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Beyond the Universal Soldier: Combat Trauma in Classical Antiquity

1.1 Introduction

Like an epistemological echo of Donovan’s famous song *The Universal Soldier*, the belief that the combatant’s susceptibility to post-traumatic stress disorder/combat stress injury\(^1\) is diachronically universal is slowly gaining ground.\(^2\) Gabriel, for instance, argues that the experience of close-quarters battle would leave ancient armies burdened with thousands of psychological causalities.\(^3\) Shay offers an influential reading of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as tales of both Achilles’ and Odysseus’ adverse psychological reactions to intense combat.\(^4\) Tritle argues, similarly, that Epizēlos, the uninjured Athenian hoplite who, according to Herodotus, went blind during the battle of Marathon, was suffering from conversion disorder,\(^5\) that Aristodemos’ voluntary death during the battle of Plataea was motivated by survivor guilt,\(^6\) Xenophon’s portrait of the Spartan

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\(^1\) This terminology, of course, reflects not only the value judgments attracted by this contentious subject, but also the breadth of human experience it covers (see, for instance, Shay’s foreword to Figley and Nash’s excellent edited volume *Combat Stress Injury: Theory, Research, and Management* (London, 2007), as well as W. Nash, ‘Combat/Operational Stress Adaptations and Injuries’, pp.33-63, in the same volume). For the sake of analytical clarity, and to avoid the confusion entailed by the adoption of often indistinct and overlapping typologies (such as combat related PTSD, combat shock, battle fatigue, perpetration induced PTSD etc), this article uses both terms as shorthand for the full range of adverse psychological reactions to combat.


\(^6\) Hdt. IX.71.1-4; cf. I.82.1-8; VII.231.1-232.1, IX.71.1-4; Paus. II.38.5; Thuc. V.41.2, with Tritle, *From Melos to My Lai*, pp.74-7.
commander Clearchos is the description of a man suffering from PTSD, and that the unnamed individuals described by Gorgias who were terrified by the sight of warriors armed for combat, as well as those driven mad by the frightful things they had seen, were traumatised by their experiences of war. Naturally, such retrospective diagnoses are not restricted to ancient Greece. The concept of PTSD/CSI has been applied to individuals in 17th century China, Pepys’ diary, Shakespeare and even in the Bible.

Typically, such retrospective diagnoses rest on an implicit belief in historically transcendental human equivalence, that is to say, that since modern humans are the equivalent of ancient humans, they are not only equally susceptible to PTSD, but the presence or absence thereof can be detected by the same diagnostic criteria, currently embodied in DSM-V. This view has already been accepted by many leading theorists.

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8 Gorg. *Hel.* 15-17, with L. Tritle, ‘Gorgias, the Encomium of Helen and the Trauma of War’, *Clio’s Psyche*, Vol.16 (2009), pp.195-9. Additional discussion of this intriguing text can also be found in Tritle's *A New History of the Peloponnesian War* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 158-60, as well as his own contribution to this volume (‘Ravished Minds’ in the Ancient World) and that offered by Raaflaub (‘War and the City: The Brutality of War and its Impact on the Community’).
and clinicians, and given the ongoing exponential increase in publications about PTSD/CSI, it seems likely that such studies will continue to proliferate until the universalist premise that underpins them becomes dogma. Yet, whilst this premise, that susceptibility to PTSD/CSI is diachronically universal, to put the matter in Popperian terms, cannot be verified by the parade of white swans it has generated, it can be refuted by the production of one single black swan, and it is the aim of this article to provide just such a creature.

1.2. Methodology

The methodology usually adopted by the universalists is characterised by the search for supporting sources which appear to describe conduct which could conceivably fit the current diagnostic criteria for PTSD/CSI, which, once identified, are deployed in support of a retrospective diagnosis thereof. This methodology is admirably direct, yet, it inevitably produces subjective and unfalsifiable readings of isolated pieces of ancient evidence, and more importantly, it fails to recognise that PTSD/CSI results from the

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15 Emergence of dogma: Melchior, ‘Caesar in Vietnam’, pp.209-23. Proliferation: Schnurr, ‘PTSD: 30 Years On’, pp.1-2, which demonstrates that this increase in interest, reflected in the number of PTSD-focused publications, which grew from only 900 in 1984 to nearly 9000 in 2010, is simply phenomenal. Furthermore, as the source of these figures reveals (the United States’ Department of Veterans’ Affairs’ Published International Literature On Traumatic Stress (PILOTS) Database, which can be found at www.ptsd.va.gov), this trend is continuing.


17 For paradigmatic examples, see Daly, ‘Samuel Pepys and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder’, pp.64-8; Tittle, From Melos to My Lai, p.64, pp.74-7, pp.123-36.

18 Tittle’s interpretation of Aristodemos’ death (From Melos to My Lai, pp.74-7) is an excellent example. His interpretation is perspectve, persuasive and consistent with the ancient evidence, but so too is its most obvious competitor, that Aristodemos chose a glorious death in combat instead of a life degraded by the irrevocable destruction of his social status (cf. Xen. Lac. Pol. IX.1.6, with additional discussion in J. Crowley, The Psychology of the Athenian Hoplite: The Culture of Combat in Classical Athens (Cambridge, 2012), pp.86-8, pp.106-7, pp.117-19.
interaction of two variables, namely the human being and his or her environment.\textsuperscript{19} This fact is critical, of course, because neither variable is historically transcendental: the attitudes and core beliefs adopted by combatants change, as does the socio-military environment in which they fight. This, naturally, allows for the possibility that although the modern combatant and his socio-military environment combine to produce a susceptibility to PTSD/CSI, a very different historically specific combination could just as easily reduce, suppress or even eliminate that susceptibility.

