Analysing and Resisting American Citizens' Insensitivity to Civilian Casualties of American Wars

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American wars have had a considerable toll on the civilian populations of the countries they have been waged in. The best estimate of civilian deaths directly caused by coalition forces in The Iraq War is 11,516, which is three times higher than the deaths of coalition forces and accounts for 33% of Iraqi deaths in the war.[48] The American public, however, is not particularly concerned by these casualties. American casualties play a far larger role in determining public support for wars, despite the fact that these are often much lower than civilian casualties (as seen in the figures above).[49]

Such partiality is to be expected, but the indifference to civilian casualties should be meliorated for two reasons. Concern for civilian casualties is good from a moral-epistemic standpoint, insofar as these casualties are morally concerning. Many of these wars are partly justified by the aim of improving these civilians' lives, hence their deaths at the hands of US forces are deeply unjust. I cannot explore this complex question further, so I will assume that more concern for civilian casualties than the indifference currently displayed is a moral-epistemic improvement. These moral-epistemic improvements can in turn lead to political improvements. The public becoming more aware that civilian casualties are morally troubling might lead to greater public outcry about them, which might in turn lead to changes in foreign policy and military strategy that reduce civilian casualties.

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48   Bruce Cronin, *Bugsplat: The politics of Collateral Damage in Western Armed Conflicts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 17.

49   John Tirman, *The Deaths of Others: The Fate of Civilians in America's Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 339; Cronin, *Bugsplat*, 17.

In this essay, I will explore the nature of Americans' insensitivity and propose strategies for meliorating it. I will argue that the epistemic structures it is rooted in and the fact that Americans are not aware that they are insensitive mean that certain strategies are particularly effective in combatting Americans' insensitivity. In the first section, I will outline the social-epistemological terms that will be applied to Americans' insensitivity - meta-blindness, meta-attitudes, and social imaginaries. Meta-blindness is José Medina's term for the phenomenon whereby insensitive subjects are unaware that they are insensitive.[50] In the second section, I will apply these concepts to international relations scholar John Tirman's analysis of Americans' insensitivity to civilian casualties. I will argue that two causes Tirman identifies, orientalism and the frontier myth, are dominant social imaginaries. Another cause, orientalist knowledge hierarchies, are meta-attitudes. I will argue that this implies that American citizens are blind to their insensitivity, something Tirman doesn't identify.

In the third section, I will outline the implications of this analysis for how insensitivity to civilian casualties must be combatted. I will argue that combatting this insensitivity requires something beyond pointing out that certain attitudes are insensitive or presenting sensitive attitudes. Specifically, it requires targeting meta-blindness and the background epistemic structures of orientalism and the frontier myth. I will argue that since these background epistemic structures are dominant social imaginaries and meta-attitudes, they should be challenged from different imaginaries and meta-attitudes that Americans can access. Meta-blindness should be combatted by engendering the comparison of different epistemic perspectives.

1. Meta-Blindness, Meta-Attitudes, and Social Imaginaries

This section will outline the paper's governing social-epistemological framework. I will first outline the sense in which emotions are epistemic attitudes. I will then explain what Medina means by the term meta-blindness, and set out what will be meant by the terms "insensitivity", "concern", and their antonyms throughout the paper. Finally, I will outline what meta-attitudes and social imaginaries are.

50   José Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and the Social Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 75.

Because Americans have both beliefs and emotions about civilian casualties, it is important to clarify the epistemic significance of emotions. I cannot treat these issues in detail, but will briefly justify the claim that emotions are epistemic attitudes because they serve as reasons for belief. I will assume that the perception theory of emotions (which I will outline shortly) is correct. It is an example of a theory which sees emotions as involving what D'Arms and Jacobson call "evaluative presentations" of their objects, and theories of this kind are currently the majority view in the philosophy of emotion.[51] Analogous arguments to those made in this paper could be made assuming any other evaluative presentation theory.[52]

Christine Tappolet claims that emotions are perceptual experiences of an evaluative property, such as fearsomeness or admirability, in their object.[53] If I fear a plant then I perceptually experience fearsomeness in it. Such perceptions can be fitting or unfitting depending on whether the object possesses the property in question.[54] Fear of a lion is fitting, while fear of a sunflower is not. Perceptual experiences do not undertake epistemic commitments – I can perceptually experience a plant

