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# **The Public Morality of Carl von Clausewitz**

**A Paper for Presentation at the Annual Meeting of the  
International Studies Association  
24-27 March 2002**

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**DRAFT**

“Nowadays, anyone reflecting on war and strategy raises a barrier between his intelligence and his humanity.”

- Raymond Aron  
*Clausewitz, Philosopher of War* (1976)

## Introduction

The ideas of Carl von Clausewitz, Prussian soldier and scholar, have been the subject of endless controversy since the posthumous publication of his great work, *On War*, in 1832. Did he produce a timebound and even faulty analysis of the wars of his age, or a classic that provides timeless insights? Was he an objective analyst of the complex nature of war, or an advocate of absolute wars of annihilation? Characterizations of Clausewitz and his writings vary tremendously. In the wake of the First World War, Liddell Hart attributed at least indirect responsibility for its destructiveness to Clausewitz. To Hart, Clausewitz was the “evil genius of military thought” and the “apostle of total war” who advocated mass and offensive above all else.<sup>1[1]</sup> Bernard Brodie gave a quite different interpretation in the 1970s. He emphasized Clausewitz’s denial that war could be waged according to a list of axioms, and his belief that even valuable generalizations admit exceptions. Brodie credited Clausewitz with “profound and original insights,” and with having written what remained “not simply the greatest but the only truly great book on war.”<sup>2[2]</sup>

Although this debate on the profundity and timelessness of *On War* is fascinating, it is only partially relevant to this paper. Instead of focusing on whether Clausewitz reveals eternal truths about war and strategy, I will explore his perspective on the moral issues that war inevitably raises. This exploration will attempt to address two main questions. The first focuses on the problem of war itself. Where Clausewitz directly addresses ethical issues, what are his views? Where these issues are not directly addressed, what are the implications of his ideas? The second question concerns Clausewitz’s views toward the state and its foreign affairs. Specifically, did Clausewitz think that the statesman’s

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<sup>1[1]</sup> The quotations from Hart are drawn from Bassford, page 129. Bassford bases his characterizations of Hart’s views on “The Napoleonic Fallacy,” *Empire Review*, May 1925; *Foch: The Man of Orleans* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1932), 23-26, *Ghost of Napoleon*, especially pt. 3, chap. 2; and *Strategy* (New York: Praeger, 1954), 352-57.

<sup>2[2]</sup> Bernard Brodie, “The Continuing Relevance of *On War*,” introductory essay to *On War*, 53-57. All citations of *On War* are from the Princeton Edition (1976), edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret.

actions in international politics could or should take into account moral considerations?<sup>3[3]</sup>

These questions are certainly no less relevant as we begin the 21st century than they were in Clausewitz's day. The end of the Cold War and the ongoing war against international terrorism have destroyed many paradigms, and demand the fundamental rethinking of issues associated with the use of force and conduct of foreign affairs. This paper is motivated by the idea that, although Clausewitz must be understood on his own terms, the outlook of a man who thought so deeply on the problem of war can certainly add perspective to contemporary debates. In addition, if the authority of the famed theorist's name carries any weight, it seems useful to clarify who can justifiably invoke his ideas in support of their own.

Some of the difficulties in analyzing Clausewitz's work must be faced up front -- the range of interpretations referred to in the first paragraph provides a useful warning. Raymond Aron was surely correct when he wrote about *On War* that "You can find what you want to find in the treatise: all that you need is a selection of quotations, supported by personal prejudice."<sup>4[4]</sup> One major difficulty is that the work was still in draft form at the time of Clausewitz's death in 1831. In an 1827 note, Clausewitz himself foresaw the problems that this might cause: "If an early death should terminate my work, what I have written so far would, of course only deserve to be called a shapeless mass of ideas. Being liable to endless misinterpretation it would be the target of much half-baked criticism."<sup>5[5]</sup> His inability to complete this revision may explain why Clausewitz seems inconsistent on certain issues. In attempting to reasonably and fairly deal with this problem, I will emphasize the ideas that represent later stages of his thought. In *On War*, his most mature views are probably reflected in the first few chapters of Book One, "On the Nature of War," which he did revise.<sup>6[6]</sup> As for personal prejudice, the recognition of its possible existence and a conscious striving to overcome its effects may be the best that one can do.

### Clausewitz's Definition of War

In order to examine Clausewitz's views on the morality of war, it is

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<sup>3[3]</sup> In this paper, I use the terms "moral" and "ethical" interchangeably in the manner employed by William Frankena in his *Ethics*. I am also following his distinctions by using these words in the sense of "pertaining to morality," and as opposites of "nonmoral" and "nonethical" rather than as opposites of "immoral" or "unethical." The contrast that Frankena draws between morality and prudence is also important here. While the two considerations may lead to the same behavior, morality is taken to be a separate institution of society or personal code. Moral or ethical decisions, unlike prudent ones, are not based purely on personal interest or desires. See William Frankena, *Ethics*, pp. 4-9.

<sup>4[4]</sup> Raymond Aron, *Clausewitz, Philosopher of War*, 235.

<sup>5[5]</sup> "Note of 10 July 1827," reprinted in *On War*, 70. In a later note Clausewitz wrote: "The first chapter of Book One alone I regard as finished." See "Unfinished Note, Presumably Written in 1830," reprinted in *On War*, 70.

<sup>6[6]</sup> This statement agrees with Paret's introductory essay to *On War*, p. 4. Aron also sees Chapter One of Book I as the expression of Clausewitz's most mature views. See Aron, *Clausewitz, Philosopher of War*, 68. I also find compelling Azar Gat's analysis that Clausewitz's final ideas on the dual nature of war and the primacy of politics begin to show themselves in the latter part of Book Six, "Defense"; Book Seven, "Offense"; and continue to evolve in Book Eight, "War Plans." In any case, he agrees with Paret and Aron in their assessment of the late date of the revision of the first few chapters of Book I. See Gat's Appendix, "Clausewitz's Final Notes Revisited," in *The Origins of Military Thought*.

important to first clarify how he conceptualizes war itself. In undertaking this clarification, it is worthwhile to go into detail for several reasons. First of all, it is not just Clausewitz's ideas, which are often clear, but also how he develops them that seem to contribute to misinterpretations of his thought. A key example of this is Clausewitz's development of the idea of abstract war before he discusses war in reality. Second, the primacy he gives to politics and his trinitarian conception of war are necessary background for understanding Clausewitz's perspective on the possibilities for, and the difficulties in, limiting the use of force between states.

Clausewitz starts by examining the essence of war as an abstract concept, which he also calls "absolute" war and the "pure concept of war."<sup>7[7]</sup> In itself, war is "nothing but a duel on a larger scale," or in a slight modification that clarifies war's means, "*War is thus an act of force to compel the enemy to do our will.*" In this abstract notion of war, conflict tends to extremes. There is no logical limit to the force that each side will use or the objectives that each will seek. Even if one side attempts to aim for less than the complete overthrow of the enemy, since war is a series of reciprocal moves, conflict cannot be limited through unilateral action. Finally, there is no logical limit to the means to be used. In a contest for ultimate survival, each side will use their entire physical strength, as well as strength of will.

However, Clausewitz suggests that this war in theory is actually nothing but a "logical fantasy" which is unlikely to motivate actors in the real world.<sup>8[8]</sup> In the real world, war takes place between two real adversaries who have some idea of each other's power and will, as well as some warning of the imminence of conflict. War in reality is also never absolute because it does not consist of a single, short blow. This is because a nation cannot bring all of its resources, to include "*the fighting forces proper, the country . . . and its allies*" to bear all at once, and because both sides may attempt to overcome initial shortcomings later in the conflict. Finally, war in reality is never absolute because it is never final -- even a defeated state may still recover. For these reasons, the dynamic that leads to extremes fades, and the political purpose which governs the conflict reasserts itself.<sup>9[9]</sup> This analysis yields Clausewitz's famous formula that "*War is Merely the Continuation of Policy by Other Means.*" This result firmly establishes the dominance of political over military considerations. "Policy, then, will permeate all military operations, and, in so far as their violent nature will admit, it will have a continuous influence on them."<sup>10[10]</sup>

Two other important points should be made about Clausewitz's definition of war. The first has to do with his intended revision of *On War*. Based on his note of 1827, Clausewitz wanted to bring two themes out more clearly while revising the entire work. The second of these, that war is a continuation of

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<sup>7[7]</sup> The summary in this paragraph and the next is drawn from *On War*, pp. 75-87. All of the italics are in the original text. Clausewitz tended to use italics frequently, and when quoting him I will keep to his usage.

<sup>8[8]</sup> *On War*, 78.

<sup>9[9]</sup> In another useful summary, Clausewitz states that in the abstract world, "since the extreme must always be the goal, the greatest effort must be exerted. However, any such pronouncement would be an abstraction and would leave the real world quite unaffected." *On War*, 78.

<sup>10[10]</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

policy, has already been mentioned. The first is that there are two kinds of war: in the first, “the objective is to *overthrow the enemy*”; in the second, the objective is “*merely to occupy some of his frontier-districts.*”<sup>11[11]</sup> This implies that, in addition to the difference between war in theory and wars in reality, there is also a significant difference between kinds of wars in reality. They may be either total or limited based on the political objectives which guide them.<sup>12[12]</sup>

The second point is that Clausewitz has a trinitarian conception of war. Although war is an instrument of policy, its violence means that emotions cannot fail to come into play, and it will always be subject to elements of chance. This means that:

As a total phenomenon its dominant tendencies always make war a paradoxical trinity -- composed of primordial violence, . . . of the play of chance and probability within which the creative spirit is free to roam; . . . and of its element of subordination, as an instrument of policy, which makes it subject to reason alone. The first of these three aspects mainly concerns the people; the second the commander and his army; the third the government.<sup>13[13]</sup>

The character of a given war will be conditioned by each of these elements. When exploring the possibility of limiting the use of force, it is particularly significant to note that Clausewitz associates primordial violence with the people and reason with governments.

This discussion of Clausewitz’s conception of war makes it possible to address interpretations such as Hart’s, which suggest that Clausewitz advocates total war and the annihilation of the enemy. This is important because if Clausewitz actually endorses these ideas, it would be impossible for ethical considerations to play a role moderating the use of force. War would always be unlimited in both its aims and means. It seems clear, however, that Hart’s remarks are inconsistent with Clausewitz’s theoretical structure. First of all, Clausewitz does not advocate total war. Instead, he argues that the type of war that should be waged is dependent on the government’s policy. This policy is governed by many considerations, and must merely be aware of what military force can be expected to accomplish.<sup>14[14]</sup> Whether a war will be total or limited

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<sup>11[11]</sup> “Note of 10 July 1827,” reprinted in *On War*, 69. Clausewitz points out that there may be a transition between the two kinds of war, but the aims are quite different, “and their points of irreconcilability” must be brought out.