To investigate this possibility, this article will contrast two combatants and their respective environments. Since the current diagnostic criteria for PTSD/CSI directly derives from the experiences of U.S. Vietnam veterans, the first of these combatants has to be the modern, specifically 20\textsuperscript{th} Century, American infantryman.\textsuperscript{20} Similarly, since the American infantryman’s adverse psychological reactions to combat have been retrospectively applied to ancient Greece, and since he is one of the few warriors from classical antiquity for which a reasonable degree of narrative evidence survives, the


\textsuperscript{20} See above, Section 1.1, n.13, with B. Moore and G. Reger, ‘Historical and Contemporary Perspectives of Combat Stress and the Army Combat Stress Control Team’ in C. Figley and W. Nash (eds.), \textit{Combat Stress Injury: Theory, Research, and Management} (London, 2007), pp.161-81, also Shephard, \textit{A War of Nerves}, esp. pp.355-68. Of course, American soldiers were not fundamentally dissimilar to those troops fielded by other Western nations, nor were their responses to the experience of combat. Earlier drafts of this paper, in fact, proposed the ‘Western soldier’ as the modern point of comparison, but the American soldier was eventually adopted for three reasons: firstly, it was his experiences that generated the current debate regarding adverse reactions to combat; secondly, the available evidence overwhelming relates to American troops; thirdly, it was hoped the focus on one specific combatant during one specific time period would help minimise, to some degree at least, the kind of analytically unhelpful generalisations unavoidably entailed by encompassing different cultures and time periods. Similar reasons explain why the Athenian hoplite was adopted as the ancient point of comparison, instead of a more general ‘Greek’ warrior.
second combatant will be the Athenian hoplite. To maximise the force of the comparison and to avoid the charge that a modern apple is being compared to an ancient orange, these combatants have been chosen because they perform exactly the same tactical role, that is to say it is their grim task to close with and kill the enemy.

To ensure methodological clarity, the analytical distinction between the individual and his environment will be maintained throughout. Accordingly, examination of both the modern and ancient paradigms will focus on the combatant’s core norms and values, since they determine what is or is not traumatic, as well as the three most pertinent aspects of the combatant’s environment, namely, the social environment, the tactical environment and lastly, the technological environment. Thereafter, the susceptibility of both paradigms to PTSD/CSI will be assessed and then compared. Finally, this article will conclude by considering the implications of this comparison for the continued viability of the universalist position.

2.1. The American Infantryman and his Environment

Obviously, it is important to acknowledge that significant points of continuity exist between the two historical case studies examined by this article. Like the American infantryman, the Athenian hoplite found the experience of combat intensely frightening.

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22 A wide convergence of evidence attests not only to the experience of fear (Aristoph. *Birds* 289–90, 1470-81, *Clouds* 350-5, *Peace* 444-6, 673-8, 1172-85, 1295-1304, *Wasps* 10-30, 592, 820-5; Eur. *Bacch.* 303-4; Lys. X.8-9, 12, 21-4, XVI.17; Thuc. IV.34.7, VII.80.3; Tyrt. XI.22; Xen. *Hell.* IV.3.17), but also to the appearance of its physical manifestations (Aristoph. *Kn.* 1055-6, *Peace* 239-41, 1179-81; Hdt. VII.231;
and like his modern counterpart, he too suffered from exposure to the elements and all the other physical hardships associated with active service. Nevertheless, the American infantryman carried into combat a highly specific set of norms and values shaped, regardless of personal belief, by the pervasive influence of Christianity. Although once a fighting religion, by the outbreak of the Second World War, Christianity’s former belligerence had been replaced by a non-violent ideal stressing personal moral conduct, mercy, love, and respect for human life, with such principles most forcefully expressed in the Christian duty to ‘turn the other cheek’ and to ‘love thy neighbour’, as well as, of course, by the 6th Commandment, popularly translated as ‘thou shalt not kill.’

Like the norms and values he adopted, the American infantryman’s social environment was just as distinctive. In the U.S. Army and Marine Corps, men served in military units comprised of complete strangers drawn from diverse geographical locations and socio-economic circumstances. Naturally, in such a social environment, cohesion required time to develop. However, in American combat units, which, during the period under discussion, demonstrated a particular propensity for both poor performance in


27 Deut. V.4-21; Ex. XX.1-17; Luke 6.31; Mark XII.31; Matt. VII.12, with further discussion in Bourke, An Intimate History of Killing, pp.215-41.

combat and PTSD/CSI, the process of inter-personal affiliation was retarded by the operation of three mutually reinforcing policies.  

