Politics and Religion (2023), **16**, 180–196
doi:10.1017/S1755048322000190

CAMBRIDGE
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ARTICLE

Love and the Winter: C.S. Lewis, Nigel Biggar, and Marc LiVecche on Enemy Love

Jason Lepojärvi

Senior Research Fellow at IFES Finland, and Lecturer in Theology and Literature at The Davenant Institute, 1301 Lakewood Dr, Sudbury, Ontario, P3E 6H9 Canada
Corresponding author: Jason Lepojärvi, email: jlepojarvi@thorneloe.ca

(Received 5 October 2021; revised 26 March 2022; accepted 27 April 2022)

Abstract
In this paper, I tackle a difficult question about "enemy love," with C.S. Lewis as a primary guide. In the Christian political tradition, can the command to "love thy enemy" be reconciled with the military task of killing one's opponent in war? After defining love, enemy, and enemy love, I move on to violence, particularly lethal violence. I disagree with perceptive contemporary Christian political ethicists Nigel Biggar and Marc LiVecche insofar as they argue that the killing of one's enemy can be "an expression of love" *towards them*. Such language obscures its moral ambiguity and is strictly speaking false. One may perhaps love one's enemy despite killing them, not by killing them. Lewis's conceptual distinction between "absolute" and "relative" love helps to untangle the knotty nature and limits of enemy love.

Keywords: pacifism; just war; C.S. Lewis; Nigel Biggar; love; war

> "I have often thought to myself how it would have been if, when I served in the first world war, I and some young German had killed each other simultaneously and found ourselves together a moment after death. I cannot imagine that either of us would have felt any resentment or even any embarrassment. I think we might have laughed over it."
> —C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Chapter 7, "Forgiveness"

> "[S]afely dead and not quite damned."
> —C.S. Lewis, letter to his brother on September 18, 1939

Introduction: Loving in Wintertime

The Shelling of Mainila is a twentieth-century conspiracy theory. In 1939, Stalin issued a series of ultimata to Finland. The Finns said "No." So, on November 26,

The author would like to thank the following gracious colleagues, friends, and critics who contributed to this essay in meaningful ways: Simo Frestadius, Simon Howard, Michael Ward, Ashley Moyse, David Ratz, and three anonymous reviewers.

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048322000190 Published online by Cambridge University Press

1939, a border incident was arranged near the Mainila outpost. Finnish guns, claimed Stalin, had fired shells at innocent Russian border patrol troops—an allegation believed by no one outside, or possibly inside, the Kremlin. The so-called Winter War between Finland and Russia would last only thirteen wintry weeks.[1] It was not the first time Russia had invaded one of its smaller neighbors, nor would it be the last.

In England, C.S. Lewis—the famous literary scholar and World War I veteran—had been delighted over Finland's early success: he followed the campaign intently (Lewis 2004*a*, 311, 337, 350, 836). Why did this Oxford don who rarely read the news care so much about Nordic miseries? Lewis had what he called a "bent to 'Northern' things" (2004*a*, 171). He loved the *Kalevala* and was enchanted by the composer Sibelius: "Very, very *Northern*: he makes me think of birch forests & moss and salt-marshes" (2004*a*, 175). Lewis's Finnish sympathies help us to understand his sometimes-unflattering words about Russian soldiers and Russian imperialism. Joseph Stalin—or "Uncle Joe" as Lewis sometimes called him (2004*b*, 178)—seemed particularly unlovable to him (2004*a*, 408).

Lewis's nuanced thoughts about our subject—the nature and limits of enemy love—are recorded in his letters, essays, and books.[2] Though Lewis found war "an odious necessity" (1984, 188), he warned against demonizing one's opponents (2004*a*, 391). Consider, for example, his hope that if he and a German soldier had killed each other simultaneously and met a moment after death, "I cannot imagine that either of us would have felt any *resentment* or even any *embarrassment*. I think we might have *laughed over* it" (2001, 119, emphasis added). Behind such optimism was his belief in the nobility of death for a good cause (beyond even this world) but also first-hand experiences and stories of outbreaks of humanity even during combat, such as the now-famous Christmas truce of 1914.[3]

Political scientist Robert Axelrod's *The Ethic of Cooperation* (2006) begins with a discussion on how the structure of World War I's trench warfare in particular encouraged such outbreaks of humanity. But cooperation is by no means unique to trench warfare. In her study *Conspiring with the Enemy* (2019), U.S. Naval War College professor Yvonne Chiu identifies, categorizes, and analyzes examples of the ethic of cooperation between enemies before, during, and after combat. Enemies have often collaborated to establish formal and informal practices to fight "fairly," to minimize damage to certain classes of people, and to end war quickly. All of this happens despite and sometimes while enemies try to kill one another. What is new is the gradual codification and systematization of these practices and principles into international law, conventions, and accompanying institutions (Chiu 2019, 23, 31).

How far can we stretch the language of such ethics? Can we meaningfully speak of loving the enemy? In this paper, I will ask, and propose an answer, to a difficult question about enemy love, leaning on Lewis as my primary guide. The British General Sir Hugh Beach who participated in the Normandy invasion has called the question "the dilemma of the Christian soldier": "How to reconcile the dominical injunction to 'love your enemies' (Matt. 5:44) with the military task of defeating, and where necessary killing, your opponent in war" (2015, 280)? More pointedly: Can I love my enemy and kill him? Despite the "Christian" designator, this is a perennially meaningful question for people of other faiths or no faith, as well.

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Ironically symptomatic of the lack of careful scholarly attention this question has received is General Beach's own treatment of it in "Can a Soldier Love His Enemy?" (2015). After raising the question at the outset, he discusses the importance of ethical training of soldiers and lists some "rules of engagement" to minimize unnecessary violence, before closing and leaving the reader with the original question left unanswered: "Whether you rate it as love I leave to you" (2015, 286). Religious studies professor James Kellenberger's otherwise worthy study of love in religion, *The Asymptote of Love: From Mundane to Religious to God's Love* (2018), completely omits any discussion of enemy love.[4] *Modern Theology*'s special edition "Love Your Enemy: Its Political Significance" (Barringer and Long 2020) fares better but never tackles the question head-on.[5]

A political ethicist who does tackle it head-on is Nigel Biggar, the Regius Professor of Moral and Pastoral Theology at the University of Oxford: his article "In Defence of War" (2015) develops ideas first presented in his eponymous book *In Defence of War* (2013). The best treatment of this subject viz. Lewis in particular is U.S. Naval Academy's Leadership Research Fellow Marc LiVecche's "C.S. Lewis, War, and the Christian Character" (2019), a study first presented at the Oxford University C.S. Lewis Society.[6] Both Biggar and LiVecche make several pertinent points, and I can follow them much—but not all—of the way.