<sup>12[12]</sup> This theme is reflected in Chapter One, Book I, and elaborated on in Chapter Two, “Purpose and Means in War.” “But the aim of *disarming the enemy* (the object of *war in the abstract* . . .) is in fact not always encountered in reality, and need not be fully achieved as a condition of peace. . . . The reason why the object of war that emerges in theory is sometimes inappropriate to actual conflict is that war can be of two different kinds, a point we discussed in the first chapter.” *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>13[13]</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>14[14]</sup> Clausewitz strongly emphasizes this point in both Book VIII, Chapter Six, and Book I, Chapter I. Since policy is presumed to take into account the sum of all of the community’s interests, it “is the guiding intelligence and war only the instrument, not vice versa. No other possibility exists, then, than to subordinate the military point of view to the political.” (*On War*, 607) The military commander does have some right to require that the ends of policy do not require something of their chosen military means that military forces cannot accomplish. This may not be a small requirement, but it will never do more than modify policy. (*On War*, 87) Because of this imperative, it is useful if the political leader has some understanding of military affairs. However, this does not mean that military leaders make the best policy-

will depend heavily on political aims, which can vary widely.<sup>15[15]</sup>

It is also inconsistent with Clausewitz's approach to argue for the dominance of a single principle, such as annihilation of the enemy's forces. Hart could certainly find quotations from *On War* to back up his argument, such as the following: "To sum up: of all the possible aims in war, the destruction of the enemy's armed forces always appears as the highest."<sup>16[16]</sup> However, Aron's discussion on this point offers a more faithful interpretation of Clausewitz's intent. He suggests that the dominance of annihilation, or the "destructive principle," only applies on the theoretical level. It would be contrary to Clausewitz's reasoning to argue that it is more than an abstract truth, and an always necessary warning. In an example where this principle serves as a warning, Clausewitz discusses a commander who seeks victory by trying to avoid a decision by arms. Such a commander "must be sure that his opponent either will not appeal to that supreme tribunal -- force -- or that he will lose the verdict if he does."<sup>17[17]</sup>

The dominance of a single principle is also problematic because strategy must always take into account both military and political considerations. Even when the political aim is the overthrow of the enemy, the military objective may vary. In this case, it should be the enemy's center of gravity, which is the "hub of all power and movement." This may be his fighting forces, but it also may be his capital or the forces of his protecting ally. The identification of the center of gravity will depend on the dominant characteristics of the belligerents and the overall political context.<sup>18[18]</sup> As a final point, Aron notes that some of the most pure arguments that annihilation of the enemy's forces is a supreme principle of war are from Books III and IV, which were written before 1826 and left unrevised.<sup>19[19]</sup>

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makers. For example, he argues that "the military and political affairs of France were never in worse hands than when the brothers Belle-Isle and the Duc de Choiseul were responsible -- good soldiers though they all were." (*On War*, 608)

<sup>15[15]</sup> Ibid., 94. There is a "gulf that separates a war of annihilation, a struggle for political existence, from a war reluctantly declared in consequence of political pressure or of an alliance that no longer seems to reflect the state's true interests. Between these two extremes lie numerous gradations."

<sup>16[16]</sup> Ibid., 99. In the paragraph following the one from which this quotation is drawn, Clausewitz argues that the annihilation of the enemy's forces is the "first-born son of war," but also that other strategies are possible in certain circumstances. Combat deserves a priority in consideration since the use of force is war's distinctive means, and either side can seek a decision by force at any time. The possibility that combat will occur also affects outcomes even in its absence. "Consequently all action is undertaken in the belief that if the ultimate test of arms should actually occur, the outcome would be *favorable*. The decision by arms is for all major and minor operations in war what cash payment is for commerce. Regardless how complex the relationship between the two parties, regardless how rarely settlements actually occur, they can never be entirely absent." (Ibid., 97)

<sup>17[17]</sup> Ibid., 99. Another example can be found in Chapter Six-A of Book VIII, "The Effect of the Political Aim on the Military Objective." Wars with "small purposes" may gradually become passive as the side with the positive aim comes to realize that it will cost more than expected to achieve its objective. In this case, "The art of war will shrivel into prudence, and its main concern will be to make sure the delicate balance is not suddenly upset in the enemy's favor and the half-hearted war does not become a real war after all." (*On War*, 604)

<sup>18[18]</sup> Ibid., 597.

<sup>19[19]</sup> Aron, 105-111. Selections from Book IV, "The Engagement," support the view that Clausewitz held the destruction of the enemy's forces to be a supreme principle of war. For example, "We do claim, however, that direct annihilation of the enemy's forces must always be the *dominant consideration*. We simply want to establish the dominance of the destructive principle." (*On War*, 228) The position taken here (and by Aron)

The above analysis highlights two key aspects of Clausewitz's views. First of all, attempts to ascribe dogmatism to his arguments should be treated with skepticism. In his view,

Theory cannot equip the mind with formulas for solving problems, nor can it mark the narrow path on which the sole solution is supposed to lie . . . But it can give the mind insight into the great mass of phenomena and of their relationships, then leave it free to rise into the higher realms of action.<sup>20[20]</sup>

The second is that, for Clausewitz, the only source of war is politics. "Its grammar, indeed, may be its own, but not its logic."<sup>21[21]</sup> Without an understanding of the political context in which war occurs, one is simply analyzing a "logical fantasy."<sup>22[22]</sup>

### Clausewitz and the Morality of War

Having established the major aspects of Clausewitz's conception of the nature of war, this section will explore Clausewitz's perspective on the moral problems that it raises. Does *On War* reflect a belief that ethical considerations have a role in guiding the conduct of war? In attempting to answer this question, the two basic categories of just war theory are useful. The first, *jus ad bellum*, establishes why and when the presumption against non-violence may be overridden and a state is justified in going to war. The second main category, *jus in bello*, establishes criteria for right conduct in war, and limitations on the means which may be used.<sup>23[23]</sup> Though Clausewitz does not discuss just war theory, the two essential questions it raises are a convenient way to organize an examination of his views.

#### Clausewitz and *Jus ad Bellum*: War and the State's Interests

Clausewitz's views on international relations and war reflect many elements of a realist's perspective. A realist holds that the primary actors in world politics are states, and the defining characteristic of the international environment is anarchy. In this situation, where no higher authority exists between states able to resolve conflicts of interests, wars are an ever-present possibility. States must be concerned about relative power, and be willing and

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is not that an interpretation such as Hart's lacks evidence, but rather that the quotations he draws from Clausewitz do not fully take into account the fact that wars in reality can be either limited or unlimited, and that policy will exert a continuous influence on military operations. The differences in emphasis may also partially stem from the fact that Book IV is more focused on the tactical level of war, while Books VIII and I are more focused on the war as a whole, and the relationship between political and military considerations.<sup>20[20]</sup> *On War*, 578.

<sup>21[21]</sup> *Ibid.*, 605.

<sup>22[22]</sup> In *Clausewitz and the State*, Paret recounts an incident in which Clausewitz was sent two academic strategy problems by a friend, and asked to evaluate them. Clausewitz sent them back without solutions. He wrote to his friend that a solution would not make any sense unless there were more information given about the military aims of each side, and the overall relations between the two countries and other powers. (p. 379)

<sup>23[23]</sup> *Jus ad bellum* criteria include just cause, proper authority, right intention, last resort, reasonable hope of success, and proportionality of the war as a whole. *Jus in bello* criteria include noncombatant immunity and the proportionality of means and tactics in each of a war's engagements. These criteria are discussed in James F. Childress, "Just War Criteria," pp. 63-94.

able to use force. All of these propositions highlight the imperative of national survival, and Clausewitz would be likely to agree with them. Taking this into account, what are Clausewitz's views on the role that this leaves for ethical considerations to influence decision-making on the resort to war?

At first, it appears that Clausewitz's opinion could be summed up in one quotation. Denying the ability of international law to limit a nation's right to resort to force, he writes:

Attached to force are certain self-imposed, imperceptible limitations hardly worth mentioning, known as international law and custom, but they scarcely weaken it. Force -- that is, physical force, for moral force has no existence save as expressed in the state and the law -- is thus the *means* of war; to impose our will on the enemy is its *object*.<sup>24[24]</sup>

At least as significant as what Clausewitz says about international law in this paragraph is what he says about morality. Clausewitz seems to follow Hobbes by equating morality with positive law, and implying that it does not exist where there is no power able to enforce it.<sup>25[25]</sup> Clausewitz also does not use the distinctions made by both international law and just war theory between unjust aggression and just self-defense.<sup>26[26]</sup> In his early political writings, he says: "No one can deny a nation the right to fight for its interests with all its strength, to free itself from slavery -- not even *France* can be criticized if she plants her foot on our back and extends her realm of frightened vassals to the polar sea."<sup>27[27]</sup> There is no clear distinction made here between freeing oneself from slavery, and fighting for other unspecified interests.

In dismissing the force of international law, and arguing that morality has no meaning outside the state, Clausewitz seems to be saying that it does not make sense for statesmen to take into account ethical considerations when making decisions to go to war. However, these decisions may still be moderated by considerations of prudence, and this prudence may mean greater or lesser restraint in different periods of history. In order to appreciate Clausewitz's views on this subject, it is necessary to return to his famous formula that war is a continuation of policy by other means.

Clausewitz amplifies this formula with the statement that "The political object is the goal, war is the means of reaching it, and means can never be considered in isolation from their purpose."<sup>28[28]</sup> The question of limitations on decisions to go to war, then, becomes a question of political ends, or of policy.

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<sup>24[24]</sup> *On War*, 75.

<sup>25[25]</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 13, 101. "Where there is no common power, there is no law: where no law, no injustice."

<sup>26[26]</sup> Though Clausewitz uses the term "aggression," there is no accompanying discussion which attempts to argue that it is a crime. An example is the following rather ironic passage: "It is only aggression that calls forth defense, and war along with it. The aggressor is always peace-loving (as Bonaparte always claimed to be); he would prefer to take over our country unopposed. To prevent his doing so one must be willing to make war and be prepared for it. In other words it is the weak, those likely to need defense, who should always be armed in order not to be overwhelmed." (*On War*, 370)

<sup>27[27]</sup> In Clausewitz, *Historical and Political Writings*, 239. This work will be referenced from this point on as *Writings*.

<sup>28[28]</sup> *On War*, 87.



About policy, Clausewitz says that:

It can be taken as agreed that the aim of policy is to unify and reconcile all aspects of internal administration as well as of spiritual values, and whatever else the moral philosopher may care to add. Policy, of course, is nothing in itself; it is simply the trustee for all these interests against other states. That it can err, subserve the ambitions, private interests, and vanity of those in power, is neither here nor there. In no sense can the art of war ever be regarded as the preceptor of policy, and here we can only treat policy as representative of all interests of the community.<sup>29[29]</sup>

This implies that criticism of policy itself is beyond the scope of a theory of war.<sup>30[30]</sup> This also means that it is within the social forces and values that affect policy that one must look for factors that will moderate decisions to go to war. Since war involves reciprocal actions, it is clear that the social conditions of all states involved in the interaction will be relevant.

Clausewitz's historicism leads him to explore this dynamic over time in Chapter Three-B, "Scale of the Military Objective and of the Effort to be Made," in Book VIII of *On War*. Clausewitz begins the chapter by revisiting the point that, since war is a political instrument, the degree of effort to be made should be appropriate to the objective to be reached. However, figuring this out "clearly calls for the intuition of a genius," since one must take into account the scale of the political demands, the situations and conditions of belligerents, the governments' and peoples' strength of will, character, and abilities, and the political sympathies of other states. In order to gain theoretical leverage on this problem, Clausewitz provides a brief history of warfare from antiquity to Napoleon. From this survey, he concludes:

The aims a belligerent adopts, and the resources he employs, must be governed by the particular characteristics of his own position; but it will also conform to the spirit of the age and to its general character. Finally, they must always be governed by the general conclusions to be drawn from the nature of war itself.<sup>31[31]</sup>

Every age has its own kind of warfare, its own limiting conditions, and its own peculiar conceptions. This view implies that, in some periods, restraint may be appropriate in states' decisions to use force.<sup>32[32]</sup>

Clausewitz's description of the state's interests is fascinating, both for what it does say and what it does not say. In the first place, it does not make Hans Morgenthau's argument that a state's interests can be understood in terms

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<sup>29[29]</sup> *Ibid.*, 607.

<sup>30[30]</sup> Paret makes this point in his essay, "Clausewitz," p. 209.