The first of these policies was individual replacement, consequent to which, for instance, units which sustained casualties during World War Two were not withdrawn from the line and reinforced, as was usually the case with the armies of Britain and Germany, but kept up to strength by the allocation of individual replacements drawn from a replacement depot. The second was individual rotation, which found its most famous manifestation during the Vietnam War. This policy operated on the principle that a soldier’s ability to endure combat was finite, and consequently, during the Vietnam War, soldiers were limited to a twelve-month tour of duty, with officers serving only six in order to facilitate the proliferation of command experience. The third policy, aimed at increasing operational efficiency, assigned each ostensibly interchangeable and transposable combatant an M.O.S., a military occupational speciality, by which the

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military matched man to task,\textsuperscript{35} consequent to which individuals were assigned and re-assigned whenever and wherever units required their services.\textsuperscript{36}

Whatever their current combat assignment, these individuals operated in a tactical environment determined by modern weapons systems, particularly the rifle, machine gun and the artillery piece, which together produce what military theorists call the dispersed battlefield.\textsuperscript{37} This deadly arena, traversed by red hot, razor sharp shrapnel and high-velocity gunfire, forced the soldier to seek safety in cover and concealment, and most importantly, to reduce the lethal affects of explosive and automatic weapons, by remaining, at all times, physically distant from his comrades.\textsuperscript{38}

Of course, modern weapons not only combine to produce a highly distinctive tactical environment, they, together with supporting military assets and equipment, also combine to produce a highly distinctive technological environment. Therein, the American infantryman faced a range of threats, not only from other similarly armed and equipped infantrymen, but also from armour, close-air support, indirect fire weapons such as mortars and artillery pieces, not to mention tactical obstacles like landmines and improvised explosive devices.\textsuperscript{39} In doing so, he was supported by sophisticated logistical

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systems and technological aids. His personal load carrying equipment allowed for the efficient carriage of considerable amounts of his three basic staples, food, water and ammunition, and when his supplies were expended, he could be resupplied in the field, usually, in the final quarter of the 20th Century, by helicopter. Consequently, the American infantryman could maintain contact with the enemy for extended periods, and since, from the Vietnam period onwards, he was typically equipped with tactical night-vision aids, he could also do so around the clock.40

2.2. The American Infantryman’s Susceptibility to PTSD/CSI

It seems obvious, therefore, that the 20th Century American infantryman entered combat with a historically-specific set of norms and values, and he operated in a historically-specific social, tactical and technological environment. What is not obvious, however, is that his pre-battle socialisation and every aspect of his environment combined to enhance his susceptibility to PTSD/CSI.

To start with, the American infantryman’s Christianised norms and values, stressing peace, mercy and the sanctity of human life, were so stunningly incongruent with his tactical role, to close with and kill his enemy, that, as Marshall observed, during World War Two, such beliefs constituted a ‘handicap’41 which inhibited the infantryman’s ability to fight and to kill.42 Naturally, this inhibition was militarily undesirable, and during the period under consideration, the U.S. military employed four

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main techniques aimed at overcoming it. Firstly, it endeavoured to re-socialise its recruits, that is to say, to engineer the elimination of incongruous norms and values and their replacement with those designed to facilitate combat.\(^{43}\) Secondly, it attempted to desensitise the soldier,\(^ {44}\) for instance, through the deification of killing, manifested by the worship of the ‘spirit of the bayonet’\(^ {45}\) and the chanting of mantras such as ‘kill, kill, kill’.\(^ {46}\) Thirdly, it supported its soldiers’ inclination to deny their lethal activities, by encouraging them to see combat as nothing more than a series of drills identical to those carried out during training.\(^ {47}\) Fourthly, as Grossman observes, after particular poor performance during the Second World War, it sought to bypass any resistance to killing by embedding Pavlovian/Skinnerian conditioning techniques into skill at arms training, which henceforth presented the soldier with a stimulus in the form of a pop-up, man-shaped target, for which the conditioned response was swift and accurate engagement,

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\(^{46}\) Grossman, *On Killing*, pp.251-2. For instance, in an attempt to enhance their ability to kill in the jungles of South Vietnam, Caputo’s hatchet-wielding and war-crying sergeant ordered his nervous recruits to chant ‘ambushes are murder and murder is fun.’ See *A Rumor of War*, p.36.

positively reinforced through the fall of the target, as the enemy ‘died’, and thereafter through progression in rank and associated privilege.\textsuperscript{48}

Such techniques, during combat, when extreme stress often impairs high-level cognition, enhanced the American infantryman’s ability to overcome his inhibition and kill, but they did so only at considerable psychological cost.\textsuperscript{49} By killing, the American infantryman committed an irreversible act that transgressed his core values, and as psychologists recognise, such psychologically damaging transgressions are often closely associated with subsequent diagnoses of PTSD/CSI.\textsuperscript{50}

The successful performance of his battlefield role, therefore, was psychologically toxic to the American infantryman, as, of course, was the social environment in which he was compelled to discharge it. As Schachter’s experiments have demonstrated, when human beings perceive danger, they experience feelings of anxiety which stimulate the desire to affiliate with other human beings.\textsuperscript{51} This inter-personal affiliation then reduces anxiety, and in socio-military contexts, it enhances morale, endurance, psychological


resilience, and small-unit cohesion, thereby enabling the soldier to withstand challenges which would break an unaffiliated combatant.\textsuperscript{52}

