



## **Western Way of War:**

### **Episode 41: Just War Theory and Not Just War**

**Moderator: Professor Peter Roberts (questions in Bold)**

Respondent: Professor Beatrice Heuser (responses in Regular text).

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## **Unedited Transcript**

### **Moderator: (TC 00:02:39) Beatrice, welcome. What does the Western way of war mean to you?**

Beatrice Heuser: Good morning. The Western way of war to me is something that is consistently in transition. It is something that has crystallised a number of times around a number of subjects, and I think the subject that would be most dear to my heart would be a particular value system around the just war tradition that I think is the most precious thing that has come out of it. This could really be traced back to the ancient Greeks, but it isn't constant tradition, because, for example, in the entire 19th century, most countries in the west seem to have given a damn about a just war tradition. It something that fluctuates, comes back and goes up and down, and also changes with technology.

### **Moderator: That comes specifically from the Greeks?**

Beatrice Heuser: Yes, in fact the Greeks identified a particular way of war, a Greek way of war, that can be traced back to Aristotle and Herodotus, both of whom thought that somehow the Greeks were superior to everybody else, they were totally, totally, blatantly racist, or culturalist. Aristotle thought the Greeks were just the best fighters of all, and everybody else was either not courageous enough, but very clever, or not very clever, but very courageous. Herodotus made out a story about how the Persians and the Greeks fought differently, and that the Persians mocked the Greeks for always seeking the direct confrontation. Which is the actual origin of this idea of a Western way of war that you find in the writings of a specialist on ancient Greece called Victor Davis Hanson, who's, of course, written this book about the Western way of war, in which he extrapolated that that was so typical for the west, that they always sought this direct confrontation while all the other powers did not do that, while everybody else was much more clandestine and indirect in their approach, a nice bit of orientalism here, but that's a dominating theory. If I just may add the footnote that other historians of ancient Greek warfare have rubbished this particular theory, saying that even the ancient Greeks didn't always fight with that direct confrontation, but sought ruses and more the Odyssean approach rather than always the battle approach at the centre of the epic of all traditions of war. Interestingly, this idea that there is this Western way of war, the big battle and the direct confrontation, has seized peoples' imagination.

**Moderator: We don't often talk about a Greek way of war, because it was the city states in Greece who you would say had very different ways of fighting. They did tend to fight in very different ways. To see this as a national style is quite an interesting thing, because we don't often associate that with the Greek way of fighting, do we?**

Beatrice Heuser: Exactly, but other countries, and afterwards, having read their Aristotle, also seized on the idea of a particular national style. It's not just the Greeks who thought that they were particularly courageous and that they were collectively wonderful regardless of whether they were Athenians or Spartans or anything. I take particular delight in the story and the history of a supposed French national way of war, beautifully, it was first elaborated by an immigrant to France, an immigrant to France from Italy, Christine de Pizan, one of the very, very few women strategists, who not only came to France, went to the court of France because her father was employed as a physician by the king, and had access to all the libraries. Clever girl, she read her way around, and read her Aristotle, and came out of it, say, with great admiration for the French, which was her host country with which she then identified particularly, and she, just like Aristotle, came up with this idea that people further to the north were really courageous but dumb, people to the south were really, really clever but idle, and that the French were just the most wonderful warriors, which linked up with older traditions of how the French were the new chosen people of God and all that. Funnily enough, this theory about how the French had this particular élan, and had all these wonderful martial virtues, afterwards went up and was repeated without any interruption, all the way up to the First World War, where strategists in France even wrote that you couldn't possibly do things with French soldiers which needed lots of patience and waiting, but they always had to attack first. You had the whole idea of the great offensive that had to be a French way of war, because the French had this inbuilt tendency to be aggressive but impatient, and therefore you couldn't possibly have a holding strategy or a defensive strategy for France. A wonderful story about a national idea of a way of war.

**Moderator: You see lots of these coming out. There are quite a lot of these national, or way that people think about their own national way they wage war, rather than perhaps how others think of them. Are there any other interpretations, aside from this nationalist style of the Western way of war?**

Beatrice Heuser: Yes. Let me just add one national style that of course have been incredibly important for us directly here in the UK, which is Liddell Hart coming out with an idea about an English, and a particular British way of war, which would always be to keep away from the continent. This is something he developed particularly after the First World War, when his desire, and that of many others, was above all to avoid another trench warfare of the First World War in a future war.