Lewis himself was personally quite fond of the season of winter. But in his poems and especially in his classic *The Chronicles of Narnia*, winter is a metaphor for circumstances most unfavorable: "Always winter and never Christmas; think of that!" (Lewis 2004*c*, 118). Or always Winter War and never Christmas truce; think of *that*. So, how do we love in the winter? How do we love when the sky is dark and the days are short, when the forests are frozen and the marshes are martial, when our fingers and our hearts are numb?

I begin by defining "love," "enemy," and "enemy love." I then turn to Lewis's general views on war and pacifism, which are informed by both politics and religion. This will put us in a good position to address the main theme, the compatibility of love and war, and how each might qualify the other in important ways. Finally, we finish with a discussion on the enemy's wellbeing or flourishing. Can it ever be in someone's best interest to suffer injury or death? Insufficient ethical precision has often obscured the moral ambiguity in the act of taking a life. Lewis's distinction between "relative" and "absolute" love will prove helpful in untangling some of the ethical and practical knots involved.

A Working Definition of Enemy Love

It is impossible to solve problems of "enemy love" before we define "enemy" and "love." And as so often happens, defining words half answers questions. Let us begin with love.

Lewis's famous treatise on love, *The Four Loves* (1960), discusses various "elements," "types," and "levels" of love. The "four" types of love—Affection, Friendship, Eros, and Charity—do not exhaust love. The book opens with a discussion of what Lewis calls the three "elements" of love—need-love, gift-love, and appreciative love—which permeate all four types of love. Lewis also includes sections on love of animals and love of country. The compatibility between enemy love and

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killing is not discussed directly. But Lewis argues that healthy patriotic love must lead to the recognition that people from other places rightly love their homes, too. The natural stance towards the "other" is one of goodwill. "Of course patriotism of this kind is not in the least aggressive. It asks only to be let alone. It becomes militant only to protect what it loves. In any mind which has a pennyworth of imagination it produces a good attitude towards foreigners" (Lewis 1960, 34).

As I have argued more carefully elsewhere (Lepojärvi 2015, 68–71; Lepojärvi 2022), Lewis nowhere gives a sufficiently clear definition of *love itself*, the common denominator of all loves, but an approximate essence of love can be extracted from *The Four Loves* and his many other writings on the subject. For the purpose of this paper, I find this definition useful: *Love is the appreciative and responsive commitment to the other's wellbeing insofar as possible and permissible*. As such, the virtue or skill of love has not just *attitudinal* but also *practical* and *relational* aspects. You can fail in one aspect of love without necessarily failing in the others, and vice versa. In the absolute fullest sense, however, what love "says" to the beloved—be they friend, family, or foe—is effectively: "It is good that you exist! I will involve myself in your wellbeing insofar as I am able, and I welcome your love in return."

If this is love, what, then, is an enemy? In the Christian tradition, everyone is your "neighbor" but some people are easier to love than others. Enemies are obviously in the "difficult" camp, but not all difficult people are our enemies. An enemy-neighbor is a difficult-neighbor whom it is difficult to love for a specific reason. The two things that arguably most threaten loving one's enemies are resentment and the prospect of violence or injury. It follows that our "enemy" *is someone whom we find difficult to love because we feel resentment towards them and/or they seek to injure us.* I have analyzed the nature and role of resentment in the enemy-relation elsewhere (Lepojärvi 2023); the present paper addresses the latter relation, that between love and violence.[7] One may or may not resent an enemy in this sense, but they actively threaten someone's wellbeing.

By defining both enemy and love we have as a happy by-product discovered a helpful understanding of enemy love, as well. *Enemy love is the appreciative and responsive commitment insofar as possible to the wellbeing of someone we feel resentment towards and/or who seeks to injure us*. This will be our working definition of enemy love. For confessing Christians, such as C.S. Lewis, enemy love is absolutely binding. "Love your enemies," commanded Jesus, "do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you" (Luke 6:27–8). Though a Christian duty, enemy love is not unique to Christianity. "I shall never forget my surprise," Lewis writes in *Reflections on the Psalms*, "when I first discovered that St Paul's 'If thine enemy hunger, give him bread,' etc., is a direct quotation from [Proverbs 25:21]" (Lewis 2017, 30).[8] The Christian covenant does not change the meaning or scope of love (as if, e.g., enemies were previously excluded), but Jesus reiterates the command to love and highlights that God, too, loves sinful people in this way.

I next turn to Lewis's general views on war and pacifism. This will prepare the way for our main question, which General Beach called "the dilemma of the Christian soldier." Just as readiness to die in battle might be seen as the ultimate test of fortitude, war or violence in general is possibly the ultimate test of enemy love. Are love and

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violence compatible? Can a soldier love his enemy? Can killing ever be an expression of love?