For the combatant, then, affiliation offers profound protection against psychological breakdown. Given time and social stability, the vast majority of modern Western soldiers affiliate easily with their peers,\textsuperscript{53} yet, the operation of individual replacement, individual rotation and the constant reassignments which resulted from the M.O.S. system effectively denied the American infantryman the same quality of opportunity.\textsuperscript{54} Instead, he operated in a social environment characterised by chronic personnel turbulence, which revealed its deleterious effects most graphically during the war from which, tellingly, the very concept of PTSD is derived: Vietnam.\textsuperscript{55} There, the operation of individual rotation and individual replacement resulted in a never-ending sequence of inexperienced officers to lead an ever-changing collection of troops whose incessant rotation and replacement inhibited affiliation precisely where it was needed most: in combat.\textsuperscript{56} Naturally, such a social environment was perfect for the proliferation


\textsuperscript{53} See above, Section 2.1, n.28, with additional discussion in Kellet, \textit{Combat Motivation}, p.42, p.123, p.320; Stouffer \textit{et al.}, \textit{Studies in Social Psychology II}, pp.278-80, and for one particularly swift example, see McManus, \textit{The Deadly Brotherhood}, p.280.

\textsuperscript{54} See above, Section 2.1, n.29-36.

\textsuperscript{55} See above, Section 1.1, n.13.

of PTSD/CSI, and unfortunately for the American soldier, this profound propensity was further exacerbated by his tactical environment.

In combat, the affiliative desire generated by intense fear produces an irresistible longing for the psychological support offered by the close physical proximity of other human beings,\(^\text{57}\) the most visible expression of which is the irrational tendency of modern troops to ‘bunch’ under fire.\(^\text{58}\) Since this increases the lethal effects of both explosive and automatic weapons, modern infantry tactics require troops to maintain their personal intervals, and when under effective enemy fire, to seek cover and concealment.\(^\text{59}\) This offers effective protection against enemy weapons, yet, as each soldier goes to ground, his unit, no matter how cohesive, is transformed into a collection of mutually isolated individuals who engage their enemy alone, not only denied the comfort offered by the close physical proximity of their peers but actually segregated from them, and therefore bereft of the benefits offered by their protective presence. This tactical environment, then, virtually ensured that the American infantryman was psychologically most vulnerable precisely at the point of severest psychological stress.\(^\text{60}\)

Worse still, this psychological vulnerability was further enhanced by the technological environment in which the American infantryman operated. This presented the infantryman with a range of threats, to which, as Lazarus demonstrated, he could


\(^{59}\) See, for instance, the British Army’s No.2 Section Battle Drill, reproduced in *The Volunteer’s Pocket Book*, p.111; cf. G. Bransby, *Her Majesty’s Vietnam Soldier* (London, 1992), p.13, with Section 2.1, ns.37-8, Section 2.2, n.58.

respond in two very different ways, either taking direct action to remove or escape the threat, or, if this was not possible, by taking palliative action to reduce its stressful effects through denial, drugs, alcohol or humour.\footnote{R. Lazarus, \textit{Psychological Stress and the Coping Process} (New York, 1966), with a good overview of this theory outlined in W. Buskist, N. Carlson and G. Martin, \textit{Psychology}, (London, 2004), pp.723-4.} Obviously, the type of response adopted by the infantryman is largely determined by two variables, namely the kind of threat facing him and his personal capacity to counter it. Thus, for instance, the infantryman can employ direct action against other troops, that is to say, by killing, suppressing or breaking contact with them, but he is forced to rely on palliative action when under artillery bombardment, since his personal weapon cannot be employed against a target ten or more kilometres distant from his own position.\footnote{See, esp. Holmes, \textit{Acts of War}, pp.28-30, with Section 2.1, ns.37-8, and Section 2.2, n.59.}

This distinction is, of course, important because direct action removes the threat, and in consequence, it is psychologically benign. In contrast, palliative action leaves the combatant in contact with the noxious agent, and as a result, it is psychologically malignant.\footnote{Bourke, \textit{An Intimate History of Killing}, p.159, pp.248-9; Holmes, \textit{Acts of War}, pp.28-30, pp.139-40, pp.211-12, pp.230-2, p.255, p.261; J. Keegan, \textit{The Face of Battle: A Study of Agincourt, Waterloo and the Somme} (London, 1976), pp.70-1; Kellet, \textit{Combat Motivation}, p.256, p.277, p.300; F. Richardson, \textit{Fighting Spirit: A Study of the Psychological Factors in War} (London, 1978), p.53; Shephard, \textit{A War of Nerves}, pp.33-51; Watson, \textit{War on the Mind}, pp.154-6; Wilson, \textit{The Anatomy of Courage}, p.38. The obvious exception to this dichotomy is where direct action involves killing, in which case the psychological benefit derived from the removal of the threat is potentially tainted by the moral transgression entailed thereby (see Section 2.2, n.50).} This explains why, during World War Two, as Stouffer and his colleagues discovered, American soldiers found the lethal threat presented by enemy crew-served weapons, such as MG34s and 42s, reasonably manageable, because they could respond with direction action, but they were intensely fearful of enemy artillery and air support, precisely because the only real response they had to this kind of threat was palliation.\footnote{Stouffer \textit{et al.}, \textit{Studies in Social Psychology II}, p.83, pp.232-41.}

Naturally, this enhanced the American soldier’s psychological vulnerability, because,
against the most lethal threats he faced, the only response available to him was psychologically toxic.