<sup>31[31]</sup> *On War*, 594.

<sup>32[32]</sup> Daniel Moran provides an interesting observation on the role that history plays in Clausewitz's work. It is both a constraint, and a source of instability. History is a constraint in the sense that historical experiences limit the range of options open to current societies. However, it is also a source of instability because "existing political forms could never be other than transitory expressions of profound social, economic, and cultural forces. Institutions were therefore to be judged by their capacity to express the balance of existing social forces accurately, to manage change, and to adapt and change themselves." (*Writings*, 224)

of power.<sup>33[33]</sup> Clausewitz's policy-maker asks himself a question a bit more complex than Morgenthau's "How does this policy affect the power of the nation?"<sup>34[34]</sup> The differences between these two thinkers' views on this point should not be exaggerated, because I think that they both see security as a prerequisite to other goals and values. However, it does offer a strong argument against an interpretation of Clausewitz, such as Anatol Rapoport's, that suggests that Clausewitz understood the sole end of the state to be the pursuit of power. Rapoport argues that "(Clausewitz's) famous dictum stated in reverse would express his philosophy with equal accuracy: 'Peace is the continuation of struggle by other means.'" Rapoport goes on to argue that, for Clausewitz, "The function of the military is to implement the will of the state; the will of the state is tacitly assumed to be directed towards continually increasing its power vis-à-vis other states."<sup>35[35]</sup> On this point, I fully agree with Aron that Rapoport's comments represent a misinterpretation of Clausewitz's thought.<sup>36[36]</sup> It is a fundamental reversal of Clausewitz's idea that political aims provide the purpose, and military forces are just one of the means for reaching them. The development of military power is never argued to be an end in itself.

Clausewitz's discussion of state interests can also usefully be compared with those of Machiavelli, another thinker who saw an important role for force in politics. Although Clausewitz has great respect for Machiavelli's political insights, he does not accept a definition of interest as glory, either for the prince or for the regime.<sup>37[37]</sup> He also does not share Machiavelli's belief that the successful statesman must be a military expert.<sup>38[38]</sup> For Clausewitz, policy-makers need above all "distinguished intellect and strength of character," and can "always get the necessary military information somehow or other."<sup>39[39]</sup> Finally, Clausewitz does not express Machiavelli's notion that a state must expand to survive.<sup>40[40]</sup> In sum, Clausewitz does not give the statesman's martial abilities the pride of place that Machiavelli does. Although Clausewitz accepts war to be a constant possibility, he does not equate state interests with power or glory, and has a more restrained notion of the proper uses of force.

Up to this point, I have argued that while Clausewitz seems to deny that considerations such as a common morality and international law should govern states' decisions to go to war, he does suggest that restraint and moderation may be appropriate. This may seem like a minor point, but it

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<sup>33[33]</sup> Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 5.

<sup>34[34]</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>35[35]</sup> Anatol Rapoport, Penguin Books edition of *On War*, pages 22, 24.

<sup>36[36]</sup> Aron, pp. 101-102. Addressing Rapoport's interpretation on this point, Aron writes: "I believe this interpretation, which is in fairly wide circulation in England and the USA, to be incompatible with the texts, with the logic of Clausewitz's thought, and with all that we know of his political philosophy."

<sup>37[37]</sup> Machiavelli tells the prince to seize the opportunity for glory in Chapter XXVI of *The Prince*. He emphasizes the glory of the regime in *The Discourses*, Book III, Chapter 41.

<sup>38[38]</sup> In Chapter XIV of *The Prince*, p. 58, Machiavelli argues that: "a prince should have no other object, nor any other thought, nor take anything else as his art but the art of war and its orders and discipline; for that is the only art of concern to one who commands."

<sup>39[39]</sup> *On War*, 608.

<sup>40[40]</sup> *The Discourses*, Book I, Chapter 6. Machiavelli begins the argument: "Since, however, all human affairs are ever in a state of flux and cannot stand still, either there will be improvement or decline . . ." (p. 123).

provides a strong contrast to Liddell Hart's view of Clausewitz as the "apostle of total war." Nevertheless, one could still ask whether the formula that "war is merely the continuation of policy by other means" is itself advocacy of war. Does this imply that war is something to be embarked on lightly? Or that war is a rational means of policy just like any other, such as the levying of a tariff? Michael Handel mentions two authors that have seen Clausewitz's formula in this way. Handel says that John Keegan, in *A History of Warfare* and Martin van Creveld in *The Transformation of War* "have convinced themselves that war has never served, and can never serve, a rational political purpose."<sup>41[41]</sup> Keegan, especially, portrays Clausewitz's formula as advocacy rather than analysis.<sup>42[42]</sup> Azar Gat, who interprets Clausewitz in the context of Germany's Counter-Enlightenment, similarly characterizes him as a potential promoter of war. He uses these lines from *On War* as evidence:

Today practically no means other than war will educate a people in this spirit of boldness. . . Nothing else will counteract the softness and the desire for ease which debase the people in times of growing prosperity and increasing trade. A people and nation can hope for a strong position in the world only if national character and familiarity with war fortify each other by continual interaction."<sup>43[43]</sup>

Gat believes that Clausewitz is merely a product of the intellectual movement of his times when he argues that war can be beneficial for society.<sup>44[44]</sup>

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<sup>41[41]</sup> Handel, 257-260. Van Creveld argues that the concept of fighting wars for political interest is both "Eurocentric and modern" (*Transformation of War*, 155). However, Handel rightly takes him to task for arguing that wars fought for justice, religion, or existence are necessarily apolitical. Van Creveld also argues that "At bottom, the reason why fighting can never be a question of interest is -- to put it bluntly -- that dead men have no interests." (Ibid., 158) However, those that start wars often are seeking to further common interests which may be protected even when individuals die. I would add to Handel's critique that van Creveld overstates the extent to which Clausewitz subscribes to the Enlightenment's faith in establishing rational laws for social phenomena, and underplays the role Clausewitz gives to irrational forces in war. (Ibid., p. 64)

<sup>42[42]</sup> I agree with Handel that Keegan presents little more than a caricature of Clausewitz's views. Keegan suggests that while Clausewitz intended to produce a work of science, it was really a work of ideology. (*A History of Warfare*, p. 21) Clausewitz would have shied away from both words, and used the word theory instead. Keegan also writes: "The purpose of war, Clausewitz said, was to serve a political end; the nature of war, he succeeded in arguing, was to serve only itself. By conclusion, his logic therefore ran, those who make war an end in itself are likely to be more successful than those who seek to moderate its character for political purposes." (Ibid., pp. 21-22) To Keegan, Clausewitz is the "ideological father" of the carnage of First World War. (p. 22) This again seems to me to represent a mischaracterization; for Clausewitz, the end of strategy is the politically desired peace, not victory, and he makes it clear that policy must guide the war's conduct until peace is achieved. Aron's discussion of this point is very useful. (*Clausewitz, Philosopher of War*, 94). Keegan makes the further critique that Clausewitz focuses on politics and misses the importance of the cultural influences of "shared beliefs, values, associations, myths, taboos, imperatives," etc. (*A History of Warfare*, p. 46). I believe that there is more room within Clausewitz's framework to allow the influence of such forces than Keegan allows.

<sup>43[43]</sup> Gat, pp. 243-244, cites *On War*, p. 192.

<sup>44[44]</sup> Gat, pp. 242-243, argues that it was characteristic of the German Movement of Clausewitz's times to believe that war was a natural part of intra-state reality, could not be judged by moral standards, and could even have a positive role to play in the development of civilization. As an example of a view of war as having socially beneficial results, Gat quotes Hegel who, in his remarks to article 324 of *Philosophy of Right*, argues that perpetual peace would merely result in the corruption of nations. (p. 211) He also cites Kant's "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose" as an argument which sees warfare as an instrument of progress. I think that Gat tries too hard to see Clausewitz's thought as a product of a particular

Despite the evidence they present, I do not agree with these authors' characterizations of Clausewitz's views. First of all, war is not merely just another policy that should be embarked on lightly. For Clausewitz, it is distinct from other forms of human interaction due to its unique means—force.<sup>45[45]</sup> By emphasizing that “war is simply a continuation of political intercourse, with the addition of other means,” Clausewitz is attempting to drive home a different point. He wants “to make it clear that war in itself does not suspend political intercourse or change it into something entirely different.”<sup>46[46]</sup> Clausewitz feels the need to hit this point so strongly, not in order to advocate the resort to war, but to make it clear that policy continues to guide the war after hostilities begin.<sup>47[47]</sup>

It is also counter to the tone of Clausewitz's work to argue that he takes war lightly, or advocates it for its own sake. Clausewitz notes that war is a weighty decision when he argues that “No one starts a war—or rather no one in his senses ought to do so—without first being clear in his mind what he intends to achieve by that war and how he intends to conduct it.”<sup>48[48]</sup> While this does not directly argue for restraint, it does seem likely that if statesmen followed its logic, it would have a moderating effect. When discussing the process of critical analysis, which evaluates the appropriateness of means based on the purposes to be served, Clausewitz argues that “In many cases, particularly those involving great and decisive actions, the analysis must extend to the *ultimate objective*, which is to bring about peace.”<sup>49[49]</sup>

Clausewitz also argues that in no sense should war be an end in itself, and he neither romanticizes nor glorifies it.<sup>50[50]</sup> Again from *On War*, “War is no pastime; it is no mere joy in daring and winning, no place for irresponsible enthusiasts. It is a serious means to a serious end . . .”<sup>51[51]</sup> Gat's evidence that Clausewitz sees war as serving a positive social function is also subject to an alternative interpretation. The idea that national character and familiarity with war are essential to a state's position in the world resembles his belief that only actual warfare can accustom soldiers to the danger and physical exertion it entails. Only experience in war can enable soldiers to overcome these and other

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intellectual movement. Other factors, such as Clausewitz's study of history and personal experiences, are likely to have influenced his views.

<sup>45[45]</sup> *On War*, 75.

<sup>46[46]</sup> *Ibid.*, 605.

<sup>47[47]</sup> *Ibid.* Clausewitz continues: “The main lines along which military events progress, and to which they are restricted, are political lines that continue throughout the war into the subsequent peace. How could it be otherwise? Do political relations between peoples and between their governments stop when diplomatic notes are no longer exchanged?”

<sup>48[48]</sup> *Ibid.*, 579.

<sup>49[49]</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>50[50]</sup> Anatol Rapoport, who argues that Clausewitz glorifies war (79-80), also notes that war was essential to Clausewitz's personal happiness by quoting from the following letter from Clausewitz to his wife: “My fatherland needs the war and -- frankly speaking -- only war can bring me to the happy goal. . . . my way takes me always across a great battlefield; unless I enter upon it, no permanent happiness can be mine.” (dated 18 September 1806, translated by Rapoport from Karl Schwartz, *Leben des Generals Carl von Clausewitz*, p. 219) Even if Clausewitz's professional aspirations as a soldier led him to hope for distinction on the battlefield when his country was at war, he is unlikely to ever have advocated war merely for such personal reasons.

<sup>51[51]</sup> *On War*, 86.

sources of friction in actual combat.<sup>52[52]</sup> However, to argue for war on these grounds is a reversal of Clausewitz's views on means and purposes; it would be an argument to engage in war in order to be effective in future wars. Clausewitz, who argues that war's logic comes from external sources, would not accept this point.