51 Justin D'Arms and Daniel Jacobson, "The Moralistic Fallacy: On the 'Appropriateness' of Emotions," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 61, no. 1 (2000): 66. Scarantino and de Sousa, in a review article, claim "The dominant view on emotions is that they are representations of… formal objects" (Andrea Scarantino and Ronald de Sousa, "Emotion," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2018 Edition), edited by Edward N. Zalta, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2018/entries/emotion). See Daniel D. Hutto, "Truly Enactive Emotion," *Emotion Review* 4, no. 2 (2012): 179, for a contrary, non-representational view of emotions.

52 This is because all evaluative presentation theories can accommodate the idea that emotions are epistemic attitudes as easily as, or more easily than, the perception theory. Other evaluative presentation theories include the theory that emotions are judgments (see Robert C. Solomon, "Emotion and Choice," in *Explaining Emotions*, ed. Amélie O. Rorty (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980), 257-258) and the theory that emotions present their objects as falling under a "paradigm scenario" and thus make that object salient to the subject's attention (Ronald de Sousa, *The Rationality of Emotion* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), 201-202).

53 Christine Tappolet, *Emotions, Values, and Agency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 13, 15-16.

54 D'Arms and Jacobson, "The Moralistic Fallacy," 66-67; Tappolet, *Emotions*, 20.

as fearsome and yet know that it is not fearsome. Emotions can nonetheless be seen as epistemic attitudes on the perception theory in the broad sense of attitudes that are *relevant* to epistemic commitments. Tappolet claims that emotions are reasons for beliefs in the same way visual experiences are: if we perceive fearsomeness in something, this is a *prima facie* reason to believe that it is fearsome.[55] This means that emotions are relevant to knowledge and are thus epistemic attitudes in the broad sense. Moreover, fittingness is an epistemic norm – fitting emotions are reasons for correct beliefs, and unfitting emotions are reasons for incorrect beliefs.

Fitting emotions about civilian casualties, on this view, lead Americans to correct beliefs and thus have the same moral-epistemic and political benefits as correct beliefs. Outrage about a civilian casualty gives Americans a *prima facie* reason to believe that the casualty is outrageous. Outrage about civilian casualties should therefore be cultivated insofar as civilian casualties are outrageous, and insofar as believing a casualty to be outrageous can lead subjects to other correct beliefs, such as "the casualty was a terrible injustice". Similarly, unfitting emotions like joy are *prima facie* reasons to form incorrect beliefs like the belief that a casualty is joyous, and so there are benefits to cultivating more fitting emotions. While the reason joy gives is firmly overruled by basic moral considerations of the value of human life, such considerations may not sway certain people, and replacing joy with a more fitting emotion might bring them to have correct beliefs. This indicates that emotions and beliefs have similar importance for my question, and I will speak of them concurrently as epistemic attitudes.[56, 57]

55   Tappolet, *Emotions*, 40.

56   This is not the only way to bring about correct beliefs about civilian casualties, for one can have unfitting emotions about a casualty and still acknowledge it as deeply wrong. Nonetheless, attempting to cultivate fitting emotions in Americans will give them reasons to change their beliefs, and might thereby cause some of them to do so.

57   Fitting emotions might also have distinctive political benefits due to their greater capacity to motivate action than beliefs. Because I am discussing emotions as epistemic attitudes, however, it is best to conceive of their benefits as coming from knowledge, rather than motivation. I will thus see fitting emotions' political benefits as I do the benefits of correct beliefs - actions which follow from people knowing how morally troubling civilian casualties are. Nonetheless, investigating which strategies should be used to motivate political action, and whether these differ from those I propose in this

I will count absences of emotion as emotions. Thus, if a civilian casualty is outrageous and someone is apathetic in the face of it, their emotion is unfitting insofar as they are not perceiving the property of outrageousness. This is not a theoretical claim, for I do not think that absences of emotion are emotions, particularly assuming a perception theory on which emotions must perceive properties. It is rather a matter of convenience, insofar as not having a fitting emotion can inhibit people from acquiring correct beliefs about casualties in the same way that having an unfitting emotion "proper" like joy can. While the latter has more potential for distortion insofar as it gives an active reason to form an incorrect belief, some people might not consider casualties outrageous unless they have the *prima facie* reason outrage gives them. For such people, having no emotion can inhibit them from reaching correct beliefs insofar as it inhibits them from feeling outrage, and in this sense their absences of emotion are "unfitting emotions".