This vulnerability was further aggravated by his extended exposure to combat. Typically well trained and equipped, and supported by a sophisticated logistical apparatus, he was able and often expected to maintain contact with the enemy for many months at a time. In addition, his ability to conduct operations during the hours of darkness ensured that the progressive exhaustion he experienced consequent to the physical and mental demands of extended campaigning were further compounded by sleep deprivation, which, as psychologists recognise, is a toxic combination which lowers the soldier’s mental resilience and intensifies his vulnerability to psychological breakdown.

The American soldier, therefore, demonstrated a profound propensity for PTSD/CSI as a result of a convergence of historically-specific factors. Firstly, the Christianised norms and values he took to the battlefield ensured that the successful performance of his battlefield role was psychologically toxic. Secondly, his social environment reduced or even denied him the psychological benefits of protective affiliation. Thirdly, his tactical environment robbed him of the comfort he would otherwise have derived from the physical proximity of his peers and forced him to face his enemy alone, isolated and psychologically exposed. Fourthly, his technological environment presented him with threats which frequently required psychologically harmful responses, and the logistical and technological support he received during

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65 See above, Section 2.1, n.40.
operations often compelled him to face those threats in an exhausted, sleep deprived and psychologically vulnerable condition. How then does this situation compare to that faced by the Athenian hoplite?

3.1. The Athenian Hoplite and his Environment

Like the American soldier, the Athenian hoplite carried into battle with him a highly distinctive set of norms and values. Unlike those influenced by Christianity, however, these were profoundly pugnacious. The explanation for this, of course, lies in the peculiar geo-political structure of Classical Greece, where a thin veneer of cultural unity overlay an aggressive agglomeration of small, fiercely independent and mutually antagonistic poleis. In this singular environment, war, which the Greeks accepted as a legitimate tool of interstate relations, proliferated unconstrained by enforceable international laws or effective methods of conflict resolution. Consequently, since the

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sovereignty and survival of his polis was secured by the warrior, the Greeks held non-martial aspects of manhood secondary to battlefield bravery,\(^{71}\) which they considered an unqualified social good that both defined a man and determined his social worth.\(^{72}\)

Naturally, as Athenian society was profoundly performative,\(^{73}\) a warrior had to demonstrate rather than merely declare his bravery,\(^{74}\) either by dying on the battlefield,\(^{75}\) or by performing creditably in combat and earning the acclaim of those who witnessed his creditable conduct.\(^{76}\) Accordingly, for the Athenians, war was more than a means of

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\(^{74}\) Xen. *Symp.* VIII.43; Lyc. I.104; Lys. XVIII.24, XXX.26; Xen. *Hell.* VII.1.21, 4.32.


defending or advancing the interests of Athens, it was a rite of passage which guarded the boundary between adolescence and manhood.\textsuperscript{77}

Of course, although armed conflict was embedded in the Athenian kosmos, the Athenians were not blind to the allure of peace: they enjoyed both its benefits and its tranquillity, and they recognised that since war entailed destruction, loss and sorrow, it should be avoided where possible. Nevertheless, despite this recognition, it is striking that expressions of humanistic sentiment are not only relatively infrequent in Athenian discourse, but most were generated by the Peloponnesian War, and those that were not are completely overshadowed by the dominant orthodoxy which fully acknowledged the human cost of war but wholeheartedly embraced it nonetheless.\textsuperscript{78}

Again, this is easy to explain. Athens was an interventionist imperial powerhouse which ruthlessly deployed the institution of war to compete for dominance in one of the harshest geo-political environments in history.\textsuperscript{79} Unsurprisingly, since it formed the foundation upon which Athenian greatness was built, the Athenians venerated war,\textsuperscript{80} and


not just as an abstract concept, but also as a tangible human experience reduced to its three most basic components: fighting, killing and dying, a triumvirate which together forms the most brutal distillation of war: combat.

For the Athenians, the ability to fight in close combat was the highest and most glorious expression of the masculine ideal.81 Similarly, the desired end result of that engagement, the death of the opponent, was also something eagerly embraced. Such hardheartedness stems, in no small part, from a principle central to Athenian culture, namely that of helping friends and harming enemies, a doctrine not only deeply internalised by Athenian men, but also one they felt obliged to obey.82 This exerted such normative force that Athenian men felt compelled to respond violently to their enemies, even if they were fellow citizens, with whom they were ideally expected to collaborate.83

Naturally, external enemies invited not collaboration but elimination, and so on the
battlefield, lethal violence was not only morally unambiguous, it was also utterly unconstrained.\(^{84}\)

The Athenians, however, did not only kill their enemies, they were also killed by them, and so many men would have witnessed the deaths of their comrades at close hand on more than one occasion.\(^{85}\) Yet, whilst such losses were lamented,\(^{86}\) the Athenians nevertheless chose to construe death in combat not as a premature end, but as a timely culmination.\(^{87}\) Accordingly, at Athens, the war dead enjoyed a special social significance. Having demonstrated their unimpeachable courage they reflected undying glory on both state and surviving family,\(^{88}\) and in return for their sacrifice, they escaped mortality, and as something close to heroes, they were immortalised by inscriptions, and annually honoured by the spectacular state funeral Athens held for her fallen.\(^{89}\) Thus, for the Athenians, death, far from dimming the bright glory of combat, was instead its most glorious aspect.

