

James, William. *Essays of Faith and Morals*, “The Moral Equivalent of War.” Edited by Ralph Barton Perry. Cleveland, Ohio: The World Publishing Company, 1962.

William James (1842-1910), brother of novelist Henry James, taught physiology, psychology, and philosophy at Harvard University. His philosophical pragmatism and thoroughgoing empiricism deeply influenced subsequent American philosophy.

We must wage war against war. We are confused about war. No one would undo the Civil War. Yet no one would vote for having another. We tend to war when compelled. Men of prehistory did otherwise. They warred to profit and glory. We plunder by trade, but still yearn for glory.

History details little but carnage. Consider the Trojan War, the Peloponnesian War, Alexander's conquests, Rome's supremacy. War made us into societies. If there ever were peaceful men, they have been exterminated.

States now call their war preparations peace. But, today, peace means war. No rational actor would war to resolve conflicts. But one must believe such common sense possible in international affairs.

I am a pacifist. I will argue against the virtues militarists vaunt. War may be a one way-station in man's journey, not his destination. We might out-grow war. Militarists recoil. They proclaim, War is man at his ultimate. War benefits the victor and the vanquished. A warless world would be a herd of grazing cattle.

All in some part of their hearts agree with the warmonger. Militarism breeds hardness. It bursts our weaklings. Militarists view war mystically. War springs from man's psyche and sociology. War must come. Its justifications are always fictions. Militarists believe war is a moral necessity. General Lea believes that Japanese power might take the islands, Alaska, Oregon, California. Steinmetz finds war the winnow of God, by which He sorts nations. The righteous prevail.

Militarist rationale exhibits two fundamental resistances: 1) unwillingness to terminate military life and settle for incrementalism, and 2) pause at the prospect of deleting from human experience the ultimate in strenuousness and the virtues that instills. Pacifists convert no militarists because they refuse to enter the militarist mind. Pacifists harp on the expense, the horror of war. Militarists agree, but find expense and horror the price of higher values. Pacifists must suggest an adequate ethical alternative to war if it wishes to win the war-party. Contemporary pacifist arguments are little more than feeble whining to militarists. A man gains dignity when his community needs him. War accomplishes that for many.

James's own utopia requires nations and individuals to replace war thirst with reasonable claims, and to outlaw acts of war. Nevertheless, war virtues must find their home, for they are a permanent good. We must create a morality of civil honor the equal of military honor. We must fight civil defects as we now fight for our freedom from subjugation. Then pacifism might prevail. Our social influence upon one another is inescapable. One might create a civil morality by conscripting all youths into a civil corps to do public works with military discipline. Besides the good done, the conscripts would be taught adult skills and get some silliness stripped out of them.

Historically, only war disciplines entire communities. A civil alternative must rise. One can imbibe martial virtues without war. We must inflame civic sentiment for peace and against war. The gap is wide, but not so wide as that which separates the primitive from the modern man.