C.S. Lewis on War and Pacifism

Though optimistic about posthumous encounters between enemy combatants, Lewis was anything but blasé or enthusiastic about war. The pacifist theologian Stanley Hauerwas's critique of Lewis on war begins with a *four-page defense* of him against any such suspicion. As a survivor of World War I, says Hauerwas, Lewis had "no time for the sentimental glorification of battle" (2010, 190). Lewis even faults his own mentor G.K. Chesterton for being "enchanted" by war: he has "no idea what a battle is like" (Lewis 2000, 691). "My memories of the last war haunted my dreams for years," Lewis confessed (Lewis 2004*a*, 258). Of the six young men with whom he trained before going to war, four died and two were wounded, Lewis badly and by "friendly fire" (Duriez 2007, 79).[9] J.R.R. Tolkien, who later befriended Lewis, wrote of his similar war experience: "By 1918 all but one of my close friends were dead" (Tolkien 2007, xxvi).[10]

When another European war was imminent, the anxious Lewis wanted to "hibernate." It was worse than that: "I think death wd. [would] be much better than to live through another war," he tells his friend Dom Bede Griffiths (2004*a*, 258). He even says his goodbyes to another dear friend Owen Barfield: "[O]ur whole joint world may be blown up before the end of the week… If we are separated, God bless you, and thanks for a hundred good things I owe to you, more than I can count or weigh" (2004*a*, 232). Lewis believed that war threatened every temporal evil. And yet, to Griffiths again: "I'm not a pacifist. If its [*sic*] got to be, its [*sic*] got to be" (Lewis 2004*a*, 258). Sometimes war was an odious necessity.

Lewis's most developed views on war and pacifism are included in his two wartime essays, "Why I Am Not A Pacifist" and "The Necessity of Chivalry." As so often for Lewis, their main points were first articulated in letters. In fact, his pre-war letter to Griffiths in 1938 is almost a synopsis of both essays. It begins with "I have always believed that it is lawful for a Christian to bear arms in war when commanded by constituted authority unless he has very good reason […] for believing the war to be unjust" (Lewis 2004*a*, 233) and ends with "I cannot believe the [chivalrous] knight errant idea to be sinful" (234). Lewis believed that facts, intuition, reason, and authority all supported his view. We need not rehearse his arguments here. I mention only two points about religious authority.

First, the commandment "thou shall not kill" (the first part of the "dilemma of the Christian soldier") is, according to Lewis, not a prohibition of all violence or even all killing. It is a prohibition of murder. "*Kill* means *murder*," he says, and "when our Our Lord quotes this commandment he uses Gk *phoneuseis* (murder) not *apokteinein* (kill)" (2004*b*, 246) and not just once but "in all three accounts, Matthew, Mark, and Luke. And I am told there is the same distinction in Hebrew" (2001, 118–119). Second, Lewis takes "the dicta in the Sermon on the Mount to be prohibitions of revenge" (2004*a*, 234). When Jesus said to "turn the other cheek" he meant what he said "but with an understood reservation in favour of those obviously exceptional cases which every hearer would naturally assume to be exceptions without being told"

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(2000, 291). "Does anyone suppose," he asks a pacifist audience, "that Our Lord's hearers understood Him to mean that if a homicidal maniac, attempting to murder a third party, tried to knock me out of the way, I must stand aside and let him get his victim?" (2000, 291). In my view, Lewis's footing here is strong exegetically (what the text says), historically (its dominant interpretation in Judeo-Christian tradition), and ethically (its moral soundness irrespective of text and tradition). I have minor qualms about his views on pacifism, however.

Lewis's essay on pacifism was indeed first delivered as a paper to a pacifist audience, the Oxford Pacifist Society. He felt comfortable invoking religion because he knew many of those present were religiously motivated. And he knew this because he had long been interested in conscientious objection and had recently himself heard a paper given by a former colleague "on his experiences in his present job as a member of the tribunal for investigating conscientious objections" (Lewis 2004*a*, 344).[11] Lewis summarizes the paper in his letter to his brother (an officer in the British military) on February 11, 1940: "I was interested and relieved to hear [that] the vast majority of the objectors are perfectly sincere, and often want to be put on dangerous non combatant [*sic*] works such as mine sweeping; and also that the communists and intellectuals are a minority—most of them are Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventists, etc. Often yokels, almost inarticulate" (2004*a*, 344–345).[12]

Why was he relieved to hear this? Because of his prejudice. The "poor Adventists and Witnesses from remote Welsh pits and Northumbrian farms" are favorably contrasted with the "really contemptible figure" of the "typical intellectual Oxford communist undergraduate" (Lewis 2004*a*, 345). Legal conscientious objection, he reminds his officer brother, belonged to "that simply fantastic side of English life which has always impressed foreigners but which *we* are apt to forget" (2004*a*, 344)—and, in fact, "that sort of thing is part of what we are fighting for" (2004*a*, 345).[13] This had of course not always been so. Great Britain had entered World War I without general conscription, but when this changed in 1916, pacifists were able to register as conscientious objectors or serve as non-combatants, but were often subjected to ridicule and harassment. "We must of course respect & tolerate Pacifists," Lewis tells another correspondent, "but I think their view erroneous" (Lewis 2004*b*, 247).[14]

My issue with Lewis's views on pacifism is two-fold. The first is historical. Lewis seems ignorant of early Christian pacifism. In his letters, he calls pacifism "a v. [very] recent and local variation" (Lewis 2004*b*, 247) of Christendom and contrasts it with "the general agreement of all Christian communities except a few sects—who generally combine pacifism with other odd opinions" (Lewis 2004*a*, 233–234)—a clear reference to Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventists, and other variants quite recent in Church history. But as military ethicist Martin Cook notes, "the clear pacifist thrust of the New Testament's strong streak condemning violence and counseling nonresistance to evil" (Cook 2013, 160) has inspired Christian pacifism from the very beginning. Early Christians may or may not have been overwhelmingly pacifists, but what patristic scholar David G. Hunter has said of Christian just war thinking applies even more so to Christian pacifism: it "stand[s] in fundamental continuity with at least one strand of pre-Constantinian tradition" (Hunter 1992, 93).

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My second issue is with Lewis's logic. When he says that "history is full of useful wars as well as of useless wars" (2000, 286) and "Christendom has made two efforts to deal with the evil of war—chivalry and pacifism. Neither succeed" (2000, 768), I nod approvingly. But when he doubts "whether chivalry has such an unbroken record of failure as pacifism" (2000, 768), I must ask: How would he know? Such comparative evaluations sound hopelessly speculative. Besides, every just war is a response to an unjust war: sometimes both sides are wrong, never are both right. It follows, by logic, that history must be *fuller* of useless wars than useful ones. Moreover, every time Christian pacifism has failed to prevent an unjust war, this failure is *shared* with Christian just war thinking ("chivalry") that failed to prevent that very same war (Biggar 2013, 33), and vice versa. One might go as far as to propose a principle: Commission in unjust wars and omission from potentially just wars are shared responsibilities.