**Moderator: Let's deal with that. There had still been a British way of war until Liddell Hart. He just formalised it in many ways. Before that, we had this way of war, and we've retrospectively pushed it into a Liddell Hart or a JFC Fuller interpretation of how it works. Would you say that's true?**

Beatrice Heuser: The First World War was, of course, in that interpretation, an enormous anomaly, where in fact you get conscription, where you get mass British armies fighting on the continent with high casualties. Liddell Hart was acting precisely against this, and said this is an anomaly, this is not normal. However, if you take a step back in history, you will find that, for many centuries, you'd had pretty poor recruits to British armies, probably more on a voluntary basis than on a conscript basis, but nevertheless, fighting on the continent, if you look at Scotland, Scottish soldiers had been fighting on the continent for ages and ages. As I said, not properly with a conscript basis, but still as a poor chap (ph 09.44) didn't have much other choice, so British forces fighting on the continent in land armies is a pretty long tradition, and Liddell Hart was trying to step away from that, and in a way to negate this long tradition of British forces fighting on the continent, (TC 00:10:00) and to say what you have to do is turn to the navy, and do this at a distance. Have a naval strategy, turn away from the continent, get out of the continent. That was really his idea. Lots and lots of people immediately agreed with him, thereby deciding the First World War was an anomaly, so that they could avoid another entanglement in a continental war that would be so heavy in casualties.

**Moderator: It was almost presented as a binary choice, wasn't it? There was no idea that they were complementary characteristics or investments.**

Beatrice Heuser: Quite, and importantly, it again negates reality, because the reality had been one in which both were done over centuries and centuries, that there was some element of those British forces, English forces fighting in the Dutch War of Independence, for a very long time stationed on the continent, but after that, always with the current (ph 10.58) continental managers, you had, even in the 19th century, still English forces, British forces, fighting along with the Hanoverians until Queen Victoria succeeded, and the dynasty split. It was something that was constantly there in many permutations. There was always a part of Navy, part of a land implications, and this would be a way reduced to a binary choice, as you rightly said. In a zero-sum game, if the navy gains in the budget, then the army has to lose, and if the army gains then the navy loses out, and Liddell Hart was pushing for a more maritime strategy, of course.

**Moderator: It strikes me that there is a very definite Russian way of war as well. There is clearly some deep thinking in Russia about the use of arms and mass in terms of a way of world that has influenced particularly the French and the Prussian ways of war in their thinking, right?**

Beatrice Heuser: It has particularly influenced them in the direct encounter with it, of course. I think the Russian way of war has to be linked directly with the history, the internal, the social and socio-political history of Russia, which had serfdom all the way up until the 19th century, and which had a much greater disregard for the individual, to some extent still does, than Western liberal traditions. Quite interestingly, you can see that not only in the enormous casualties of soldiers that the Soviet regime accepted during the Second World War, but you can also see it in how, afterwards, Russia in the First World War and then the Soviet Union in the Second World War and after dealt with their casualties. I always like to flag up one example of this. Already in the First World War, you have great efforts made by the Western powers to record every single name of every single fallen soldier, whereas even for the Second World War, the Soviet

war graves, huge installations, but do not record individual names unless they were officers. For example, in the graveyard outside Berlin at the Seelow Heights, you simply have crosses which say, '6 soldiers, 8 soldiers,' and then occasionally you have a cross for a military officer, or a marking stone, but you don't have this idea of trying to commemorate the individual. That, in a way, reflects also the strategy that the Soviet Union then pursued in the Second World War in their defensive role back of the Wehrmacht, which was to throw mass at a technologically superior adversary, with the Soviets losing so many soldiers than the Germans in that war.

**Moderator: That is a slightly different interpretation to the Western way of war or a national way of war that we've seen, right? There must be other interpretations rather than just the national style of fighting?**

