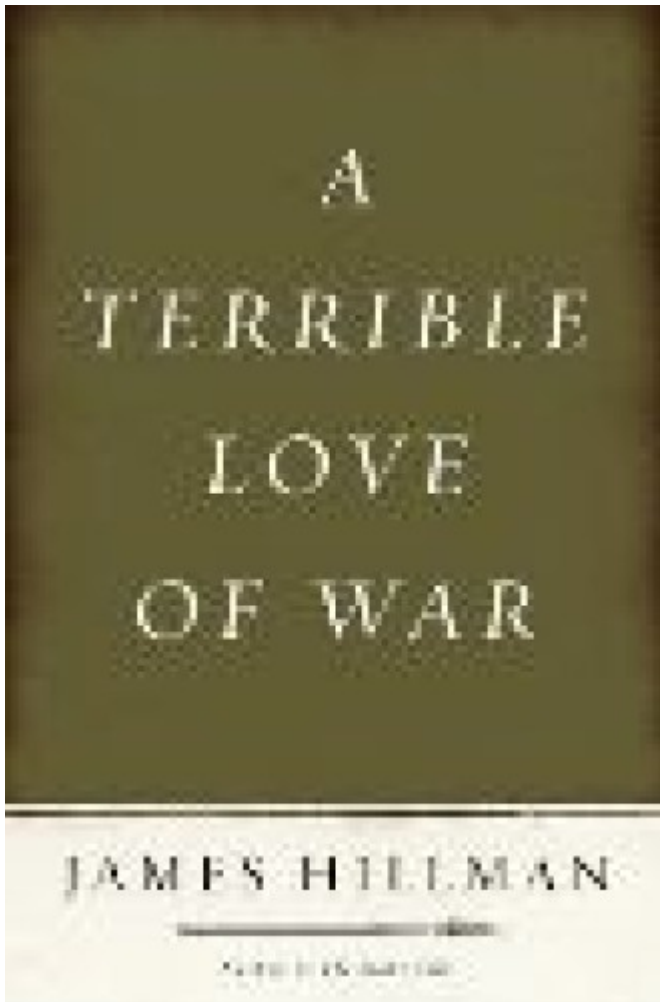


The Terrible Love of War

reviewed by [Urbane Peachey](#) in the [February 22, 2005](#) issue

In Review



The Terrible Love of War

James Hillman
Penguin

"Why do the nations rage so furiously together and the people imagine a vain thing?" That is Handel's lyrical adaptation of Psalm 2:1. The anguished question is

an ancient one, reflected in the mythology of the Greek and Roman gods of war, Ares and Mars. Tolstoy asks in his extensive study of war, “Why did millions of people begin to kill one another? Who told them to do it?” He concludes that because endless conjectures can be made, the causes are “innumerable.” Robert McNamara, who was secretary of defense during the Vietnam war, now understands war as “the failure of imagination.” The ancient question is ours also.

In *The Terrible Love of War*, James Hillman, Jungian psychologist and author of the best-seller *The Soul’s Code*, provides urgently needed analysis that goes beyond the usual categories of just war, ethics, pacifism and patriotism. He intends to help readers understand not only the causes of war, but more importantly “the madness” of the love of war—madness that captivates the national system, including the media, corporate interests and religious legitimators of war policy, as well as the military chain of command.

Hillman studied with Carl Jung in the 1950s and served as the director of the Jung Institute in Zurich. Over the years he has examined reports and letters from combatants, military leaders and a host of other writers and has come to understand war’s passion, with all its vigor and animation, as a mythical state of being that drives combatants to extremes of inhumanity and devastation.

The opening chapter dramatizes the book’s focus with a few lines from a film about one of the most colorful generals of World War II, *Patton*: “The general walks the field after a battle. Churned earth, burnt tanks, dead men. He takes up a dying officer, kisses him, surveys the havoc, and says: ‘I love it. God help me I do love it so. I love it more than my life.’”

Hillman says that war is becoming normalized in common expressions, such as “trade war,” “gender war” and “war against crime.” This normalization of war has whitewashed it and has brainwashed us so that we forget its terrible images. The dictum “war is normal” is based on war’s constancy throughout history, its ubiquity over the globe and its acceptability. Perhaps more basically, war is normalized because it is in tune with something in the human soul, with a force other than aggression and self-preservation. The psyche normalizes war’s folly because it is archetypally in tune with war.

Whatever war’s causes, Hillman concludes that it requires an enemy—an imagined enemy. “The imagined phantom swells and clouds the horizon, we cannot see

beyond enmity. The archetype idea gains a face. Once the enemy is imagined, one is already in a state of war. Once the enemy has been named, war has already been declared and the actual declaration becomes inconsequential, only legalistic. The invasion of Iraq began before the invasion of Iraq; it had already begun when that nation was named among the axis of evil.” If an enemy can be labeled or imagined as evil, then any means to oppose it are justified by those who consider themselves good.

Hillman charges that the United States entered the Iraq war in “haste,” not even heeding the supplication for restraint in the Greek “Hymn to Ares.”

beam down from up there
your gentle light . . .
so that I can . . .
diminish that deceptive rush . . .
that provokes me
to enter the chilling din of battle.

Hillman describes war as a psychological task, asserting that “philosophy and theology, the fields supposed to do the heavy thinking for our species, have neglected war’s overriding importance.” The notable exception, says Hillman, is Immanuel Kant, who writes: “The state of peace among men living side by side is not the natural state; the natural state is one of war.” Quoting from Chris Hedges’s *War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning*, Hillman explains that war does what religion is supposed to do: it raises life to a level of importance.

Hillman contends that because a monotheistic psychology must be dedicated to unity, its psychopathology is intolerance of difference. When people believe in the claims of any deity or in an abstract idea of a people or a nation as “prime reality,” they will fight against the claims of all others.

In my judgment a most critical issue for adherents to the three monotheistic religions is to come to terms with the violence in their scriptures and with the violence of the nations which appeal to these faiths.

What a gaping contradiction, that the God whom all three monotheistic religions petition for peace is the One in whose name the great wars of history and of the present have been fought. I concur with Hillman that hypocrisy in the United States

is a necessity. "It makes possible armories of mass destruction side by side with the proliferation of churches, cults and charities. Hypocrisy holds the nation together so that it can preach, and practice what it does not preach."

Hillman's writing is urgently poignant for me because I have witnessed firsthand the senseless and irrational devastation of war's fury. The issue is the more compelling because the U.S., as gunsmith to the world, has helped to militarize the societies it claims to democratize. This book, with its excellent bibliography, is provocative reading. It challenges the self-justifying assumptions that take this nation to war.