Is Lewis's comparison salvageable? By my lights, the only way to avoid possibly unfalsifiable nonsense is either (a) to emphasize quality over quantity or (b) to focus on a subset of parties involved. In other words, (a) to say that *given the outbreak of an unjust war*, chivalry can prevent or mitigate *worse* injustice than pacifism (e.g. sometimes aggressors are better resisted early[15]) or (b) that the wars of a *given* country committed to chivalry can on average be more just than unjust. Some countries may have better track records than others. There is a third alternative. Lewis was an orator who sometimes took rhetorical liberties: perhaps his comment was (c) a hyperbole not salvageable by logic at all. It was a line at the end of a newspaper letter and perhaps not intended as the substantive claim I have treated it. In any case, Lewis was not a consequentialist: comparative records alone rarely settle any position.

Mars and Venus: How Love and War Qualify Each Other

Despite these minor qualms, on the more general question about love's partial compatibility with violence and war, I tend to agree with Lewis. Can violence or killing be described as "love" in any meaningful sense? My answer will be: yes and no. I agree with Biggar that to say that war is not "fully compatible" with love means that "they are *somewhat* compatible" (2015, 198). Or as LiVecche puts it, love "*qualifies*, but does not eradicate, war" (2019, 6).

Excluding actual homicide, what does "violence" mean? Here, with Lewis, I apply the traditional minimalist definition limited to physicality and leave out modern extended meanings of the word: *Violence is using force to deter, harm, or kill a human body.*[16] The more painful, the more violent. Lewis "doubts" (2000, 586) whether war increases the chances of painful death. Even so-called "natural death is usually preceded by suffering: and a battlefield is one of the very few places where one has a reasonable prospect of dying with no pain at all" (2000, 586). Again, we can quibble over statistics and probabilities. There are worse things than pain, or violence, or war.

"It must be remembered," Lewis says, "that there are risks in both directions: if war is ever lawful, then peace is sometimes sinful" (Lewis 2000, 768). Why so? Because nonviolence can sometimes be *a failure to uphold justice* in a broken world motivated by rightly ordered love. This is a strong argument: sometimes love prefers war to

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peace. But I agree with it if by peace we mean "absence of conflict" in a grossly unjust way. The object of just war remains peace, but a better, more just one. I am thinking of what Biggar calls the "evils of *peace*" (2013, 7), "the evils, tragedies, ambiguities, risks, and uncertainties of peace" (2015, 196), such things as the preventable massacres and genocides that took place in Rwanda and Srebrenica in Bosnia. As LiVecche says, "*not* to act is also a decision requiring some degree of justification" (2019, 9). We are morally responsible for our omissions as well as our commissions.

Love does not categorically preclude violence. It can permit and even motivate it. Lewis would certainly reject what has been called "the virus of wishful thinking" (Burn 2003, 70; Biggar 2013, 9): that everybody is rational and wants what is best for the other. The anthropological fact of "sin" and historical experience contradicts this. According to Biggar, "some people cannot be talked out of grave wrong-doing and […] they must therefore be forced out of it" (2015, 194). "Courts are not the only place where justice is done; the battlefield can be another" (196). Chiu summarizes the predicament thus:

> War is not merely a counterintuitive way of resolving disputes—it is downright insane… [However,] the horrifying endeavor that is war will always be with us. No matter how much moral progress we make, the nature of humanity is such that someone will always be willing to use the final trump card of violence to settle a dispute. It is also the case that sometimes, brutality must be used in the service of justice: nonviolence can be highly effective, but only against regimes capable of feeling shame, of which there are but few. Given that war cannot be eliminated, we must try to contain it. (Chiu 2019, 200, viii)

According to Lewis, it follows that the fighting instinct is not bad per se. Sometimes it can be a duty to "encourage" it (Lewis 2001, 11).

So, I would agree with LiVecche, here approving paraphrasing the character Faramir in *The Lord of the Rings*, that "war can be an *expression* of love" (LiVecche 2019, 1). But an expression of love *towards whom*? This is more complicated. Violence can be an expression of self-love or family-love against Lewis's "homicidal maniac." It can be an expression of patriotic love against a homicidal nation. Above all, it can be an expression of love for the innocent victim-neighbor. Lewis writes: "I do not think punishment inflicted by lawful authorities for the right motives is revenge: still less, violent action in the defence of innocent people" (Lewis 2004*a*, 234). "[T]o banish the knight does not alleviate the suffering of the peasant" (Lewis 1954, 153). According to Biggar, indeed, in the Christian tradition, the paradigm of just war is not self-defense but "the rescue of the innocent" (2015, 196). Whether violence and war can be an expression of *enemy love* is a much more difficult question, which I will address soon.

We have all heard the maxim "all is fair in love and war." This is doubly false. All is not fair in war. And it is precisely love that sets limits to it. Love may permit and even motivate war, but it also qualifies it. Venus qualifies Mars.[17] The guiding principle for Christians is of course the "Golden Rule" (Matt. 7:12)—treat others as you would have them treat you. The simplistic literal interpretation is impossible. I love my back scratched, my brother hates it: scratching his back is a declaration of

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war. The Golden Rule is a guiding principle not a mathematical formula. Applied to warfare it might go something like this: "Wage war against others as you would have them wage war against you." This both limits legitimate reasons for entering war and curtails what may be done in war in the spirit of the ethic of cooperation. Political theorists speak of *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*, reasons for and methods in war, respectively.

According to Chiu (2019, 204, 222, 227), considerations of *jus ad bellum* (except self-defense) have effectively been eclipsed by *jus in bello* in contemporary discussion and international laws of war. Lewis, too, spends more time discussing the latter than the former, possibly because of his general lack of interest and aptitude in international politics, his ethical training that prioritized individual responsibility, and his own wartime experiences from the grassroot perspective of foot soldiers who vastly outnumber political leaders responsible for entering or abstaining from wars.