Beatrice Heuser: Absolutely, and fascinatingly, some of those go back quite a long time as well. 4 writers who are very, very interesting on this are Montesquieu, Gerbert, Henry Humphrey Evans Lloyd, a Welshman who was a refugee from the persecutions of the Jacobites in the 18th century, and good old Immanuel Kant. Those 4 saw a link between the internal constitution, as they said, of states and the way they would fight war, because they derive from the idea of a constitution, whether this was an absolute monarchy, whether this was despotic, or whether it had some semblances of governing in the interests of their population, which all of them called a republic, to how they would then fight, because if they were fighting in the interest of their own populations, all 4 of them claimed their countries couldn't really fight aggressive wars. They would want to defend, they would want to defend their own interests and their own populations against attack from the outside, but that their populations wouldn't go along with an aggressive war outside their own frontiers, which is a fascinating idea. That is of course where Kant got his idea from about the republican peace, that republics would live peacefully next to each other, because they wouldn't go for aggression. All 4 of them, Montesquieu, Gerbert, Lloyd, and Kant, developed this idea that if you were a despotic system, then the ruler could any time decide on aggression, and the population would not be able to oppose this, whereas if you had any sort of republican system of government in which the population had some way of being consulted, they would be against this, because they'd have to bear the brunt of all aggression, of all war. They would be the ones to suffer, and they wouldn't be doing this in the interest of a despotic dynasty that simply wanted to enlarge its territory.

**Moderator: It's not actually worked out that way, has it? It's not the republican peace that we've seen, but it's a republican style of war. Do we think it's reflected well across history, or do we just think it's another interesting theory?**

Beatrice Heuser: I think, to some extent, it's just another interesting theory, because the other thing that I was really, really struck by is reading authors of the second half of the 19th century. When, all of a sudden, lots and lots of them, including military authors whom you would suspect of wanting big wars, like Moltke, the great successful general of the Prussian wars, were so afraid of mass armies, were so afraid of democracy, were so afraid of the idea of rousing the enthusiasm of the masses for fighting, which you need to do if you wanted to have them all fight for a bigger cause that was interpreted as being there. If you

suggest to them this is really a cause for which you certainly have to fight, and you actually get them really geared up, and they all want to do it, then it's incredibly difficult to restrain them afterwards and then come to a peaceful conclusion, and to reign them in again, and say, 'We've now achieved our more limited diplomatic and political aims, and now we want to stop fighting,' because then they all want to hang the Kaiser and they want to go much further than that. In fact, in the second half of the 19th century and all the way up to the First World War, there were a lot of people who were very sceptical about the idea of getting mass armies involved, and getting a lot of the citizens of countries involved in the causes for which they were fighting.

**Moderator: This idea of mass has become really important in defining different ways of war. It feels as though mass is not a Western concept, but at its heart, I think from what you're saying, it was a Western concept?**

Beatrice Heuser: I would have thought that the idea of mass is defined in a particular way when nationalism arises in the west. I don't doubt for a moment that, for example, in the spring and autumn periods of the warring kingdoms in China, they had mass armies, or at various other times in history, the Gupta Empire has mass armies. After a period in which most armies were predominantly professional, or else people who were conscripts for many, many years, and had been chosen by lot amongst all the population available for conscription in the 18th century, the Napoleonic Wars and the French Revolutionary Wars, it certainly had this levée en masse that tried to create this, of course, went hand-in-hand with the new concept in the west of this idea of nationalism, the nation itself being involved in the cause of the war. As Gerbert put it, it was their cause that was being fought for, it was suggested to them that it was their cause that was being fought for. In the 19th century, that's a particular configuration in the Western world because it's linked up with the idea of nationalism, and the idea of values of nationalism that are certainly being fought over and fought for. That has a particular twist to it, because we're now very much still in this notion that we're living in supposedly nation states in which the nation is sovereign, in which the nation is at the centre of it, so there is still an underlying notion in many countries, in many democracies, republics, every citizen should be willing to defend the polity, and (TC 00:20:00) should be willing to do that. I do think that it's a particular form of mass army that came out together with nationalism. It's interesting, of course, that Britain rarely espoused it.

**Moderator: Lots of these concepts that you've talked about, lots of these theories, seem to be in tension with each other, they don't necessarily work. There's not much clarity there, is there?**

Beatrice Heuser: I think it's very important, if I have any theory at all, first of all to establish where it came from, what particular historical circumstances it came from. Did it make sense in its own time? For a lot of these ideas, you realise that they made a certain amount of sense in their own time, but really only in their own time, and that they can't simply be translated or transferred to another century, another part of the world, or another context. Taking it one step further, I always admire those theories most which not only make sense in their own time, but have something of a timeless quality, whether you can apply them to a longer period of time or you can apply them to completely other context. Not a lot do.