Instead of seeing Clausewitz's insight that war is a continuation of policy as a pernicious prescription, it is more consistent with his own framework to see it as a possible moderating force. Recalling Clausewitz's trinitarian conception of war, policy is determined by the government, which is held to represent the rational element in war.<sup>53[53]</sup> Clausewitz argues that:

Since war is not an act of senseless passion but is controlled by its political object, the value of this object must determine the sacrifices to be made for it in *magnitude* and also in *duration*. Once the expenditure of effort exceeds the value of the political object, the object must be renounced and peace must follow.<sup>54[54]</sup>

Policy, then, can be a moderating force on war. However, Clausewitz warns that this is not the only dynamic at work. Because war will contain an element of chance, and operates in an environment of danger "absolute, so-called mathematical, factors never find a firm basis in military calculations . . . In the whole range of human activities, war most closely resembles a game of cards."<sup>55[55]</sup> Even such factors as the moral courage and other qualities of individual commanders or statesmen can play a large role.<sup>56[56]</sup> War can also be unpredictable to the extent that the passions of the people are engaged. For example, between two very hostile states, "the slightest quarrel can produce a wholly disproportionate effect—a real explosion."<sup>57[57]</sup> This portrayal of the role of the populace is contrary, of course, to the classic liberal view that sees the control of government by the people as a restraining force on decisions to go to war.<sup>58[58]</sup> Finally, since war is always conducted against an opponent that reacts, successful limitations on force always require at least a tacit agreement between

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<sup>52[52]</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>53[53]</sup> In his article, "Clausewitz," Paret points out that the identification of government with the rational element in war and the people with its passions can be questionable. He writes that even in Clausewitz's time, "the passion and violence of the emperor certainly carried more weight than whatever hatred the French population might have felt toward the rest of Europe." (p. 202) This difficulty is perhaps lessened within the theoretical structure of *On War* by Clausewitz's presumption that war serves the community's ends rather than personal vanities and ambitions.

<sup>54[54]</sup> *On War*, 92. It is also possible, however, for political aims to change during the course of a conflict "since they are influenced by events and their probable consequences."

<sup>55[55]</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>56[56]</sup> Ibid., 94. "The personalities of statesmen and soldiers are such important factors that in war above all it is vital not to underrate them."

<sup>57[57]</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>58[58]</sup> In "Perpetual Peace," Kant writes: "If, as is inevitably the case under this (republican) constitution, the consent of the citizens is required to decide whether or not war is to be declared, it is very natural that they will have great hesitation in embarking on so dangerous an enterprise." (p. 100) However, Clausewitz is not dogmatic about the role of the people. He suggests that a civilized people can be guided by rationality. Another modification can be found in his 1831 essay, "On the Basic Question of Germany's Existence." He says that the governments of England, Prussia, and Austria realize that the "hearts of the people" will only be truly committed in a defensive war. (*Writings*, 383)

both sides. A commander who tries to win without fighting “must always keep a sharp eye on his opponent so that he does not, if the latter has taken up a sharp sword, approach him with only an ornamental rapier.”<sup>59[59]</sup> Clausewitz’s dictum that war is a continuation of policy is not meant to argue that war should be lightly undertaken. On the contrary, war is dangerous and unpredictable, and one must struggle to preserve the moderation that policy may induce.

For Clausewitz war is strictly subordinate to policy, and the judgment of that policy is beyond a theory of war. In fact, Clausewitz denies himself the authority to judge war itself. When discussing the possibility that a people’s uprising can give a defender an advantage in war, he writes:

If this is so, the question only remains whether mankind at large will gain by this further expansion of the element of war; a question to which the answer should be the same as to the question of war itself. We shall leave both to the philosophers.<sup>60[60]</sup>

While Clausewitz does not argue that decisions to go to war should be guided by a common morality, his description of war as a social and historical phenomenon does suggest the possibility of limiting it. Finally, Clausewitz’s formula that war is a continuation of policy by other means is misinterpreted when seen as an argument advocating the easy resort to force. Instead, policy can be seen as a moderating force in a hazardous and potentially volatile enterprise. While Clausewitz does not make an argument for moderation based on a common morality or justice, he does make one based on a prudent safeguarding of the state’s interests.

#### Clausewitz and *Jus In Bello*: Limitations on the Means used in Warfare

As with limitations on decisions to go to war, at first it would appear that Clausewitz’s opinion on limiting the means used in warfare could be summed up with one quotation. In Chapter One, Book I, he writes: “To introduce the principle of moderation into the theory of war itself would always lead to a logical absurdity.”<sup>61[61]</sup> However, to take this as conclusive evidence of his position would be a misleading removal of the quotation from its context, and not reveal the subtlety of Clausewitz’s views.<sup>62[62]</sup> Introducing a principle of moderation into Clausewitz’s abstract concept of war might indeed be absurd, but Clausewitz recognizes that war in reality may be more or less moderate depending on the nature of the political purposes, the societies involved, and the general characteristics of the age.

Although Clausewitz does not necessarily draw on ethical

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<sup>59[59]</sup> *On War*, 99.

<sup>60[60]</sup> *Ibid.*, 479.

<sup>61[61]</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>62[62]</sup> Michael Walzer, in *Just and Unjust Wars*, engages in such a maneuver. (p. 23) In fact, what Walzer argues that Clausewitz wants to deny, Clausewitz would be likely to accept. The passage from *Just and Unjust Wars* begins “What is war and what is not-war is something that people decide. As both anthropological and historical accounts suggest, they can decide, and in a considerable variety of settings they have decided, that war is limited war . . .” (pp. 24-25) Clausewitz would agree with this statement, maybe adding only a warning about war’s unpredictability. Van Creveld also uses this and other quotations in a misleading way in pp. 63-66, *Transformation of War*.

considerations when discussing limitations on means, he does suggest that under certain circumstances limits may be observed. The following passage is revealing on this point:

If wars between civilized nations are far less cruel and destructive than wars between savages, the reason lies in the social conditions of the states themselves and in their relationships to one another. These are the forces that give rise to war; the same forces circumscribe and moderate it. They themselves however are not part of war; they already exist before fighting starts.<sup>63[63]</sup>

It is interesting to again recall Clausewitz's trinitarian conception of war, and the tendency towards unrestrained violence and primordial hatred that he ascribes to the people. Clausewitz suggests here that this tendency is governed by the nature of the belligerents involved. Civilized peoples may be less savage than uncivilized peoples, but Clausewitz notes that this difference "does not operate in every case."<sup>64[64]</sup>

Though Clausewitz locates the forces which determine whether or not moderation will be exercised outside a theory of war itself, he does seem to hold several strong opinions on the topic. As has been noted above with regard to decisions to go to war, Clausewitz emphasizes that decisions on moderation cannot effectively be made unilaterally. "If one side uses force without compunction, undeterred by the bloodshed it involves, while the other side refrains, the first will gain the upper hand."<sup>65[65]</sup> This will force the opponent to follow suit. Clausewitz may be wrong not to consider the possibility that acting with moderation, even unilaterally, may actually increase one's effectiveness in certain cases. An example could be the avoidance of reprisals in a counter-insurgency conflict where a force is seeking to win over the population. However, many other forms of restraint, such as the refusal to resort to certain categories of weapons, require at least tacit cooperation from both sides to be effective.

A second theme that Clausewitz returns to on several occasions is that one should not let attempts to moderate the conduct of war confuse the main point—war itself is not humane. One should not have any illusions. Clausewitz states that "It would be futile—even wrong—to try and shut one's eyes to what war really is from sheer distress at its brutality."<sup>66[66]</sup> In his brief survey of warfare

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<sup>63[63]</sup> *On War*, 76.

<sup>64[64]</sup> *Ibid.* Clausewitz goes on to say that "Even the most civilized of peoples, in short, can be filled with passionate hatred for each other." It is not so much the level of civilization that matters, as the intensity of the interests at stake and the duration of the conflict. Clausewitz also argues that these passions are one reason that the outcomes of wars cannot be decided, or wars themselves avoided, merely by making some examination of quantifiable measures of the relative strengths of both sides.

<sup>65[65]</sup> *Ibid.*, 75-76. The exact meaning of this quotation is unclear. First of all, it comes just at the end of the discussion of abstract war, so it is not entirely clear whether it applies equally to wars in reality. Second, when trying to evaluate this idea from an ethical perspective such as that of just war theory, elaboration would be helpful. Is he reiterating the point that, if one commander seeks decisive combat, the other will not be able to decline costly battle? Or does "force without compunction" include atrocities and attacks on noncombatants? Although Clausewitz does not carefully distinguish between combatants and noncombatants, the first of these possibilities is more consistent with other passages from *On War*.

<sup>66[66]</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

in Book VIII, Clausewitz discusses a time when war did obey limits. In eighteenth century European warfare:

It had ceased to be in harmony with the spirit of the times to plunder and lay waste the enemy's land. . . . It was rightly held to be unnecessarily barbarous, an invitation to reprisals, and a practice that hurt the enemy's subjects rather than the government—one therefore that was ineffective and only served permanently to impede the advance of general civilization.<sup>67[67]</sup>

This passage shows that Clausewitz disapproves of senseless destruction. It may also be an argument for moderation to the extent that it reflects Rousseau's idea that "war is a contest among states but not men."<sup>68[68]</sup> At least in this time period, war was fought between governments and not populations.

Clausewitz says that "it is the natural law of the moral world that a nation that finds itself on the brink of an abyss will try to save itself by any means," but this does not suggest that states will always be in such a situation.<sup>69[69]</sup> He also does not advocate the "war is hell" doctrine that Michael Walzer attributes to General William Sherman in *Just and Unjust Wars*. He never argues that the responsibility for all of war's devastation belongs to the aggressor, and therefore any means, no matter how inhumane, are appropriate as a response.<sup>70[70]</sup> Though war is essentially not humane, it does not follow that any and all acts of barbarism are therefore justified once it breaks out.

Instead, Clausewitz is making it clear that even when its devastation is limited, one should never be deluded into thinking that warfare will not contain brutal elements. In a discussion of local requisitioning and the burdens that it places on populations, Clausewitz argues that avoiding this situation should not be "considered a perfecting of warfare simply because it is more humane. War itself is anything but humane."<sup>71[71]</sup> On the contrary, war has many terrible features. Examples of Clausewitz's personal reactions to war's devastation can be drawn from his experience in the campaign of 1812. He saw the burning of Moscow as tragic, and was appalled by the Cossack slaughter of isolated

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<sup>67[67]</sup> Ibid., 571. Clausewitz also notes that recurrent wars since the Middle Ages have retarded cultural development in Germany in his essay "Agitation," *Writings*, 346. This is further evidence against the view that Clausewitz saw war as a beneficial social institution, or engine of progress.

<sup>68[68]</sup> Hoffmann, 42, cites C.E. Vaughan, *The Political Writings of J.J. Rousseau* (Cambridge, Eng., 1915), II, 159.

<sup>69[69]</sup> *On War*, 483.

<sup>70[70]</sup> *Just and Unjust Wars*, pp. 32-33. This section of Walzer's book includes an additional example of what I would interpret to be a mischaracterization of Clausewitz's views. In discussing Sherman's ideas, Walzer states that it "is the Clausewitzian idea of limitlessness that is at work here."

<sup>71[71]</sup> Ibid., 338. Though Clausewitz appears to disdain senseless destruction, he is not entirely unwilling to pass on some of war's hardships to the civilian population. For example, in ensuring the delivery of requisitions from the local population, "Even more effective (than providing local officials with detachments of soldiers) is the fear of being held responsible, of being punished or maltreated -- which, under such circumstances, acts as a collective burden and weighs upon the whole population." (p. 335) However, he also writes that "Even belligerent foreign forces that occupy a country for any length of time will hardly be so harsh and pitiless as to place the whole burden of subsistence on the land." (p. 336) Clausewitz seems to expect that while a commander may be driven to threaten local civilians in order to supply his army, he will not act with total inhumanity. Clausewitz's commander does not seem to have quite the ruthlessness of Machiavelli's prince.



elements of the retreating French Army. He told his wife “that he had witnessed ‘ghastly scenes . . . If my feelings had not been hardened it would have sent me mad. Even so it will take many years before I can recall what I have seen without a shuddering horror.’”<sup>72[72]</sup> In *On War*, Clausewitz sympathizes with the deprivations of soldiers in time of war, and discusses the danger and fear that are part of combat.<sup>73[73]</sup> While Clausewitz does not explicitly argue that the means of warfare should be limited by moral considerations, he disapproves of senseless destruction, and does not fail to remind us of war’s costs.