Love qualifies when we may enter war (*jus ad bellum*). Hauerwas summarizes Lewis's position well: Lewis "thought it should be a last resort, declared by a lawful authority, a defensive rather than an imperialistic endeavour, that the aims of the war be limited, that there be some realistic chance of success, and that there be a willingness on the part of the combatants to take responsibility for their actions so that civilians will be properly protected" (Hauerwas 2010, 192).[18]

Love also qualifies what we may do in war (*jus in bello*). Lewis explains the general principle: "lesser violence done to [an enemy or dangerous criminal] is always preferable to the greater, provided that it is equally efficient in restraining him and equally good for everyone concerned" (Lewis 2000, 286)—if you will, an "Occam's razor" with a bellicose bent. Entirely forbidden methods include murdering prisoners, bombing civilians, and so on (Lewis 2000, 768).[19] One's own moral posture is also crucial, Lewis thought. "We may kill if necessary, but we must not hate and enjoy hating" (2001, 120). Just war requires just soldiers or "knights," as Lewis calls them in "The Necessity of Chivalry." The "marbling of ferocity and meekness," as LiVecche (2019, 7) memorably summarizes this essay, protects the victim-neighbor both against external tyrants and the potential tyrant dormant in the sinful heart of the soldier himself.[20] It is here, in *jus in bello* and not *jus ad bellum*, that Christian conscientious objection comes alive to Lewis: "A man is much more certain that he ought not to murder prisoners or bomb civilians than he ever can be about the justice of a war. It is perhaps here that 'conscientious objection' ought to begin. I feel certain that one Christian airman shot for refusing to bomb enemy civilians would be a more effective martyr […] than a hundred Christians in jail for refusing to join the army" (2004*a*, 251–252).

I said above that "all is fair in love and war" is doubly false. Love limits war, but war imposes major limits on love, too. War qualifies love. Mars qualifies Venus. And this is to be expected given the qualification "insofar as possible" in our understanding of love. *Love is the appreciative and responsive commitment to the other's wellbeing insofar as possible and permissible*. War seriously limits the possibilities of love. One obvious way war qualifies love is "that it separates you from all you love" (Lewis 2000, 292). But I am thinking of something else.

War and all situations that call for violence compel us to use force and sometimes even lethal force. This sounds circular and tautologous. And it is, but consider what

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this means. I argue that *even in the best scenarios*, even when both the reasons and methods are just, the soldier that kills the enemy is primarily motivated by love for others, not for the enemy, if at all. This does not mean that the soldier cannot love the enemy at all. He can and should. It means that he loves the enemy only *insofar* as he succeeds in appreciating and responsively committing to the enemy's wellbeing *despite* killing him. The "good kill," if there is one, is the kill that *least violates absolute love*. I will try to explain.

The Law of Beneficence: An Order of Loves

Lewis says in *The Problem of Pain* that the "permanent nature of wood which enables us to use it as a beam also enables us to use it for hitting our neighbour on the head" (Lewis 2002, 24). But, in fact, he believed that what he called "the law of beneficence" sometimes actually *compels* us to use the wood for the latter purpose, too. The law of beneficence, written into human hearts and the order of things, is based on the *absolute* general law to do good to everyone, and to so order your loves and responsibilities that when you apply this law in the *relative* vicissitudes of life, conflicts of interest do not prompt you to love disorderly—that is, neglect higher loves and duties at the expense of lower.

"Every human being," Lewis says, "has an *absolute* claim on me for every service I can render them without neglecting other [i.e. higher] duties" (Lewis 2004*b*, 481, emphasis added). "Then come the laws that give certain people a prior claim on your beneficence" (2004*b*, 699). A hostile enemy's claim might be "inferior to all the other claims involved but not nonexistent" (2000, 286). "You cannot do *simply* good to *simply* Man; you must do this or that good to this or that man. [T]he law of beneficence involves not doing some good to some men at some times. […] And sooner or later it involves helping A by actually doing some degree of violence to B" (2000, 286). Why is that? Because "when B is up to mischief against A, you must either do nothing […] or you must help one against the other" (286). As already established above, doing nothing is doing something: by omission it allows the mischief to happen. There are risks in both directions.

The language of "higher" and "lower" reveals the hidden presupposition of a hierarchy of loves. For Lewis, the right order of loves means the right order of loyalties. What is this order? And how do we choose? Lewis offers no comprehensive hierarchy, no clear-cut formula, just examples of "rules" which he thinks "have never been doubted" (2000, 286). These rules or obligations are based on values and intrinsic qualities like justice, patriotism, and even species. For example, special obligation is rendered to "people to whom your beneficence is pledged by a promise (Justice), or who have already benefited you (Gratitude), or who are specially weak and pitiable (Mercy) or fellow-citizens (Patriotism) or relatives (Family Affection). They are all perfectly sound, but the last two must not be allowed to over-ride the others" (Lewis 2004*b*, 699).[21] The feeling of love, even when disordered, is not decisive: "Loving dogs more than children is a misfortune not a sin. *Acting* on that superior love for dogs—i.e. sacrificing the interests of the human in your household to the animals—is a sin" (Lewis 2004*b*, 788).

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The absolute versus relative distinction implicit in much of what has been said is explicitly unpacked in one of Lewis's letters. To underscore its relevance to our subject of enemy love, I have simply substituted the word *pain* with *violence*:

> I believe all [violence] is contrary to God's will, absolutely but not relatively. When I am taking a thorn out of my finger (or a child's finger) the [violence] is "absolutely" contrary to my will: i.e. if I could have chosen a situation without [violence] I would have done so. But I *do* will what caused [violence], relatively to the given situation: i.e. granted the thorn I prefer the [violence] to leaving the thorn where it is. A mother smacking a child wd. [would] be in the same position: she wd. [would] rather cause it this [violence] than let it go on pulling the cat's tail, but she wd. [would] like it better if no situation which demands a smack had risen. (Lewis 2004*b*, 153)

Similarly, the just soldier would like it better if no situation which demanded war would rise. If he could choose a situation without such need he would do so. As Chiu puts it: "As violent action is a means to an end, not a good in itself, if the outcome could be achieved without killing a single person, so much the better" (2019, 19).