Medina defines meta-blindness as a subject's epistemic blindness with respect to their first-order epistemic attitudes.[58] First-order epistemic attitudes are about something that is not an epistemic attitude – for example, the belief that the earth is round. Second-order epistemic attitudes are about a subject's own first-order epistemic attitudes – for example, *A*'s belief that *A*'s belief that the earth is round is correct. Meta-blindness always involves first-order epistemic attitudes about features of one's social world, and second-order epistemic attitudes which are incorrect attitudes towards those first-order attitudes.[59] One could have first-order attitudes of incorrect beliefs about others (such as not knowing the difference between Shia and Sunni Islam), and a second-order attitude which is an incorrect belief about one's first-order beliefs (such as thinking that one's beliefs cover every part of the social world). The first-order attitude could also be affective, such as a lack of concern for the suffering of Muslims.[60] Meta-blindness would here lie in an incorrect second-order belief about this lack of concern, such

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paper, would undoubtedly be of interest.

58   Medina, *Epistemology of Resistance*, 149.

59   Medina, *Epistemology of Resistance*, 75, 149.

60   Medina sees epistemic attitudes as "hybrid… cognitive-affective attitudes", but does not defend this or elaborate on what it entails (José Medina, "Racial Violence, Emotional Friction, and Epistemic Activism," *Angelaki* 24, no. 4 (2019): 25).

as thinking that one is not wrong for lacking concern because the situation does not warrant concern. While the second-order attitudes could be affective (feeling concerned or unconcerned about one's first-order attitudes), only cognitive second-order attitudes are required for my analysis.[61]

First-order blindness refers to first-order epistemic attitudes that are incorrect beliefs or unfitting emotions. I will, following Medina, refer to both of these as "insensitivities", because it best captures the epistemic attitudes that are the focus of my paper.[62] I will also refer to them as "first-order insensitivities", even though I do not use the term "second-order insensitivity", in order to distinguish them from meta-blindness. Insensitivities could be cognitive, such as thinking a civilian casualty isn't morally wrong, or affective, such as not feeling outrage at a needless casualty. Conversely, "sensitivities' are correct beliefs or fitting emotions. Correctness and fittingness of beliefs and emotions come on a scale, so sometimes I will speak of attitudes as more or less sensitive than one another, rather than as "sensitivities" and "insensitivities". Beliefs and emotions about civilian casualties can be concerned – such as the belief that a casualty is unjust and outrage at a needless casualty –- or unconcerned. "Concern" and "unconcern" do not determine whether an attitude is correct or fitting – a concerned or unconcerned attitude could, depending on how the world is, be an insensitivity or a sensitivity. I have, however, assumed that the world is such that Americans coming to have more concern about civilian casualties is a moral-epistemic improvement.

Medina defines "meta-attitudes" as epistemic attitudes about one's epistemic attitudes.[63] Meta-attitudes could take many shapes, such as attitudes about one's epistemic abilities.[64] For example, epistemic arrogance places undue credence in one's beliefs, and an undue lack of credence in contradictory beliefs.[65] Meta-attitudes influence epistemic life in several ways. For example, they determine which attitudes one takes seriously, and which are dismissed without consideration.[66]

61 Medina, *Epistemology of Resistance*, 81.

62 Medina, *Epistemology of Resistance*, 89.

63 Medina, *Epistemology of Resistance*, 58. It is plausible to see meta-blindness as itself a meta-attitude, but this is irrelevant to my argument.