A third theme is that Clausewitz denies the identification of history with progress. As Paret observes, Clausewitz demanded “objective, analytic, nonteleological history.”<sup>74[74]</sup> As an example, Clausewitz argues that those who identified the limitations observed in eighteenth century warfare with the general enlightenment of mankind were mistaken.<sup>75[75]</sup> This view of history has two implications for the possibility of limiting the means used in warfare. First of all, warfare will not necessarily become more humane as civilization advances. As has already been noted, Clausewitz thought it possible that war between civilized peoples could be guided by reason and therefore be less savage than war between uncivilized peoples, but this is not guaranteed. It is also possible for civilized peoples to get swept up, either before or during the course of a war, by passionate hatred. Technology also provides no solution. “The invention of gunpowder and the constant improvement of firearms are enough in themselves to show that the advance of civilization has done nothing practical to alter or deflect the impulse to destroy the enemy, which is central to the very idea of war.”<sup>76[76]</sup> During Clausewitz’s own life, he saw the shocking transition from the more limited forms of warfare of the eighteenth century to the more total warfare of the Revolutionary armies and the Napoleonic era. The increased role of the people in warfare not only increased warfare’s means, but in Clausewitz’s view, increased the strength of its irrational element.

However, Clausewitz’s nonteleological view of history also leads him to reject the conclusion that warfare has reached its ultimate form under Napoleon, and that all future warfare will approximate the absolute. He realizes that governments have learned that the “heart and temper of a nation” can make an enormous contribution to “the sum total of its politics, war potential, and fighting strength.”<sup>77[77]</sup> Now that governments are aware of these resources, they

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<sup>72[72]</sup> Clausewitz’s personal reactions to this campaign are cited in Keegan, pp. 6-8. For the content of Clausewitz’s remarks to his wife, Keegan cites R. Parkinson, *Clausewitz*, London, 1970, pp. 175-6.

Clausewitz also discusses the burning of Moscow in “The Campaign of 1812 in Russia,” *Writings*, 167-168.

<sup>73[73]</sup> Clausewitz discusses the hardships of soldiers several times in Book V. In Chapter Nine, Clausewitz mentions the increased wear and tear on soldiers, as well as on the countryside, due to the fact that supply trains no longer carry tents. In Chapter Fourteen, Clausewitz describes the frequent privations of soldiers due to inadequate provisioning. Clausewitz brings alive the danger and fear of the battlefield in Chapter Four of Book I, “On Danger in War,” where he introduces a novice to the battlefield: “To someone who has never experienced danger, the idea is attractive rather than alarming.” However, as the guide and novice approach the front line illusions dissipate, and “For a final shock, the sight of men being killed and mutilated moves our pounding hearts to awe and pity.” (p. 113)

<sup>74[74]</sup> In his introduction to the historical collection of *Writings*, p. 4.

<sup>75[75]</sup> *On War*, 591.

<sup>76[76]</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>77[77]</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

are likely to tap them.<sup>78[78]</sup> However, to argue that all future wars will be total is to ignore the evidence of history. Clausewitz notes that the majority of wars in history have actually been limited, “more a state of observation than a struggle of life and death.”<sup>79[79]</sup> This means that in order for his theory to remain close to reality, a concern that greatly absorbs him, his theory must allow that wars of the future could be of different types.<sup>80[80]</sup> War in reality will continue to be governed by the dominant characteristics of the age.

Before attempting to sum up Clausewitz’s views on the morality of war, it is important to make one last point. Despite Clausewitz’s assertion that judging policy is beyond a theory of war, there is an example in *On War* where he does make such a judgment. In analyzing the transformation of warfare in the last decade of the eighteenth century, Clausewitz finds that:

Clearly the tremendous effects of the French Revolution abroad were caused not so much by new military methods and concepts as by radical changes in policies and administration, by the new character of the French people, and the like.<sup>81[81]</sup>

These changes were primarily political, and therefore the failure to grasp and adapt to them was political. Even if a military leader had perceived these changes, he could not have acted on this recognition, since the response required the mobilization of society itself.

This brings out the general point that when Clausewitz is willing to judge policy in *On War*, it is based on whether it is in conformance with the spirit of the age. For this reason, Clausewitz is able to praise the very different policies of both Napoleon and Frederick Great. In an earlier age, Frederick the Great showed his wisdom by acting in accordance with his true situation in his campaign of 1760:

As head of a small state resembling other states in most respects, and distinguished from them only by the efficiency of some branches of his administration, Frederick could not be an Alexander. . . . His whole conduct of war, therefore, shows an element of restrained strength, . . . Neither vanity, ambition, nor vindictiveness could move him from this course; and it was this course alone that brought him success.<sup>82[82]</sup>

Operating under new conditions, the most important of which was the increased role of the people in warfare, Napoleon deserves praise for acting with boldness in the pursuit of great objectives. He perfected and exploited the potential of the armed forces of the age, and is called by Clausewitz the “God of War

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<sup>78[78]</sup> *Ibid.*, 593. Clausewitz says “once barriers—which in a sense consists only in man’s ignorance of what is possible—are torn down, they are not so easily set up again.”

<sup>79[79]</sup> *Ibid.*, 488.

<sup>80[80]</sup> About theory, Clausewitz writes: “Just as some plants bear fruit only if they don’t shoot up too high, so in the practical arts the leaves and flowers of theory must be pruned and the plant kept close to its proper soil – experience.” (“Author’s Preface to an Unpublished Manuscript on the Theory of War,” reprinted in *On War*, 61). He discusses the impact of the variety of types of war in history on theory in *On War*, 488.

<sup>81[81]</sup> *On War*, 609.

<sup>82[82]</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

himself.<sup>83[83]</sup> In an era of limited war, to pursue limited objectives with limited means is a mark of wisdom. However, when the Prussians and Austrians took the same approach against Napoleon in the campaigns of 1805, 1806, and 1809, it could only end in disaster.<sup>84[84]</sup>

This discussion illuminates the fact that, while to some extent it seems fitting to portray Clausewitz as a proponent of restraint, this does not quite capture the whole of his perspective. Moderation is best where it is possible, but immoderate measures must be met with what some might conceive to be an immoderate response.<sup>85[85]</sup> In either case, however, it is a matter of accurately appraising the situation, and balancing means and purposes.

#### Clausewitz and the Morality of War: An Ethic of Responsibility

In his essay, "Politics as a Vocation," Max Weber sets out what he calls the "ethic of responsibility" which he feels is appropriate to those responsible for the affairs of state. The statesman must soberly and steadfastly consider the consequences of all his decisions for the welfare of the state, and cannot in his official capacity indulge in what Weber calls the "ethic of ultimate ends" or the "acosmic ethic of love." This latter corresponds to the ordinary morality appropriate to interpersonal relations. A clear statement of Weber's position is the following: "For if it is said, in line with the acosmic ethic of love, 'Resist not him that is evil with force,' for the politician the reverse proposition holds, 'thou *shalt* resist evil by force,' or else you are responsible for the evil winning out."<sup>86[86]</sup>

Although Clausewitz does not often directly discuss ethical considerations, it seems likely that he would agree with Weber on the ethic appropriate to the statesman, as well as to the senior military commander, since "the commander-in-chief is simultaneously a statesman."<sup>87[87]</sup> In fact, Clausewitz expresses almost direct agreement with Weber's distinctions in a discussion of types of coalitions. A state can enter a coalition either to defeat the enemy, or to weaken both the enemy and one's ally simultaneously. As far as Clausewitz is concerned, "Politicians who consider the second objective illegitimate sacrifice the state's interests, for which they are responsible, to their own sense of propriety. Those who conduct themselves in high office as they would in private life are the true egoists."<sup>88[88]</sup> Clausewitz does not suggest that statesmen

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<sup>83[83]</sup> Ibid., 583.

<sup>84[84]</sup> Ibid., 584.

<sup>85[85]</sup> An example of where Clausewitz's thoughts are relevant to this question is in Book VI, "Defense," of *On War*, in a passage where he discusses when it makes sense to give up resistance. Clausewitz writes: "Even after a defeat there is always the possibility that one's fortune can be turned by developing new sources of strength, or through the natural decimation suffered by all offensives in the long run, or by means of help from abroad. There will always be time enough to die . . . No matter how small and insignificant a state may be in comparison with its enemy, it must not forsake these last efforts, or else one will conclude that its soul is dead." (p. 483) Are last ditch efforts, such as the arming of the people, a reasonable or immoderate response?

<sup>86[86]</sup> Weber, 119-120. Weber goes on to note that, for the statesman "it is *not* true that good can follow only from good and evil only from evil, but that often the opposite is true. Anyone who fails to see this is a political infant." (p. 123)

<sup>87[87]</sup> *On War*, 111.

<sup>88[88]</sup> *Writings*, 242.

should be guided by the morality appropriate to interpersonal relations, but does hold that their actions should be governed by an ethical code based on prudent protection of the interests of the state.

Clausewitz seems to hold a similar view on the relationship between a personal and public morality when he discusses purely military affairs. Clausewitz is sensitive to the ugly side of war, and deliberately brings out its costs. However, he also writes that it is because “war is such a dangerous business that the mistakes which come from kindness are the very worst.”<sup>89[89]</sup> In the glimpses one gets of Clausewitz’s distaste for senseless destruction, one wonders whether he would further agree with Weber that “an ethic of ultimate ends and an ethic of responsibility are not absolute contrasts but rather supplements, which only in unison constitute a genuine man.”<sup>90[90]</sup>

In sum, Clausewitz does not glorify or romanticize war, and he does not advocate it for its own sake. War is dangerous and costly, and is at best moderated through a rational balancing of the means being used and the ends being sought.<sup>91[91]</sup> While Clausewitz does not draw on moral language to defend his positions, he does recognize the possibility of limits and the benefits of moderation. His historicism leads him to recognize that war can and has been more or less barbarous in different ages, and between different peoples. Finally, the fact that Clausewitz denies a teleological view of history means that there is no force of providence moving through history to guarantee progress. On the other hand, it also leaves room for choice in the development of human affairs—how they turn out is partially up to us.<sup>92[92]</sup>

The above analysis intrinsically leads, however, to an additional question. According to the ethic of responsibility the dictates of ordinary morality can, and indeed must be, overridden in the service of the state. What are Clausewitz’s views which make this ethic so imperative? The argument below will be that this state-centric perspective is consistent with Clausewitz’s opinions in two key areas: the first is his idealism about what the state represents, and the second is his view of the international environment as extremely threatening. Given these views, did Clausewitz rule out the possibility of cooperation in international affairs? The section below will conclude with an examination of this point.

### **Defending the State in a Dangerous World**

In *On War*, Clausewitz provides some insight into his view of the state. As has been noted above, he writes that policy is concerned not only with

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<sup>89[89]</sup> *On War*, 75. An example of such a mistake might be attempting to preserve one’s forces by avoiding all bloodshed. Even when in the defensive, such passivity could lead to disaster. “Avoidance of bloodshed, then, should not be taken as an act of policy if our main concern is to preserve our forces.” (Ibid., 98)

<sup>90[90]</sup> Weber, 127.