Lewis's absolute versus relative distinction anticipates what in contemporary just war theory is called the philosophical doctrine of double effect. It distinguishes the intention of the act from the foreseen but unintended side-effects.[22] Biggar says that "[s]oldiers should never intend to kill their enemies" (2013, 14). By "intend" he means to "desire it actively" (2013, 13) as an end in itself instead of a means to a justified end. To intend an enemy's death is incompatible with loving them, but one may accept it as a foreseen and unintended side-effect of just military action. The principle of double effect is the subject of long-standing controversy.[23] I tend to accept the basic distinction, but shun the idiomatic language. Lewis's absolute versus relative distinction might alleviate some of its seeming spuriousness. "I deliberately shot him in the head, but did not intend to kill him" sounds more peculiar or disingenuous (even if technically accurate) than "In these relative circumstances, I did intend to kill him, but I absolutely wish I did not have to."

And with this, we have arrived at the last hill, which is the steepest. I have been putting off the most difficult question, but it must be faced squarely before we finish. I tried to demonstrate how love for *others* can motivate violence and in extreme cases even lethal violence. But what about love for the enemy? "How can we both love our enemy-neighbor *and* kill him?" as LiVecche asks (2019, 7). Some Christian pacifists such as Hauerwas are clear: we cannot. On the contrary, "loving enemies means not killing them" (Barringer and Long 2020, 2).

Lewis is more optimistic or at least not as pessimistic about their compatibility. "Even in the very act of fighting," he says, "I think charity (to the enemy) is not *more* endangered than in many necessary acts wh. [which] we all admit to be lawful" (2004*a*, 234). However, since the very act of combat is by definition the attempt to potentially injure or even kill the enemy and, as such, the opposite of contributing to their immediate wellbeing, I submit that for this to make any sense Lewis must here be thinking about *some* but not all aspects of love. Though war has qualified the practical wellbeing dimension of love, perhaps other more attitudinal, emotional,

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and other aspects are still possible. In short, Lewis is speaking of the possibility of relative not absolute love. If you do all that is relatively possible, you have done all you can. “Even while we kill and punish,” he thinks, “we must try to feel about the enemy as we feel about ourselves—to wish that he were not bad, to hope that he may, in this world or another, be cured: in fact, to wish his good” (2001, 120). In cases of capital punishment, it means “being sorry that the man should have done such things [that we should have to kill him], and hoping, if it is anyway possible, that somehow, sometime, somewhere he can be cured” (2001, 117).

The Enemy’s Flourishing: A Response to Biggar and LiVecche

But can it ever be in our enemy’s best and real interest for us to *kill* him? Can we imagine him turning towards us with a dying grimace or groan that basically said: “Thanks, I needed that. Thank you for contributing to my wellbeing”? No, and no. My aim here is not frivolity but dispassionate realism: I cannot think of persuasive or remotely probable real-life examples where our enemy’s best and real interest was for us to kill him. But I remain open to being corrected. In every or almost every case the answer must be “No.” If it is “good” let alone “better” for my enemy to die by my hand in battle rather than live another day and be united with his family, it is also “good” *for me as his enemy* to die by his hand instead of living another day and being united with my family. This conclusion seems absurd to me, so I reject the premise.

It is not entirely clear to me whether Lewis would agree. Perhaps Lewis might think one could love one’s enemy by killing them, or they could contribute to your prosperity by killing you. In *The Abolition of Man*, he chooses death in battle for one’s country as the “*experimentum crucis*” (2021, 30) that tests the clarity of systems of thought. Roman fathers taught their sons that it was *dulce et decorum* or “sweet and seemly” to die for their country (2021, 21). The idea of a “noble” or “glorious” death is not, of course, a uniquely Roman or Christian idea. It is seen in many traditions and texts, such as Sanskrit epic poetry, especially when compared to the alternative of participating in an unfair victory (Chiu 2019, 52, 236). But sweet, how? Glorious, to whom? Is the idea actually true for the *dead* person, or is it a useful fiction? Can it be accounted for by purely “this world” considerations?

Lewis did say “sometime, somewhere” and “in this world or another.” So perhaps he meant only *eternal* good not temporal. Does lethal force jeopardize the eternal good of my enemy-neighbor? In some questions, Lewis thought, the eternal perspective makes “[a]ll the difference in the world” (2001, 119) because “it is immortals we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit” (2000, 106)—and, we must add, sometimes kill. Again, Lewis is not fully pessimistic: he says war endangers every evil “except dishonour and final perdition” (2000, 292), echoing the language of “sweet and seemly.” He often speaks of death-by-hangman and death-by-war together: neither, he thinks, decreases our chances of peace with God. If anything, the prospect of dying *encourages* us to prepare for death (e.g. Lewis 2000, 586).[24] Screwtape, the demonic character in Lewis’s satirical *The Screwtape Letters*, puts it thus: “Men are killed in places where they knew they might be killed and to which they go, if they are at all of the Enemy’s [i.e. God’s] party, prepared” (2013, 23).

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However, in many cases, I think Lewis's optimism is unfounded. Even Screwtape acknowledged the conditional "if they are." Traditional theists—whether Jews, Christians, or Muslims—would assume that many are not, and that many wrongdoers die ill-prepared to meet their Maker. What assurance does anyone have of dying and "finding yourself safely dead and not quite damned" (Lewis 2004*b*, 278), as Lewis hoped would happen to himself?[25] Biggar says about the death penalty and (I suspect) *mutatis mutandis* about war, that killing "involves at least two evils—the cutting off of the possibility of a criminal [or soldiering] human being's (earthly) repentance and reformation and reconciliation, as well as his physical death" (2013, 52–53). Unless God successfully woos every sinner to posthumous repentance, "we must entertain the possibility that ultimate death will be the destiny of some" (2013, 53). The best a traditional theist, such as Lewis, can confidently say is that *hopefully sometimes* homicide does not jeopardize posthumous wellbeing. This is not saying much.

