educate governments and policymakers in their decision-making. Virtuous consequentialism emphasizes the aspects of a decision that should be taken into account, but it is ultimately unconvincing in its implied assumption that natural law and culture have sufficiently shaped our consciences for us to appraise the good spontaneously.