<sup>91[91]</sup> Another example which shows Clausewitz’s view that rationality can have a moderating effect on warfare is the following quotation: “If, then, civilized nations do not put their prisoners to death or devastate cities or countries, it is because intelligence plays a larger part in their methods of warfare and has taught them more effective ways of using force than the crude expression of instinct.” (*On War*, p. 76)

<sup>92[92]</sup> In a note entitled “In Reference to Well-Meaning German Philosophers,” Clausewitz writes: “Presumptuous philosophy deserves contempt and derision when it seeks to raise us high above the activities of the day so that we can escape their pressures and cease all inner resistance to them . . . The times belong to you; what they will become they will become through you.” (*Writings*, 270)

protecting a state's relative power position vis-à-vis other states, but also presumed to represent the sum of the community's interests, its spiritual values, and "whatever else the moral philosopher may care to add."<sup>93[93]</sup> This statement reflects not only an assumption about policy, but also a certain conception of the state as an entity with both concrete interests and spiritual values. Did Clausewitz ever question either of these views? He does not probe these issues in *On War*. One might also suspect that they did not trouble him personally, since he did, after all, spend almost all of his adult life in state service. He was born in 1780, and in 1792 entered the Prussian military and saw his first combat against the Revolutionary armies of France. At the time of his death, in 1831, he was a serving Prussian Major General who had fought in seven campaigns.

Such a suspicion, however, is not supported by a more thorough examination of the evidence. A closer look at the events of his life, and at his writings in different phases of his life, show that he held a complex and fluctuating view of the state. A brief sketch of these events and writings adds greater depth to an understanding of Clausewitz's views.

#### Clausewitz's Relationship with the Prussian State

One of the major themes of Paret's excellent intellectual biography of Clausewitz is the evolution that took place in Clausewitz's opinions about the state.<sup>94[94]</sup> Paret describes the young Clausewitz as having an extremely idealistic and exceptionally demanding notion of the state, as well as an intense personal identification with its successes and failures.<sup>95[95]</sup> Clausewitz's views were actually somewhat radical for his time because they reflected not only the citizen's obligation to obey the absolute authority of the monarch, but also his obligation to serve a national and cultural ideal.<sup>96[96]</sup> Clausewitz's views faced a crisis with Prussia's collapse and his temporary internment in France after Napoleon's victories in 1806, but then returned in stronger form.<sup>97[97]</sup> From 1808 until 1812, Clausewitz served this ideal by working closely with General Gerhard Scharnhorst, the leading Prussian military reformer. This fundamental goal of these military reformers, shared with key political reformers, was to more fully take advantage of the "social and psychological energies" of the people, which "the Frederician class-structure had repressed."<sup>98[98]</sup>

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<sup>93[93]</sup> *On War*, 607.

<sup>94[94]</sup> Peter Paret, *Clausewitz and the State*, 1976.

<sup>95[95]</sup> *Ibid.*, 95. Paret writes the following: "The psychological nature of (Clausewitz's) view of the state is clearly evident in the demands repeatedly made in his early notebooks and manuscripts for the state to maintain dignity, strength, and frankness in its foreign relations."

<sup>96[96]</sup> In Clausewitz's idealism, "The formal obligations of absolutism are replaced by joint service to a cultural and national ideal, a combination in which the state dominates, but in which the individual as well is invested with ethical authority that enables him to judge his own and the state's actions according to general principles." (*Ibid.* 96)

<sup>97[97]</sup> *Ibid.*, Paret, 126-136. One example of the evidence upon which Paret bases his argument about Clausewitz's intense patriotism and identification with the state is a letter from Clausewitz to his fiancée during his ten-month internment in France. He wrote: "Children of a lost fatherland, we wander aimlessly like orphans." He goes on to say: "I always think it egotistical for man to be so proud of his human qualities that he becomes indifferent to the quality of citizenship." (Clausewitz to Marie v. Brühl, 2 April 1807)

<sup>98[98]</sup> *Ibid.*, 138. Clausewitz later attributed Prussia's ultimate success against Napoleon to Scharnhorst's reforms. In an obituary for Scharnhorst, Clausewitz wrote: "The rebirth of the Prussian army, the bringing together of the various classes of society, the creation of the *Landwehr*, the tenacious resistance to the

Paret argues that 1812 marks the height of Clausewitz's "allegiance to a political ideal," rather than to the "politically inadequate Prussian state."<sup>99[99]</sup> In written form, the supreme expression of Clausewitz's idealism is his "Political Declaration."<sup>100[100]</sup> This statement is an emotional defense of those Prussians like himself who, anticipating the alliance with France, felt an imperative to leave so that they would not end up in the service of Prussia's true enemy. Clausewitz argues in part: "That nation whose king has lost honor and freedom has lost both along with him, and will suffer internal decay and external repression."<sup>101[101]</sup> In his opinion, "Since there is no external safety in the French alliance and no other remedy for our inner sickness than resistance to France, then resistance should be regarded as our ultimate salvation."<sup>102[102]</sup> After the alliance was agreed upon, Clausewitz took the difficult personal step of resigning and entering Russian service to fight Napoleon.<sup>103[103]</sup> In this case, Clausewitz clearly took it upon himself to judge government policy according to his own perception of the state's interests. In 1813 Prussia abandoned its alliance with France, and Clausewitz was readmitted to Prussian service in 1814.<sup>104[104]</sup>

Paret argues that between 1812 and Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo, Clausewitz began to take a more mature perspective on Prussia's imperfections and became more tolerant of the status quo. Clausewitz's continued criticisms of state and society become more objective and less emotional in tone.<sup>105[105]</sup> Clausewitz's disillusionment with the Prussian state was only partially due to his

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defeatism of the times and the mistrust of parties -- all these are anchors that this able pilot tossed into the threatening seas, anchors that enabled the royal vessel to defy the storms breaking around it." ("On the Life and Character of Scharnhorst," *Writings*, 99)

<sup>99[99]</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

<sup>100[100]</sup> Clausewitz begins this declaration with a quote from Frederick II's *Posthumous Works*: "Of course I know the value of rest, the attractions of society, the joys of life; I too want to be happy like anyone else. But as much as I value these things, as little would I purchase them at the cost of baseness and dishonor. Philosophy teaches us to do our duty, to serve our fatherland loyally even with our blood; to renounce our ease, yes, to sacrifice our very existence." (*Writings*, 287)

<sup>101[101]</sup> *Writings*, 300. In introducing this document, Moran notes that the autonomy and not the existence of Prussia was at stake in 1812. "Clausewitz regards existence and autonomy as morally indistinguishable; his opponents did not. Neither, for the most part, did his allies." (*Writings*, 286) However, whether Clausewitz saw the situation this way is not entirely clear. In the declaration, he argues that Napoleon ultimately intends the destruction of Prussia.

<sup>102[102]</sup> *Ibid.*, 301.

<sup>103[103]</sup> Before Clausewitz was readmitted to Prussian service, he was involved in two other incidents in which he acted in accordance with his understanding of the national interest, and against the king's policy. In December of 1812, he played a key role in the negotiations which led to the defection of General Yorck's Prussian corps from its alliance with Napoleon's armies -- a change of loyalties that took place without the king's approval. By January of 1813, Yorck's corps had moved to Eastern Prussia. Yorck began to raise a national militia of 20,000 men according to a plan which Clausewitz drafted, again before approval had been received from the king. Paret discusses these events in Chapter 9, "Napoleon's Destruction," of *Clausewitz and the State*.

<sup>104[104]</sup> Although Clausewitz's resignation had been approved by the king, Clausewitz did not request permission to enter Russian service. After he donned a Russian uniform he was brought up on charges, though these were dropped in the course of events. (Paret, *Clausewitz and the State*, 220-221) There is reason to believe that the king never forgave Clausewitz for his independence. For example, two requests for Clausewitz to reenter Prussian service in 1813 were denied. (*Ibid.*, 232, 239) These events also may have contributed to the failure of Clausewitz's attempts to get diplomatic postings from 1819 to 1823. (*Ibid.*, 320)

<sup>105[105]</sup> *Ibid.*, 256. In another summary of this transition, Paret writes "By the end of the Napoleonic wars, his objectivity and his analytic energies had fully matured, and had vanquished the strain of national arrogance with which the younger man had responded to Prussia's humiliation and his own." (p. 136)

disagreements with its actions with regard to Napoleon. He was also discouraged by factional struggles between reformers and social conservatives.<sup>106[106]</sup> Though Clausewitz remained a Prussian and German patriot, and a defender of the reform movement, his loyalties were expressed with less intensity. In his last years, Clausewitz accepted the shortcomings of the state and the people, and a new realism and focus on power marked his perceptions of politics.<sup>107[107]</sup> Paret suggests that: “For Clausewitz the Prussian state ceased to be what it continued to be for Hegel—the realization of an ethical idea. Instead, he regarded it as a historical reality whose first duty is to maintain itself.”<sup>108[108]</sup>

Through his analysis of Clausewitz’s life and work, Paret clearly adds perspective to an understanding of Clausewitz’s opinions about the state. Clausewitz’s idealistic view of the state as the embodiment of a cultural and national ideal is consistent with the ethic of responsibility that *On War* expresses. Though the strength of Clausewitz’s idealism actually led him to break with the government in 1812, and then seemed to diminish over time, he never doubted that the state was worth defending. This biographical sketch also depicts events in Clausewitz’s life that must have convinced him that policy could err. Not only could it be wrong, it could also reflect the interests of factions rather than those of the whole community considered as some sort of organic entity. Yet despite these realizations, Clausewitz maintained that the state should still be presumed to be the guarantor of the political community’s “great and permanent” interests.<sup>109[109]</sup>

Paret also makes a compelling case that Clausewitz’s frustration with the direction in which Prussian society was heading after 1815 led him to turn more to questions of foreign policy. It must be noted however, that despite the changes over time that Paret emphasizes, Clausewitz’s writing throughout his adult life addressed power and security concerns. This constant can perhaps be explained by another aspect of Clausewitz’s views that are consistent with an ethic of responsibility -- a perspective that sees a high level of threat in the international environment. When international relations resemble Hobbes’ state of nature, acting in accordance with Weber’s ethic of ultimate ends is most dangerous. The next section will examine Clausewitz’s political writings more closely. In clarifying his views, it again seems useful to compare them with those of Machiavelli, a thinker he greatly admired.

### Machiavelli and Clausewitz on Politics

Clausewitz directly expresses respect for Machiavelli in some notes on politics in 1807, in which he says that “No book on earth is more necessary to the politician than Machiavelli’s; those who affect disgust at his principles are

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<sup>106[106]</sup> The Restoration and victory of conservatism in Prussia after 1815 were discouraging to Clausewitz. The military reformers were opposed because many of the measures they advocated, especially universal conscription, challenged Prussia’s social hierarchy. Paret discusses the Restoration in Chapter 10, *Clausewitz and the State*.

<sup>107[107]</sup> *Ibid.*, 421.

<sup>108[108]</sup> *Ibid.*, 438.