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\(^{84}\) See above, Section 3.1, n.82.

\(^{85}\) For instance, in Aetolia in 426 BC (Thuc. III.94.1-98.5), Delion in 424 BC (Thuc. IV.89.1-101.2) and of course, on Sicily, in 413 BC (Thuc. VII.83.1-85.4). Given that the Military Participation Ratio (for which see S. Andreski, \textit{Military Organization and Society} (London, 1968)) was so high at Athens, such experiences would have been particularly widespread.

\(^{86}\) Dem. LX.37; Lys. II.71; Thuc. II.34.4, 44.1-46.2.


\(^{88}\) Hdt. I.30.3-5; Dem. LX.37; Eur. \textit{Tro.} 400-2; Lyc. I.47-8; Thuc. II.41.4-43.4, with Section 3.1, n.87.

These bellicose views also received religious amplification. Admittedly, Ares, who personified the more sinister aspects of war, appears to have revolted the Greeks. Furthermore, religious sentiments, by underpinning the respect normally accorded to temples, truces, heralds, holy days and enemy dead, undoubtedly offered a welcome degree of amelioration. Nevertheless, there is no hint of pacifism in Greek religion, and the gods with whom men communed, usually through the medium of animal sacrifice, during which, tellingly, the victim had its throat cut with an edged weapon, were often warriors themselves, and as such, they both approved of the institution of war and accepted its utility in interstate relations. As a result, for the Greek warrior, the gods were a potential source of support, and if their favour could be obtained by means of offerings and promises, they could be induced to work for him and against his enemies.

This ensured that the Greek warrior’s relationship with his gods was both profound and pitiless, as two particularly grim examples offered by Xenophon demonstrate. In the first, he recounts how the Athenians promised to sacrifice a goat to Artemis for every Persian they killed at Marathon. The goddess, however, was so generous that the slaughter of Persians outstripped the supply of animals, and although the Athenians subsequently sacrificed by annual instalments of five hundred goats, their blood-debt was so great that, according to Xenophon, it was still being paid nearly a hundred years after it had been incurred.\(^97\) In the second, even more dreadful example, Xenophon describes an awful Spartan massacre of corralled and utterly helpless enemies, which, in his view, was not only something that a Greek warrior might legitimately pray for, but its successful execution, in this instance, signified by ‘heaps of corpses’, could actually be considered a ‘gift of heaven’.\(^98\)

Although shocking to a modern reader, Xenophon’s ruthless religious Weltanschauung is entirely understandable. His formative years had been spent in the shadow of his city’s patron, Athena, the warrior goddess \textit{par excellence}. Her citizens paraded their military power in her honour during her festival, the Panathenaea.\(^99\) They

\(^{96}\) Dem. XVIII.324; Thuc. I.118.3, also Hdt. VIII.64.1-2; Thuc. I.86.5, 123.1-2; Xen. \textit{Anab.} III.2.10, IV.3.8-15, V.2.24, \textit{Cyrop.} VII.1.11, \textit{Ec.} V.19-20, \textit{Hell.} IV.4.2-3, 12, VI.4.7-8, VII.2.21, 5.9-10, 13, 26, \textit{Mem.} II.1.32-3; Lissarrague, ‘The World of the Warrior’, p.42.

\(^{97}\) Xen. \textit{Anab.} III.2.10-14; cf. Hdt. VI.117.1. For similar examples, see Xen. \textit{Anab.} III.2.9, IV.8.25 and Diod. Sic. XIII.102.2.

\(^{98}\) Xen. \textit{Hell.} IV.4.12 (trans. C. Brownson); cf. § VII.1.32-2, with \textit{Cyrop.} VII.1.11-13, also Thuc. I.106.1-2.

depicted her, in Athenian art, as the personification of Athenian martial virtue, standing both with and for the Athenian hoplite, not only fighting at his side, but also celebrating his victories and grieving for his losses. Most revealingly, they portrayed her, in the warrior departure scenes often found on Attic pots, displacing the hoplite’s wife or mother in order to assist him while he armed himself for battle against those hostile to her polis.

Certainly, then, the norms and values the Athenian hoplite carried with him into battle were strikingly different to those of the American infantryman, and so too was the social environment in which he fought. As a convergence of evidence demonstrates, the Athenian hoplite mobilised, deployed and fought alongside his fellow demesmen. This is significant because the deme, the smallest subdivision of the Athenian body-politic,


was also by far the most socially cohesive.\textsuperscript{104} Most were small, rather internally-focused face-to-face communities of whose members were religiously, economically, politically and socially integrated.\textsuperscript{105} As a consequence, affiliation amongst demesmen was so profound and normative\textsuperscript{106} that any damage to this affilative relationship was, for the unfortunate demesmen concerned, not merely transgressive, it was actually shameful.\textsuperscript{107}

