

DOES WAR MAKE US FEEL HUMAN

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NATURE CONSIGNS TO EVERY CHILD A BODY, a mind and an emotion and sets them adrift to sow from naught, zero, a cipher, a root, a stem and a fruit formed around the amalgamation of things as the one artifact to claim exclusively, theirs alone, inseparable, their truest identity, the essential part of each of them; one human and one soul that congeals and anneals under the weight of events, tempered by the good and the bad, actions and reactions, objects and subjects to which life exposes and draws together her parts, the purest expression of life, a child. And, the possibility exists that through the carelessness and perfidies of others; a soul might not fully form, or formed can be deformed and finally denatured to evaporate into naught, zero, a cipher.

We who possess such a soul so formed bear an inborn capacity to love and to kill because we have been programmed to guarantee the survival of our kind, our specie. The recurring thought of this fact of nature, consumes us above all else. We do that which maximizes the chance that our blood endures another day, a week or indefinitely. It drives us to love, it drives us to hate; it drives us towards civility and barbarity — we employ all methods, sometimes all in the same event — as the soldier who kills his enemies to show how much he loves his comrades. But, this obsession with replicating immortality always remains a precarious undertaking, because we can lose that small part of ourselves that resists the notion of life everlasting at any price; that small part referred to as humanity, that precious thing, that if lost consigns us to die, an animal.

Our souls balance perilously at the precipice of salvation and damnation because we are part of a greater community determined to enlist our collective hearts and minds for the greater good. Under its pressures we fall victim to the actions of the whole. Socialist and capitalist farms alike keep us fed, great private and public factories assemble our modern machinery, great armies and lesser cadres unite against diverse political forces and battle to eradicate our idols, ideals and ideas — our leaders preach against the evil ones and conspire with them to satisfy a bottomless greed or bloated ego. We have come to believe in the holiness of governments and their institutions because they claim to be our benefactors and to bestow the good life and to grant our heirs perpetual peace. So if called upon to die for our nation or its institutions, we eagerly follow that god, king or politician who waves his crucifix, star, crescent, or flag in our direction. We risk dying so that our leaders paranoia shall not consume the spirit of his successors, his clan, and his society. We hear the canons roar, muffling the echoes of the oft-repeated excuse that “we were only following orders.” Paradoxically, we teach our children to wire themselves to the detonator or fix bayonets and charge the enemy for its virtue or vanity and if neither, then the utter and ugly glory of it. And, we pay taxes so that our leaders can dress our children in khaki costumes and bid them to do battle and maybe give up the ghost for what our kind and we believe (only Man and God does this, remember the Christian God cloaked his only son in flesh before he had him crucified;) neither politicians nor gods seem so inclined to so sacrifice themselves.

Our fathers, brothers, sons and *compadres*, share their most poignant lifetime memory: the war fought-well or otherwise. We thank them for their sacrifice. The worth of war one-sided, its majesty witnessed by the survivors and those who escaped its calamity; its vacancy emptied upon the psyche of its victims. We live in a time when wars are a leading cause of death, especially among our children. Small price. We find ample justification among the mindless manifold abstractions of: territoriality, nationalism, ethnic or religious cleansing, political power, and in the gold and spices of a modern world, oil, gas and arms export. In the contemporary world we notionally count actual deaths in the hundreds of millions. Small price. Let it not deter our resolve to keep alive the very idea of war. Small price. After all, war makes us human, without it we would resemble just another pack of disorganized animals, although let's concede perhaps one's which maintain their everlasting beauty.