<sup>109[109]</sup> The phrase in quotation marks is from “Agitation,” a political essay written in the early 1820s. (*Writings*, 353)

idealistic dilettantes.”<sup>110[110]</sup> Clausewitz continues on this theme:

You kindhearted moralists, just look at yourselves in the mirror -- look at how your principles, your moral egotism, are so utterly changed when reflected back by the real world. . . . And you sensitive politicians, have you learned anything yet from experience? The twenty-first chapter of Machiavelli's *Prince* is the basic code for all diplomacy -- and woe to those who fail to heed it!<sup>111[111]</sup>

This can be placed in perspective by noting that it is an (obviously emotional) response to what Clausewitz saw as Russian betrayal of Prussia in its treaty with France of July 1807.<sup>112[112]</sup> Setting aside the polemic tone, the admiration of Machiavelli seems genuine and is expressed by Clausewitz in other writings.<sup>113[113]</sup>

Clausewitz shares with Machiavelli an outlook on the international environment that sees it as very hostile and dangerous. In *On War*, he writes:

The fact that slaughter is a horrifying spectacle must make us take war more seriously, but not provide an excuse for gradually blunting our swords in the name of humanity. Sooner or later someone will come along with a sharp sword and hack off our arms.<sup>114[114]</sup>

This seems similar to Machiavelli's warnings that the prince who wants to be good “must come to ruin among many who are not good,” and the importance he places on military affairs.<sup>115[115]</sup> In Clausewitz's view, Prussia and Germany face a particularly threatening situation. In an 1818 essay, he writes:

Germany should always be under arms, more than all the states that surround her, since she lies in the middle of them. . . . With a glance at our history it would not seem to me difficult to convince the whole world that if Germany does not take very strong precautions, if she does not possess military institutions of great vigor, she will not survive.<sup>116[116]</sup>

In a defense of Prussian military reforms written the following year, he argues

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<sup>110[110]</sup> Ibid., 268.

<sup>111[111]</sup> Ibid. This chapter, “How a Prince Should Act to Acquire Reputation,” argues against neutrality for a prince caught between two powerful rivals. It also argues that the prince should undertake great enterprises and set a glorious example. Clausewitz would also have been likely to agree with the following from this chapter: “Let no state think that it can always adopt a safe course; rather should it be understood that all choices involve risks, for the order of things is such that one never escapes one danger without incurring another; prudence lies in weighing the disadvantages of each choice and taking the least bad as good.”

<sup>112[112]</sup> Ibid., 267. The essay is entitled “On the Occasion of the Russian Manifesto Following the Peace of Tilsit.”

<sup>113[113]</sup> One example is an anonymous letter that Clausewitz sent to the German philosopher J.G. Fichte in 1809. The letter was in response to an article Fichte published which argued that Machiavelli's view of political power was the one appropriate to Germany's present situation. In his response, Clausewitz notes that Fichte's “results entirely agree with those at which I have arrived in my own quiet reflections.” (*Writings*, 284) The aspects of Clausewitz's letter which were critical were primarily in response to Fichte's speculations about the timelessness of Machiavelli's military ideas. The letter is published in *Writings*, pages 279-284.

<sup>114[114]</sup> *On War*, 260.

<sup>115[115]</sup> *The Prince*, pages 58-61.

<sup>116[116]</sup> “On the German Federal Army,” *Writings*, 309.



that a strong military capability is not a question of honor or fame, but one of existence or non-existence. For this reason, “nothing distinguishes a statesman more than the creation, alongside an effective military establishment, of a martial spirit and institutions among the people.”<sup>117[117]</sup> He firmly believes that, “Sooner or later we shall really have to defend our skins.”<sup>118[118]</sup>

Although in these examples Clausewitz gives the use of force almost the same level of importance as Machiavelli, in each case he does so only after first arguing that the survival of the state is at stake. In his two last political essays, written in the year of his death, Clausewitz argues that Prussia’s situation is such that security must take precedence over other concerns. In the first of these, “Europe since the Polish Partitions,” Clausewitz argues that Prussian popular sympathy for Polish restoration is misplaced. He asks:

Why should the philosophers consider the partition of this country, and its disappearance as a state, from a moral, as opposed to historical-political, standpoint? We can only say flatly: this moralistic attitude toward the question of Poland’s restoration is unjustified. This tendency of public opinion is nothing more than a fad, which is based more on an aesthetic than on a moral principle. People enjoy this sort of enthusiasm, like the sentimental suffering of a melodrama, and they give in to the diversion because they think it costs them nothing . . .<sup>119[119]</sup>

In fact, Polish restoration could be very costly. Clausewitz argues that it could be achieved only at Prussia and Austria’s expense. This would not only weaken the ability of these two powers to serve as a bulwark against a resurgent France, but also provide France with a natural ally. He goes on to argue that it has not been Russia, Austria and Prussia which have recently threatened the independence of other nations. To weaken them would dangerously shift power toward the true danger—France.<sup>120[120]</sup>

In “On the Basic Question of Germany’s Existence,” Clausewitz again argues for a non-ideological and interest-driven perspective on international events. In this case, his concern is not just the restoration of Poland, but also the Belgian drive for independence and the movement for Italian reunification.<sup>121[121]</sup> His basic point is that: “It is absolutely essential that we

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<sup>117[117]</sup> “Our Military Institutions,” *Writings*, 317. Clausewitz goes on to argue that effective defense depends not just on the army, but on the collaboration of the whole people - and not just in insurrection and guerrilla warfare, “but on the greater overall effort that results from a lively sense of popular participation, a warlike spirit, and efficient national institutions.” (p. 318)

<sup>118[118]</sup> *Ibid.* In arguing against conservatives who wanted to disband the *Landwehr* out of a fear that it could become a revolutionary force, Clausewitz concludes this essay with the following remark: “Prussia has the need to arm her entire people so that she can withstand the two giants who will always threaten her from the east and west. Should she fear her own people more than these two giants?” (p. 328)

<sup>119[119]</sup> “Europe since the Polish Partitions,” *Writings*, 373.

<sup>120[120]</sup> To Clausewitz, the key change in Europe since the Polish partitions was not the result of these partitions, but rather the increased power of France. Clausewitz traces this growth in power back to the reign of Louis XIV, when he believes that “the natural superiority of France first emerged to weigh upon her neighbors.” (*Writings*, 372) France’s advantages include her position on the continent, unity, and martial spirit.

<sup>121[121]</sup> Clausewitz writes that the true importance of the revolt in Belgium is its implications for the security of Prussia and Germany, and perhaps even Europe, against a French drive for domination. “Belgium was not just a bulwark for Germany and Europe; it was also a  *pied à terre*  for the English when they wished to assist

Germans reduce the many political questions preoccupying us today to one fundamental question, that of *our existence*.<sup>122[122]</sup> Although the tendency is for Germans to regard these foreign events with sympathy, in Clausewitz's view they should not forget that these developments would weaken Germany. This is critical, because Germany is the true bulwark against a renewed French attempt to dominate Europe, which Clausewitz sees as a possibility in the wake of the 1830 French Revolution.

Germany's educated classes, especially, seem to fail to perceive the threat from France. Instead, they examine France's opponents: "Russia, Austria, Prussia, England—each is brought before the bar of public opinion, so that people can praise their love of peace, on the one hand, and express alarm about their armaments and warlike outlook, on the other."<sup>123[123]</sup> In Clausewitz's view, what the educated public fails to see is that these powers do not have aggressive intentions, and would only act defensively in any case. Not only would any aggressive alliance preparations be obvious, but these powers will also only fight to defend themselves because they need the critical support of their own people. Popular support would only be assured in a defensive struggle. Clausewitz sums up his argument by saying:

What is the overall result of our reflections? That it is time to think of ourselves and not to play around with remote and useless questions that corrupt pure patriotic feelings. . . . If we Germans do not arm ourselves with a spirit and passion like that of 1813, Germany will not be equal to its demanding circumstances, and it can then be dislodged from the position where the Treaties of Paris placed it.<sup>124[124]</sup>

The fragile nature of Germany's international position demands that her security interests receive primary consideration when examining international events.<sup>125[125]</sup>

Up until now I have focused on the similarities between the views of Machiavelli and Clausewitz with regard to the threatening nature of the international environment, and the importance of being well-armed. However, I have also already noted one significant difference. In each case, Clausewitz is arguing about the defensive needs of the state. The state's basic survival requires statesmen to pay attention to military institutions and realistically appraise relative changes in power. Machiavelli generally seems less restrained. He does not argue that the ability to use force is primarily important for defensive purposes, but instead points out the importance of good arms for the prince's

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the troubled continent, which, as the military history of the last 150 years clearly shows, they have often done to outstanding effect." Control of Belgium by outside powers, to include the House of Austria, "has never led to aggression against France, but has instead been used only to defend Europe against a restless and ambitious France." ("On the Basic Question of Germany's Existence," *Writings*, 380)

<sup>122[122]</sup> "On the Basic Question of Germany's Existence," *Writings*, 378.

<sup>123[123]</sup> *Ibid.*, 383.

<sup>124[124]</sup> *Ibid.*, 384.

<sup>125[125]</sup> It is also perhaps significant to note that, in the atmosphere of heightened tensions surrounding the French Revolution of 1830 and the Belgian uprising, Clausewitz opposed a preventive war. Prussia's security at that time could be found more in diplomacy than in the force of arms. Paret discusses Clausewitz's position on these events in *Clausewitz and the State*, pp. 396-399.

pursuit of acquisitions, and quest for honor and glory. A second important difference is that Clausewitz explicitly rejects Machiavelli's domestic policy guidance. To the extent that criticisms of Machiavelli are justified, he writes, it is because "What he says about the princes' policies toward their subjects is certainly largely outdated because political forms have largely changed since his time."<sup>126[126]</sup> In Clausewitz's view, the state has positive obligations to the citizens.<sup>127[127]</sup>

This point may further be clarified by examining the links that Clausewitz draws between domestic politics and foreign policy. As evidenced by his involvement in the reform movement, Clausewitz was extremely concerned about the effectiveness of the state's institutions in mobilizing the resources of the political community. This was not only out of concern for the state's power, but also due to his belief that the state had a responsibility to support individuals in the achievement of their potential.<sup>128[128]</sup> Many of the reforms, such as the ending of the nobility's privileges in the officer promotion system, were designed to give opportunities to individuals who merited them regardless of class origins. Development of the potential of both individuals and the community were held to be compatible goals.

However, Clausewitz is very non-ideological in his approach. In an early essay, he argues that a Parliament would be a useful institution in Germany because it would restrain the German's natural cosmopolitanism and "bind the public's interests more closely to the fatherland."<sup>129[129]</sup> Unfortunately, this is not possible because it would create divisions that "Germany—the target of constant foreign interference" could not afford.<sup>130[130]</sup> In a later essay, Clausewitz backs away from this desire for participatory politics.<sup>131[131]</sup> He expresses the view that the average citizen can contribute more to the state through competence and uprightness in private life, and a sympathy with the country's great interests, than through a constant agitation about all political affairs.<sup>132[132]</sup> Clausewitz stops

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<sup>126[126]</sup> "Notes on History and Politics" (1807-1809), *Writings*, 268-269.

<sup>127[127]</sup> A good example of Clausewitz's view of this obligation can be drawn from "Agitation." In a brief digression, Clausewitz discusses a famine he witnessed in the Eifel Mountains in the Spring of 1817. He says that "Anyone who has looked such misery in the face will forever be filled a sense of obligation, which the government, too, should possess and act on in such calamities. It is for that reason that the author has never been able to recall without bitterness and outraged heart the lack of scruple that led the Prussian government to drop the matter." (*Writings*, 366)

<sup>128[128]</sup> A good example of the state's responsibilities is in the field of education. Clausewitz thought that state-sponsored education could play a role in binding in individuals to the state, as well as to the cultural and political nation, but also that it should foster a "greater degree of independence and self-reliance of the individual." (Paret, *Clausewitz and the State*, 183)

<sup>129[129]</sup> "The Germans and the French" (1807), *Writings*, 258. He again argues for the benefits of a Parliament in "On the Political Advantages and Disadvantages of the Prussian *Landwehr*" (1819). He writes, "let the government gather around it representatives of the people, elected from those who share the true interests of government and are known to the people. Let this be the government's main support, friend, and ally, as Parliament has been for a century the support of the king of England." (p. 333)

<sup>130[130]</sup> "The Germans and the French," *Writings*, 258.