The tactical environment in which these men fought was also very different. The Athenian hoplite was a heavy infantryman who sacrificed speed and agility in order to maximise his capacity for close-quarters combat. To protect himself from troops, such as cavalry and light infantry, whose capacity for tactical mobility surpassed his own, he fought in a phalanx, a close-order formation predicated on mutual protection and tactical interdependency.\textsuperscript{108} Insofar as its table of organisation can be reconstructed, the Athenian phalanx seems to have been subdivided by ten medium-sized subunits, called \textit{taxeis}, with each \textit{taxis} in turn subdivided by an unknown number of smaller units called \textit{lochoi}.\textsuperscript{109} As the evidence suggests, demesmen were assigned to the same \textit{lochos}, and deployed in tactically distinct files of men, usually eight deep, laterally arranged to produce eight

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Aristot. \textit{Pol.} IV.1297b; Dem. III.17; Eur. \textit{Her.} 190-4; Plut. \textit{Arist.} XVIII.3, \textit{Mor.} 220a; Thuc. I.63.1-3, III.108.1-3, IV.126.1-6, V.66.1-4, 69.1, 71.1; Tyrt. X-XI; Xen. \textit{Hell.} IV.2.18-19, V.1.12, VII.5.22; \textit{Mem.} III.1.7, with Section 1.2, n.21.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
serried ranks. Consequently, when the Athenian hoplite met his enemy, he did so surrounded by and in close order with his comrades.110

The technological environment in which the Athenian hoplite fought, which was largely determined by muscle-powered weapons, was also highly distinctive.111 As he discharged his main tactical duty, to close with and kill enemy hoplites, the principal threat the Athenian hoplite faced was from the stabbing spears and slashing swords of similarly armed and equipped opponents.112 Moreover, since he was normally protected by friendly cavalry and light infantry during deployment, the advance to contact and whilst in contact with the enemy, if he was victorious, the weapons wielded by enemy hoplites were the only threat he would face on the battlefield.113 However, if he was ineffectively screened by supporting arms, or if that protective screen was dispersed or his own phalanx atomised by defeat, he might find himself exposed to the javelins thrown by enemy cavalry and light infantry, as well as the sling stones and arrows of enemy slingers and archers.114

In comparison to the modern infantryman, then, the range of threats faced by the Athenian hoplite was relatively restricted, and so too was the logistical and technological

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110 See above, Section 3.1, n.103.


114 See above, Section 3.1, n.113. This explains why most hoplites were killed during the pursuit, for which see Thuc. VI.69.1-3; Plat. Lach. 181a-b, 189b, Laws XII.961e-962a, Symp. 221a-c; Plut. Alc. VII.3.
support he received. Typically, he mobilised with only a few days self-supplied rations,\textsuperscript{115} and after they were consumed, he was forced to live by purchasing food from nearby markets when in neutral or friendly territory, and by plunder when in that of the enemy.\textsuperscript{116} Accordingly, since he could live by plunder only when enemy crops were ripe, extended operations in enemy territory, such as those conducted by the Athenians on Sicily, were difficult to sustain. In addition, without the technological aids required for the amplification of ambient light, night operations, like the disastrous Athenian attack on Epipolae, were extremely risky, and therefore also comparatively rare.\textsuperscript{117}

### 3.2. The Athenian Hoplite’s Susceptibility to PTSD/CSI

It seems obvious, therefore, that the Athenian hoplite entered combat with a historically-specific set of norms and values, and that he operated in a historically-specific social, tactical and technological environment. What is not obvious, however, is that his pre-battle socialisation and every aspect of his environment combined to produce a historically-specific resistance to PTSD/combat stress injury.

Clearly, the religiously amplified and militarised norms and values internalised by the Athenian hoplite were stunningly congruent with his tactical role, which was to close with and kill his enemy. Consequently, he did not require re-socialisation prior to active service since he was, from childhood, continually conditioned for combat.\textsuperscript{118} Thus, instead of regretting the killing of his enemies, the Athenian hoplite gloried in their

\textsuperscript{116} Thuc. II.101.5, IV.6.1; VI.44.1-4, 50.1-2, VIII.95.4, with Anderson, Military Theory, pp.43-66; W. Pritchett, The Greek State at War, Part I (Berkeley, 1971), pp.30-52; van Wees, Greek Warfare, pp.102-8.
\textsuperscript{117} See above, Section 3.1, n.116, also L. Foxhall, ‘Farming and Fighting in Ancient Greece’ in J. Rich and G. Shipley (eds.), War and Society in the Greek World (London, 1995), pp.134-45. For the operations conducted during the Sicilian Campaign, see Thuc. VI.64.1-72.5, 96.1-97.5, 100.1-3, VII.5.1-4, 6.1-4, 43.1-45.2, 75.1-86.5, and for the difficulty and danger inherent to operations at night, see esp. Thuc. VII.44.2-45.2.
\textsuperscript{118} See above, Section 3.1, ns.81-102.
deaths. Xenophon, for instance, describes how, at the point when an enemy formation breaks and close-quarters combat gives way to the slaughter of fleeing and panic-stricken men, the emotion typically experienced by pursuing hoplites was unbridled joy. Furthermore, he adds, the pride men take in their own personal tally of kills tempts so many to exaggerate that their boastful claims exceed the actual body count.\(^{119}\) The same feelings are also unambiguously expressed in a famous epitaph, to Pythion of Megara. That claims Pythion was a good man because of his capacity to help his friends and harm his enemies, which he apparently demonstrated by helping to save three Athenian taxeis, which had been cut off near his homeland, probably in 446 BC, and by personally killing seven men in close-quarters combat. As Dover perceptively observes, the fact that, according to the inscription, Pythion then entered the underworld ‘having brought sorrow to no one among all the men who dwell on the earth’\(^{120}\) demonstrates that the sorrow of enemies was not merely inconsequential, it was actually beyond reflective consideration.\(^{121}\)