And this is where I must part ways with perceptive Christian ethicists like Biggar and LiVecche—and even with C.S. Lewis insofar as LiVecche correctly reads Lewis and I correctly read LiVecche. I think they take it too far and overplay their hand. Biggar believes that "lethal violence can be motivated, not at all by hatred, but by love—even for the enemy" (2015, 197). I think Biggar is wrong about the last point even according to his own minimalist definition of love as "due respect and care for persons" (197).[26] LiVecche is also too optimistic and says Lewis shows "how it is possible even to love our enemies, even to love them to death" (2019, 1). It would be more correct to say that we can love *others* to our enemy's death.

LiVecche argues that "when restraining a *wrongdoer* by forcing him to stop, by deterring him from resuming, and ideally by provoking him to think again and change his aggressive ways, we work toward the promotion of the only possibility for his true flourishing. This belongs to his own good, *even if it should cost him his very life*. It is the only way to be happy" (2019, 9, emphasis added). The key words on which much hinges are *wrongdoer* and *even if it should cost him his very life*. The wrongdoer cannot simply be replaced with an *enemy combatant*, for otherwise, by the logic of war, you as *his enemy* are also such a "wrongdoer" whose "true flourishing" and "only way to be happy" depends on being stopped by lethal force. Again, this seems nonsensical to me. Enemy combatants may or may not be morally equal,[27] but this has no bearing on whether their death is good *for them*.

It is not at all clear to me that even in cases of genuine wrongdoing their death *is* good for them. The wrongdoing in question must be very grave indeed to justify this belief. What could it be? Please excuse a terribly morbid example, but rules are tested by extremes (another *experimentum crucis*). Would I be willing to stop, say, a violent rapist in the very act of his crime by lethal force *if it were the only way to do so*? I hesitate, but I probably would. But would dying be "better" for him than to be allowed to finish his crime and live another day? I cannot fathom it would: not for him, immortal or not. I would of course hope that he could be cured in another world, but (a) I would have no assurance of this and, *most importantly*, (b) I would not pretend to be motivated by *his good*. I agree with LiVecche (2019, 11; 2021, 177) that any "interval of hesitation," as Simone Weil movingly called it (2000, 174), that might precede my act, any hope-against-hope that the aggressor would stop before I pulled the trigger, is love for him. But killing him is not. That is love for her.

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Killing is precisely that part in the enemy-relation that makes our enemy love "relative" not "absolute." We do not love our enemies to death. Such language obscures its moral ambiguity and is strictly speaking false.[28] We love our enemies to the extent that killing them *least* violates absolute love. We may perhaps love them despite killing them, not by killing them. It is precisely their death that remains outside the full expression of love for them. We say in effect: "I will kill you, but I won't torture you needlessly, and I wish you well hereafter." In absolute terms, this is not saying much, even if it is the overall greatest possible good given the relative circumstances.[29] In particularly wintry conditions Mars can qualify Venus almost beyond recognition. She is still alive but barely breathes and no longer smiles.

Conclusion

The ethics of cooperation between enemies, we remember, meant such things as collaboration to fight "fairly," to minimize damage to certain classes of people, and to end war quickly (Chiu 2019). If the line of argument developed in this paper is correct, all of that—and much more—can be viewed as an extension of "love" of the enemy *despite* the continuing effort to injure one's opponent. We may *expand* love's possibilities in warfare by establishing international laws, conventions, and above all by cultivating personal virtues that support love. But love does not eradicate war, and violence poses serious limitations on love. The act of killing itself always remains outside of the scope of what can meaningfully be called "love" for the enemy.

Enemy love is difficult, but it is not impossible. Outbreaks of humanity happen both in relationships and in war. And whether just or unjust, all wars end. Exactly three months after D-Day, Lewis wrote to his friend Sister Penelope about how difficult it was "to keep pace with the almost miraculous mercies we are receiving as a nation." He had never dreamed that it would go "quite so well" (2004*a*, 625). Finland suffered territorial losses but secured its independence. American and Russian forces met on the Elbe River on April 25, 1945, and Hitler committed suicide five days later. The unconditional surrender of Germany took effect on May 8. The war in Europe was over. Barfield, to whom the anxious Lewis had said his goodbyes, was alive. Lewis wrote to Griffiths: "I am sometimes a little awed by the burden of our favours. Every one of us has escaped by a series of Providences, some not far short of miracles" (2004*a*, 647–648).

Lewis of course believed in the afterlife and saw heaven as the final confirmation of a divine conspiracy of love that begins on earth. But if he had indeed met that young German soldier, though neither would have felt any "resentment" or "embarrassment," may I respectfully suggest that they might not have "laughed over" having just shot each other. Not at first. *Forsan et haec olim meminisse iuvabit*, says the *Aeneid* (Book 1, line 203); Lewis translates it: "Some day it will be pastime to recall this woe" (Reyes 2011, 50–51). Someday, but perhaps not the first day. Rather, I imagine they might say something like this: "I am sorry mundane circumstances prevented us from loving each other better. I am sorry I was not permitted to love you more. Now that the war is over, however, let us make up for it. Now that winter is over, let us thaw in God's love and learn to love each other perfectly and absolutely in eternity." And perhaps: "Have you seen Uncle Joe?"

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048322000190 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Conflict of Interest. None to declare.

Financial Support. None to declare.