**Moderator: People just want to reach back to a period of history and pull out the perfect idea, rather than understanding that they're going to have to do a little bit of original thinking?**

Beatrice Heuser: There are some ideas that I think really are working very well across centuries, and those, I think, are really worth protecting, but for everything else, you're absolutely right. History shouldn't be seen as a quarry where you find a bit here or a bit there that matches, but I'm almost fascinated by, when I find an idea that was expressed by somebody, say, in the 18th century, or even earlier, where I think, 'My goodness, this has been true throughout history.' Things that are true throughout history do include such things as the problems, the challenges of leadership. Is the leader admired because he, it's usually a he, looks very different, seems from a different aristocratic class, and is quite distinct from his men, or is he admired because he really mucks in with his men and suffers the same hardship, and sleeps on a camp bed? That sort of challenge, or the challenge of decision-making, the challenge of making a strategy, the differences between a political approach and the purely military approach, and how you sort those out, or what you do once you have actually aroused mass support for a cause, and how you can then manage that again, and put the lid back onto the kettle, as it were, to dampen down the enthusiasm for war once you have reached your political aims, and you want to stop the war, and you want to move onto peace. There are issues (ph 23.01), I think, that are very *longue durée*, and do outlast particular periods, but there are lots of things that make sense only in a particular context.

**Moderator: I think those enduring truths are what people find really interesting, and are really important. The other one you raised I was struck by, which is this idea of how we end wars well. This is something that I don't think Western states focus on. Are there some enduring truths about ending wars well?**

Beatrice Heuser: Yes, there are. Let me make 3 points about that. The first point is that there are different types of adversaries. There are adversaries with whom you seriously can't possibly negotiate, Hitler would be one of them, in many respects, and Stalin was one of them, where basically you can't make any concessions, you just simply have to defeat them utterly and totally, and get rid of that regime, and there is nothing in between. There are, and this is my second point, lots of adversaries who have some sort of claim that they make that you should at least consider and go along with. Then, the third point is that, if you have adversaries like that, the only lasting and good peace will be one which to some extent also meets their needs, meets their requirements. There must be some sort of negotiation, the peace-making and the peace treaty, or the peace arrangement, even if you don't have a proper treaty, must be one in which the adversary also has the stake, unless the adversary is so completely beyond the pale that you can't possibly negotiate with them, or make concessions to them. This is actually part of my beloved Western just war tradition. In theory, the Western just war tradition starts with the idea that the only good outcome of war has to be a good peace, a lasting peace. If you hold up that measure, then you realise that some peace treaties, and while some peace arrangements have been pretty good, particularly if they did bring in adversaries who weren't completely ideologically beyond the pale, mass murderers, genocidal horrors, but if you had people with whom you had to come to some agreement, and you made some deal

with which both sides could live, and that for a long time. That's really the crucial thing. Also, that means that you have to take that adversary seriously, and you have to consider their complaints and their cause, and their issues seriously, and see whether you can think outside the box and make the outcome of war not a win or lose situation, a zero-sum game, but one with which both sides can live afterwards.

**Moderator: I think there are some real problems in here with defining which is in category 1, the devil that you will never deal with, and category 2, which is, we will find a peace with. Finding the definition between the 2 is a real art form, but that's the political question, right?**

Beatrice Heuser: Absolutely, yes. The problem with that, you just mentioned it at the beginning, is that if you're selling the idea of a war to your public, you are automatically demonising the other side. You have to show the other side as so bad that you have to go to war with them, and how can you ever really then reign that in again, and say, 'Yes, we've done that. We've now fought them, but now we think they're okay for negotiating with.' This tension is always there, and is very profound. Also, the thing about how we now know that Hitler was absolutely horrendous is with the benefit of hindsight. In 1939, it wasn't quite clear what genocidal intentions he had with regard to the Jewish populations of Europe, not to mention the Slavs. We didn't know yet to what extremes he was going to go. Yes, he'd done horrendous things internally in the early 1930s, when he came to power, but people didn't quite realise what an absolute monster he was. It's something that is so difficult to decide. You can also find that a regime can change. If the worst devil wants peace, and could lay with you the foundations for something in which ultimately the worst devil would be defeated and not win, and his regime would go to pot, is that not something you'd go along with to have peace, and to try to get something new? You don't know whether it's going to work until afterwards, and that's, in a way, our eternal human dilemma in this context.

**Moderator: I feel like I really want to go and learn more about how to end wars well, it strikes me as one of the most important facets of the Western way of war that we don't focus enough on. Beatrice, we've run out of time. Thank you so much.**