<sup>131[131]</sup> Clausewitz's ambivalence about the benefits of participatory politics resembles Hegel's in *Philosophy of Right*. Hegel says that determining the best interests of the community is "the fruit of profound apprehension and insight, precisely the things which are not popular." (remark to article 301) Clausewitz expresses the same skepticism about the people's ability to perceive the "great and permanent" interests of the state in "Agitation," *Writings*, 353.

<sup>132[132]</sup> "Agitation," *Writings*, 353.

short of suggesting the institutional forms that would lead to success in achieving these goals.<sup>133[133]</sup> In the end, Clausewitz does not resolve the tension between his desire to energize the people and bind them more closely to the state, and his wariness about giving them a high degree of control over the state's affairs.<sup>134[134]</sup>

Clausewitz is non-ideological about state structure in an additional way. He does not believe that a state's institutions have much bearing on its behavior internationally.<sup>135[135]</sup> In an essay in 1831, he writes a specific refutation of what is now known as democratic peace theory. He argues that, even if all peoples were free from despotism:

Would an idyllic peace then prevail among the nations, would the clash of interests and passions that has threatened their security disappear? Obviously not. The source of conflict among nations is not to be sought in slogans but in the sum total of their spiritual and material relationships, and for this purpose it is surely advisable to consult history.<sup>136[136]</sup>

Effective state institutions may increase a government's power and ability to defend itself, but institutions based on a particular ideology will not necessarily make a country more or less peaceful.<sup>137[137]</sup> In a sense, this may merely represent an additional expression of Clausewitz's belief that the complex nature of the relations between states can not be explained by the reliance on a single variable.

This discussion supplements Paret's interpretation of the reasons behind Clausewitz's focus on foreign affairs and power politics in his political

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<sup>133[133]</sup> One result of his perspective was that, during the Restoration in Prussia, Clausewitz was alienated from multiple groups. His concern with Prussia's security and governmental power led him to reject both the political reformers' priority on a constitution, and the ultra-conservatives' priority on the preservation existing social forms. This point is made by Daniel Moran in his introductory essay to Clausewitz's political writings. (*Writings*, 231) Clausewitz shows his distance from both the constitutional movement and ultra-conservatives in "Agitation."

<sup>134[134]</sup> There is an interesting debate over Clausewitz's political views of the Restoration. In an essay which responds to *Clausewitz and the State*, Behrens argues that Clausewitz would have been on the side of the reactionaries if he had lived to see the Revolutions of 1848. In his Preface to the 1985 Edition of the book, Paret responds to this critique. He is appreciative of Behrens' interpretation, but suggests that Clausewitz's politics are really a "combination of early liberalism and of the brand of conservatism that was rooted in the tradition of enlightened absolutism." With the early German liberals, Clausewitz shared a belief in "equality before the law, a strong militia or *Landwehr* based on universal military service, in an independent judiciary, ministerial responsibility, a limited franchise, and a parliament with advisory functions." However, his views also contained conservative elements as can be seen by his prioritization of an efficient administration and a strong executive over parliamentary form. (p. ix)

<sup>135[135]</sup> "The role played by a state toward other powers is only *indirectly* and by no means *significantly* linked to its constitution; and although one might believe that a certain steadiness, consequentiality, and security in foreign policy should naturally result from a constitution, history -- unless we are very much mistaken -- does not bear this out." He goes on to remark that England has done well when it enjoyed its least internal freedom, America is not impressive in foreign affairs, "and there is nothing whatever to say about a free state like Poland." ("Agitation," *Writings*, 351)

<sup>136[136]</sup> "Europe Since the Polish Partitions," *Writings*, 375.

<sup>137[137]</sup> In terms of Kenneth Waltz's three images from *Man, the State and War*, Clausewitz seems to have primarily a third image perspective, finding the causes of war in the international system. He does not express the views of a "first-image pessimist" who finds the essential roots of war in unchanging human nature. (ch. 2) He also does not accept the dominance of the second image perspective which looks for the causes of war in state ideologies or internal structures. (ch. 4) As is typical of his historicism and undogmatic approach, he also does not make Weber's argument that conflict is a immutable feature among states due to permanently irreconcilable national values.

writings, especially those written later in his life. This focus may have been partially due to frustrations with Prussian society, but it also stem from his belief that Prussia's existence was truly threatened. Whether Clausewitz's perceptions of threat were always entirely accurate may be less important than the fact that they seem genuine. This threat perception meant to him that Prussians could not afford the luxuries of cosmopolitan sympathies, and domestic institutions that would weaken Prussia's ability to act coherently in foreign affairs. In sum, Clausewitz's views of both the state and the international environment are consistent with an imperative need for statesmen to act in accordance with an ethic of responsibility. The next section will attempt to analyze the implications of this discussion for Clausewitz's perspective on the ability of the statesman to go beyond this need, and pursue amity in international affairs.

#### Clausewitz and Moral Opportunity in International Affairs

In an essay entitled "Statesmanship and Moral Choice," Arnold Wolfers introduces the concept of moral opportunity in international affairs. For Wolfers, the nature of the international political context has significance for moral decision-making. Relations between states can range along a spectrum from enmity to amity. In extreme enmity, there is "no sense of commonly held values or of common interest" between states.<sup>138[138]</sup> The latent war and extreme danger that states face in such an environment mean that "the sheer quest for survival would justify almost any course of action."<sup>139[139]</sup> By contrast, in complete amity, there is a community of interest sufficient to eliminate fear and foster friendship. Statesmen will be able to choose "between different avenues toward co-operation, compromise, and conciliation."<sup>140[140]</sup> According to Wolfers, "Under the circumstances usually prevailing in a multistate system painful limitations are set on policies of self-negation, generosity, or restraint of power."<sup>141[141]</sup> However, without making unacceptable sacrifices of values, statesmen ought to seek opportunities to make moral choices and promote amity in international politics.

Clausewitz's affinity for Machiavelli's insights into foreign policy might lead one to suspect that he denied the possibility of moral opportunity. Machiavelli is likely to have had little regard for Wolfers' concept. Not only would it be ruled out by his belief that politics was about expansionism and the zero-sum pursuit of glory, but also by Machiavelli's belief that ordinary morality was not a standard which should be applied to politics.<sup>142[142]</sup> However, the case is not quite as clear cut for Clausewitz. It has already been noted that Clausewitz did not advocate war for the sake of expansion or the pursuit of glory as did Machiavelli. In addition, the ethic of responsibility Clausewitz finds appropriate to the statesman does not necessarily rule out a search for common interests.

In some of his notes on politics in 1807, Clausewitz seems to

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<sup>138[138]</sup> Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration*, 53.

<sup>139[139]</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140[140]</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>141[141]</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>142[142]</sup> In *The Prince*, Machiavelli writes: "Hence it is necessary to a prince, if he wants to maintain himself, to learn to be able not to be good, and to use this and not use it according to necessity." (p. 61)

recognize the role that common interests could play in shaping state behavior internationally. He examines the tendency he sees toward the development of larger, centralized monarchies in Europe, and speculates on its implications for the balance of power:

If the number of contending elements were sufficiently reduced that mutual alliances became possible among them, and if European culture were sufficiently advanced that these alliances became a real necessity, then a self-conscious balance of power, established and preserved by reason, could emerge.<sup>143[143]</sup>

He goes on to note that this is different from the equilibrium that arises naturally, by “the mere rubbing of forces against each other,” and implies design and effort.<sup>144[144]</sup> This conception of the balance of power is very similar to the one that Hedley Bull discusses when he calls the balance of power an institution of international society.<sup>145[145]</sup> Such an arrangement would be an expression of international society to the extent that it involved states working together according to roughly agreed upon rules in order to uphold common interests and values.<sup>146[146]</sup> In relation to Wolfers’ idea of moral opportunity, such cooperation could be seen as promoting amity rather than enmity in international affairs.

However, in his discussion of the balance of power system in *On War*, Clausewitz denies that it reflects the operation of an international society in its current manifestation:

If we consider the community of states in Europe today, we do not find a systematically regulated balance of power and of spheres of influence, which does not exist and whose existence has often been justifiably denied; but we certainly do find major and minor interests of states interwoven in the most varied and changeable manner . . .<sup>147[147]</sup>

The balance of power system that he sees in operation here is the product of the spontaneous interaction of the self-interest of various states, and not an expression of common interests. Such a system still has the tendency to preserve the existence of the states in the system, especially the smaller ones, but its workings will be imperfect. For Clausewitz, the partitioning of Poland was evidence of this.<sup>148[148]</sup> It is still a system of self-help, since a state can best assure the aid of others in a struggle for its survival when its political and military conditions are fundamentally sound.<sup>149[149]</sup>

It seems clear from his written work that Clausewitz did not see much of a role for moral opportunity in the international relations of his day. Especially when he viewed the world from the perspective of Prussia and

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<sup>143[143]</sup> *Writings*, 247.

<sup>144[144]</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>145[145]</sup> *The Anarchical Society*, p. 71.

<sup>146[146]</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>147[147]</sup> *On War*, 373.

<sup>148[148]</sup> *Ibid.*, 375. Clausewitz attributed the dissolution of Poland to a number of circumstances, but especially found its cause in Poland’s internal weakness. “But it is asking too much when a state’s integrity must be maintained entirely by others.”

<sup>149[149]</sup> *Ibid.*, 376.

Germany's place in it, he saw the imperative of survival as so pressing that actions in accordance with ideological preferences or cosmopolitan sympathies must be ruled out. It could perhaps be said, however, that the ethic of responsibility which he saw as appropriate to statesmen and military leaders could at least be a moderating force in international affairs. In addition, the historicism that his views so often reflected leave open the possibility that, in the future, international affairs could offer greater possibilities for developing amity between states than he saw existing in his own time.

### **Conclusion**

My goal in this paper has been to explore Clausewitz's ideas in two main areas. The first is Clausewitz's ethical outlook on the problem of war, and the second is his view on the role of moral opportunity in international affairs. In both foreign policy and war, Clausewitz seems to accept that those in the service of the state should act in accordance with an ethic of responsibility, and subordinate personal moral concerns to the state's interests. However, Clausewitz does not argue that the content of these state interests is pre-determined. Their variance over time has implications for limitations on decisions to go to war, limitations on actions within war, and opportunities for developing amity in international affairs.

Many of Clausewitz's key themes also contain an either implicit or explicit argument for the benefits of moderation. Clausewitz's work on war reflects sensitivity to its costs, and a seeming disapproval of senseless violence and destruction. In fact, he is more likely to look on the use of force with the tragic acceptance of Max Weber than with the almost gleeful anticipation of Machiavelli. At the same time, he accepts that war is a continual prospect. Its devastation can at best be limited, and this limitation is possible only to the extent that statesmen and commanders on both sides of a conflict are able to manage a rational balancing of means and purposes. As for the opportunity to seek and act in accordance with common interests in international affairs, Clausewitz is likely to have seen it as a theoretical possibility, but also to have thought that it had little role to play in his own times.

What one will not find in Clausewitz is a story of progress. He does not explore how the subject of his master work could become obsolete, or even more rare, in the affairs of mankind. However, Clausewitz does suggest that limitations on the use of force between states are dependent on the characteristics of the age. To evaluate the prospects, statesmen must judge the nature of the societies and governments involved, and the relationships between them. It seems likely that, if statesmen were to undertake such an examination in today's world, many of them would not find their state's existence so threatened that there is no room for choice.

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