The successful performance of his battlefield role, therefore, was not psychologically toxic to the Athenian hoplite, nor was he forced to perform it without the full support his social environment. On the contrary, he mobilised, deployed and fought together with his fellow demesmen, and so, unlike the American infantryman, whose military service entailed the ongoing disruption of his social environment, the Athenian hoplite met his enemy surrounded by the men of own cohesive community whose

\(^{119}\) Xen. Hiero II.15-16.

\(^{120}\) IG P 1353/ML 51/Fornara 101/Tod 41 (trans. K. Dover); cf. Diod. Sic. XII.5-7; Plut. Per. XXII.1-3; Thuc. I.114.1-115.1.

protective affiliation both shielded him from the corrosive effects of apprehension and enhanced his psychological resilience.\(^{122}\)

This psychological resilience was further reinforced by the Athenian hoplite’s tactical environment, which virtually ensured the close physical proximity that combatants crave. Unlike the American infantryman, who sought safety in dispersion and often met his enemy isolated from his peers, the Athenian hoplite sought salvation in close order, and consequently, when he met his enemy, he was able to do so whilst deriving the maximum comfort from the close physical proximity of his surrounding comrades.\(^{123}\)

Finally, the Athenian hoplite’s psychological resilience was further enhanced by the technological environment in which he operated. Two aspects of this environment are especially notable. The first is that during conventional operations, the main threats he faced, that is those presented by other warriors armed with muscled-powered weapons, could be countered by the most psychologically benign Lazarus response, namely direct action. Specifically, during main force encounters, the Athenian hoplite could eliminate the threat he faced from enemy hoplites by closing with and killing them or, if overmatched, he could break contact under the cover of friendly cavalry and light infantry.\(^{124}\) Indeed, even during a tactical worst case scenario, in which his own phalanx was atomised and relentlessly pursued by more tactically mobile troops, the only option

\(^{122}\) See above, Section 3.1, ns.103-10; cf. Section 2.1, ns.28-36, Section 2.2, ns.51-6.

\(^{123}\) See above, Section 3.1, ns.108-10; cf. Section 2.1, ns.37-8, Section 2.2, ns.57-60.

\(^{124}\) See above, Section 1.2, n.21, also Section 3.1, ns.112-13.
available to the hoplite, uncontrolled flight, usually facilitated by the abandonment of the shield, was itself a form of direct action.¹²⁵

The second notable aspect of the technological environment is the limited duration in which the Athenian hoplite had to cope with the stresses and strains of the ancient battlefield. Main force encounters were mercifully brief, and in the absence of sophisticated logistical support, the Athenian hoplite was not typically expected to conduct extended operations, nor was he, without the ability to amplify ambient light, usually required to fight during the hours of darkness.¹²⁶ Admittedly, because the Greeks generally lacked the technology for breach and the will to storm, siege operations, normally conducted by circumvallation, did entail continuous contact with the enemy and, in consequence, such operations undoubtedly required a psychologically toxic Lazarus response, namely palliation.¹²⁷ Nevertheless, during conventional operations the Athenian hoplite was largely protected against progressive exhaustion and sleep deprivation, and all the subsequent psychological vulnerabilities entailed thereby.¹²⁸

The Athenian hoplite, therefore, was profoundly protected against PTSD/CSI as a result of a convergence of historically-specific factors. Firstly, the martial norms and values he took to the battlefield ensured that the successful performance of his battlefield role was not psychologically harmful. Secondly, his social environment allowed him to receive all the benefits that protective affiliation could provide. Thirdly, his tactical

¹²⁶ See above, Section 3.1, ns.115-17, with the comparative brevity of combat discussed in Schwartz, *Reinstating the Hoplite*, pp.201-22.
¹²⁸ See above, Section 3.1, ns.115-17, Section, 3.2, n.126.
environment almost guaranteed him all the comfort he could derive from the physical proximity of his peers. Fourthly, his technological environment enabled him to confront the threats he faced during conventional operations with the most psychologically benign response, and to face those threats with his psychological resilience largely unaffected by the insidious effects of exhaustion or sleep deprivation.

4. Conclusion

The American infantryman and the Athenian hoplite both performed the same tactical role, and this sometimes tempts even the most impressive modern scholars to read evidence in way that equates their experiences. Nevertheless, despite the tactical similarity of these combatants, it is clear that the norms and values they carried into combat, and the social, tactical and technological environments in which they fought, were both historically-specific and radically divergent. Furthermore, it would appear that these historically-specific and radically divergent circumstances left the American infantryman critically vulnerable to PTSD/CSI whilst the Athenian hoplite was effectively immunised against the same risk. In Popperian terms, then, the Athenian hoplite is a black swan. Consequently, no matter how many white swans are marshalled in support of the universalist position, it seems that Donovan and his academic admirers are mistaken: the soldier is not, and indeed, can never be, universal.
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