

replacements filled depleted units, meaning that “at the tactical level many Germans accepted the racial theories of their Fuhrer.” This situation is contrasted with the Red Army, where the average soldier “may have been less influenced by ideology compared to his Nazi counterpart,” motivated more by “loyalty to comrades and defense of the nation than their healthy fear of the oppressive Marxist dictatorship and its minions.” This assertion is made without any reference or collaborating information.

Trawling through the endnotes and noting the research that has gone into this and the previous volume, it is increasingly unlikely that in the short or medium term these works will be surmounted as the epitome of operational history regarding the fight for Stalingrad. This work will stand the test of time, making a significant contribution to the literature.

**Moral Dilemmas of Modern War: Torture, Assassination, and Blackmail in an Age of Asymmetric Conflict.** By Michael L. Gross. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010. 321 pages. \$90 (cloth). \$21.47 (paper). **Reviewed by David L. Perry**, Professor of Applied Ethics and Director of the Vann Center for Ethics, Davidson College, and author of *Partly Cloudy: Ethics in War, Espionage, Covert Action, and Interrogation*.

Michael Gross is a professor of political science at the University of Haifa, Israel, and the author of two previous books: *Ethics and Activism: The Theory and Practice of Political Morality and Bioethics* and *Armed Conflict: Moral Dilemmas of Medicine and War*. Recalling my largely positive assessment of the latter work, I held high hopes for *Moral Dilemmas of Modern War*.

This book addresses several intriguing and potentially fruitful ethical topics in contemporary armed conflicts, including challenges to traditional principles of noncombatant immunity and the moral equality of combatants, as well as issues surrounding targeted killing, torture, and humanitarian intervention. There are a number of interesting details about Israel’s recent wars in Lebanon and Gaza, and about debates within Israel about the ethics of its military tactics. This reviewer also found the author’s examination of legally prohibited and “nonlethal” weapons in chapters three and four to be informative. The sources cited in the book’s endnotes are rich and varied.

Unfortunately, significant portions of *Moral Dilemmas of Modern War* contain rambling and repetitive arguments, along with confusing statements. Gross frequently exhibits a lack of care in defining and applying key terms and concepts, and makes claims that are misleading or overly ambiguous in an ethical and legal sense.

Although the author notes on pages 13-14 that the term “asymmetric war” can have distinctly different connotations (he mentions material, legal, and moral), he uses that term in the remainder of the book without ever indicating which meaning is intended.

Gross also tends to categorize conventional wars as symmetric, and humanitarian military interventions as asymmetric, but neither assumption is necessarily true or historically accurate. For example, some conventional wars have been materially and morally asymmetric, while humanitarian interventions can be materially symmetric. Too often in this book (as in far too many recent military books and articles) the

word “asymmetric” seems little more than a fashionable buzzword that does no real conceptual or clarifying work.

On the second page of the book, the author states, “Torture, assassination, and blackmail are certainly not new forms of warfare.” He is clearly right that they are not new, but wrong to call them forms of warfare. They are better labeled tactics; moreover, they are ones that are neither unique to nor particularly characteristic of modern war, nor are they exclusive to warfare. Some police forces use torture against common criminals; political leaders are sometimes assassinated in peacetime; and some intelligence officers blackmail foreign agents to coerce their obedience, irrespective of whether a war is being waged.

Gross defines blackmail on page six as consisting of “tactics that intentionally or unintentionally harm, or threaten to harm, noncombatants.” While a threat to harm is implicit in blackmail, if actual harm is inflicted on noncombatants, then we have clearly moved beyond blackmail. The author would also have been better served by not classifying encirclement, siege, banishment, and relocation as forms of blackmail per se. A second attempt to define blackmail on page 153 is more successful.

On page five the author says of torture and rendition, “Each is a long-standing counterinsurgency tactic designed to deliver and hold suspects for interrogation.” But torture is not designed to do that at all, and only some forms of rendition (extraordinary ones) can sensibly be so described. The later description of rendition on page 140 is more accurate.

Gross later claims that “all nonlethal weapons intentionally target un-uniformed combatants and noncombatants alike, a blatant violation of humanitarian law.” But that statement is misleading in that it equivocates on “targeting” and “weapons” in ways that obscure moral and legal restrictions on lethal weapons. In other words, even when non-lethals are used “indiscriminately” or directed at noncombatants, that does not render them necessarily illegal (or unethical).

The author also makes the argument that civilians are increasingly targeted by states in asymmetric wars because of their ambiguous roles and status in the conflicts. Unfortunately, Gross provides inadequate documentary support for that claim, while ignoring the fact that civilians were directly targeted and indiscriminately killed in much more horrendous numbers in conventional bombings during World War II and the wars in Korea and Vietnam.

Finally, in an early portion of the book, the author says that “terrorism deliberately targets innocent civilian noncombatants for political gain, and thus is heinous by any understanding of humanitarianism.” But four pages later he qualifies that condemnation, wondering “if terrorism in pursuit of a just cause is sometimes defensible.” In Chapter Eight, although the author eloquently condemns reprisals against civilians, he also claims that terrorism is “excusable” in some circumstances, and “defensible” if “discriminating.” Do we really want to go there ethically? Did we not learn the dangers of such arguments long ago?

I regretfully conclude that this book on the whole makes few original contributions to the scholarly literature on ethics and war, and so I cannot enthusiastically recommend it. Its uneven quality also indicates that at least one copy editor at Cambridge University Press needs to work harder.