Notes

1. For a good introduction to the Russo–Finnish War, see Trotter 2013.
2. For a recent study of Lewis's political thought, see Dyer and Watson 2016.
3. Loconte (2015, ix–x) begins his book on Lewis and Tolkien's experiences of the Great War with a short account of this Christmas truce. Lewis himself did not enter the war until age nineteen in 1917.
4. For my review of Kellenberger's study, see Lepojärvi 2021.
5. The articles represent versions of two contemporary Christian approaches in political theology, the so-called "neo-Augustinian" and "neo-Anabaptist" approaches, but they also problematize these categories (see Barringer and Long 2020, 1–7).
6. See also LiVecche's more recent general study *The Good Kill: Just War and Moral Injury* (2021). In addition to LiVecche and Biggar, two other sources are worth mentioning, among others. Martin Cook's *Issues in Military Ethics* (2013) is cognisant of many spiritual-ethical dilemmas involved in warfare (see especially chapters 9 and 13), and the Vietnam War veteran Karl Marlantes's autobiographical *What It Is Like To Go To War* (2012) is also philosophically admirably informed.
7. For a distinction between "enemy" and "adversary" in political theory, see Mouffe 2000. According to Mouffe, seeing your political opponents as "adversaries" not "enemies" means recognizing their right to defend the ideas which we combat. The object is not to "destroy" the other (15). "*Antagonism* is struggle between enemies, while *agonism* is struggle between adversaries" (16). I thank Filip Reyniers for drawing my attention to this discourse in political theory.
8. For enemy love in Judaism, see also Leviticus 19:17 and 23:4–5, and Proverbs 24:17.
9. For the most up-to-date and careful account of Lewis's wartime experiences, see Poe 2019, 171–257.
10. This is from Tolkien's "Foreword" to the second edition of *The Fellowship of the Ring*. On Tolkien's service in the Great War, see Garth 2004.
11. The colleague was Cyril Bailey, Fellow and Classics Tutor at Balliol College 1902–1939.
12. For a short reflection on World War I from an Adventist perspective, see Kaiser 2014. Besides more dangerous occupations like bomb disposal, Adventist non-combatants served as "medics, litter bearers, interpreters, cooks, train conductors, etc." (19).
13. Lewis is here ("that sort of thing") quoting Bailey's paper in (I think) an approving spirit.
14. In *Mere Christianity* Lewis puts it slightly more pointedly: "I can respect an honest pacifist, though I think he is entirely mistaken" (2001, 119).
15. This may have been Lewis's point. To an American correspondent in 1952, Lewis writes in reference to Korea: "[B]oth your country and mine have twice in our lifetime tried the recipe of appeasing an aggressor and it didn't work on either occasion: so that it seems sense to try the other way this time" (2004b, 178–179).
16. This narrow definition of violence is an example of a "simple, monolithic" conception of violence that the editors of *Modern Theology*'s special edition on enemy love encourage scholars to "revisit" (Barringer and Long 2020, 6).
17. On Lewis's understanding of the permanent spiritual value of these and other planetary symbols, see Ward 2008 and LiVecche 2019, 3–5.
18. Hauerwas (2010, 192 n. 20) cites three letters by Lewis (Lewis 2004a, 250–252, 233–234, and 2004b [mistakenly cited as 2004a], 782) and two essays ("Private Bates" and "Is English Doomed?"). I would add to these Lewis's letter to the editor of *Theology* in March 1939 which the editor of Lewis's collected essays Lesley Malmsley titled "The Conditions for a Just War" (Lewis 2000, 767–768).
19. Chiu lists the traditional core principles of *jus in bello* as "honor[,] military necessity, humanity, proportionality, and distinction" (2019, 81). See also Biggar 2013, 7.
20. An example of a contemporary declaration of this might be the British Army booklet called *Soldiering: The Military Covenant*, which lists six ethical principles. See Ministry of Defence, *Army Doctrine Publications 5: Soldiering—The Military Covenant* (2000). These principles are selfless commitment, courage, discipline, integrity, loyalty, and respect for others. Beach (2015, 285) explains that soldiers need

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training "in these virtues or moral skills—habits of thought/feeling/action—so that they will follow the rules even under all the pressures of battle." On soldiering and virtue ethics, see also Chiu 2019, 76–78.

21. See also Lewis 2000, 286: "[T]hat we should help one we have promised to help rather than another, or a benefactor rather than one who has no special claims on us, or a compatriot more than a stranger, or a kinsman rather than a mere compatriot."

22. For two variants of the principle of double effect, the traditional and the more demanding, see Walzer 2015, 153, 156, and Chiu 2019, 195–196, 288 n. 2.

23. For a defence of the principle of double effect, see Biggar 2004 (chapter 3) and Biggar 2013 (chapter 3). Simpson (2015, 287–291) argues that even on the battlefield there are times when "intending" to kill (in Biggar's sense) is not morally wrong.

24. This is not to be confused with Lewis's *agnosticism* about whether *capital punishment* or *life in prison* is more likely to undermine chances of repentance (see his essay "The Humanitarian Theory of Punishment" in Lewis 2000, 698). That is a separate question. Lewis was neither for nor against abolishing capital punishment. He thinks that neither reason, scripture, nor religious authority settle the issue (see "Capital Punishment and the Death Penalty" in Lewis 2000, 779–780).

25. "If one could only hibernate. More and more sleep seems to me the best thing—short of waking up and finding yourself safely dead and not quite damned."

26. This is the closest explicit definition of love that I can uncover in Biggar's essay "In Defence of War" (2015). His eponymous book *In Defence of War* (2013) operates with implicit definitions of love (e.g. "to do whatever they can and may to see it [the object of love, e.g. enemy] prosper" [24]), but nowhere is love explicitly defined, by my lights. This occasionally complicates one's reading even of his many strong arguments.

27. On the doctrine of moral equality of combatants, see, for example, Chiu 2019, 68, 97, 117, 120, 229. This doctrine is the subject of much contemporary debate. I think Chiu captures its essence by connecting it to *jus ad bellum*: the "doctrine that combatants in war are morally equal—that they cannot and should not be held responsible for considerations of *jus ad bellum*" (2019, 229). This leads to professional respect between enemies being "frequently tinged with regret and a sense of tragedy" (68). The enemy may not want to be there any more than you do.

28. On the risks involved in describing war as "loving," see Cahill 2014 and Biggar 2015, 198.

29. Self-contraint in the form of rejecting, say, torture, protects also the *agent* from moral injury or psychological-spiritual malaise (see LiVecche 2021 and Chiu 2019, 107–109).

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Dr. Jason Lepojärvi is a Senior Research Fellow at IFES Finland and a Lecturer in Theology and Literature at The Davenant Institute. He has taught courses in Theology, Philosophy, Ethics, Literature, and Religious Studies at the University of Helsinki, University of Oxford, Regent College in Vancouver, and Thorneloe University in Ontario.

Cite this article: Lepojärvi J (2023). Love and the Winter: C.S. Lewis, Nigel Biggar, and Marc LiVecche on Enemy Love. *Politics and Religion* **16**, 180–196. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048322000190

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