64 Medina, *Epistemology of Resistance*, 58

65 Medina, *Epistemology of Resistance*, 31.

66 Medina, *Epistemology of Resistance*, 212.

For example, epistemic arrogance leads people to dismiss anything which conflicts with their current attitudes.[67] Meta-attitudes also influence epistemic life by determining which epistemic attitudes a subject seeks out, and what subjects count as justification.[68] Meta-attitudes can be beneficial as well as harmful – e- empiricism is a beneficial meta-attitude that places higher credence in attitudes for which there is evidence.

Moira Gatens defines the social imaginary as the "background" of "imaginings" by which individuals in a society can understand one another, with these imaginings including things like images and scripts.[69] The social imaginary consists of many different imaginaries, some of which are dominant imaginaries such as the patriarchal imaginary and the white imaginary.[70] When something falls outside dominant social imaginaries, it is "unimaginable" from within them.[71] Medina analyses how in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, "black pity for white subjects" and "a white girl coming on to" a black man are shown to be unimaginable within the dominant white imaginary of Jim Crow Alabama. Instead, the script of this imaginary read that black people "have a sexual agency out of control whereas white women lack sexual agency".[72] Imaginaries can also influence affective life, for example by rendering one unable to experience sympathy for people who are dehumanised by the imaginary's scripts.[73]

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67   Medina, *Epistemology of Resistance*, 31-33.

68   Medina Epistemology of Resistance, 212.

69   Moira Gatens, "Imaginaries," in *50 Concepts for a Critical Phenomenology*, eds. Gail Weiss, Ann V. Murphy, and Gayle Salamon (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2019), 183; Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004), 165, quoted in Gatens, "Imaginaries," 183; Medina, *Epistemology of Resistance*, 67 n. 4.

70   Medina, *Epistemology of Resistance*, 78.

71   Medina, *Epistemology of Resistance*, 67-68.

72   Medina, *Epistemology of Resistance*, 67-68.

73   A relevant feature of social imaginaries is that they can be "internalized" by subjects, and can thus influence one's beliefs and emotions even if one's conscious beliefs refute the imaginary (Medina, *Epistemology of Resistance*, 269). Someone in Jim Crow Alabama who consciously believed that white people are not superior to black people could nonetheless be biased towards thinking that black people do not feel pity for white people. This is the well-known phenomenon of "implicit bias". See Jennifer Saul,

Subjects' beliefs and emotions are not completely determined by dominant social imaginaries, for there are what Medina calls "alternative social imaginaries".[74] For example, the black imaginary within Jim Crow Alabama challenged the script of the white imaginary insofar as black people recognised the incorrectness of the white imaginary's racist stereotypes.[75] People may come to inhabit different imaginaries, and thus be able to imagine what was previously unimaginable to them.[76] Nonetheless, since dominant imaginaries render many contents of other imaginaries unintelligible, entering other imaginaries is challenging for subjects under dominant imaginaries.[77] Hereon, I will use "epistemic structures" to refer to both imaginaries and meta-attitudes.

2. The Insensitivity of American Citizens to Civilian Casualties

Having outlined the concepts of meta-blindness, meta-attitudes, and the social imaginary, I am now in a position to analyse American citizens' insensitivity to civilian casualties in terms of this framework. After going over part of the empirical evidence for Americans' insensitivity, I will present Tirman's case for orientalism and the frontier myth causing this insensitivity, noting that both are dominant social imaginaries. I will then present Tirman's case for orientalist knowledge hierarchies causing insensitivity, noting that they are meta-attitudes. Finally, I will argue that the influence of these epistemic structures would cause Americans to be meta-blind. The implications of this analysis for how insensitivity should be combatted will be presented in the next section.

Tirman presents empirical evidence for Americans' insensitivity to civilian casualties, although notes that there is little survey data on this topic, which he claims is "itself a symptom" of indifference.[78] I will present Tirman's evidence for insensitivity to civilian casualties in the wars in Iraq, since

"Implicit Bias, Stereotype Threat, and Epistemic Injustice," in *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice*, ed. Ian James Kidd, José Medina, and Gaile Pohlhaus (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 235-242.

74   Medina, *Epistemology of Resistance*, 78.

75   Medina, *Epistemology of Resistance*, 78.

76   Medina, "Racial Violence," 31.

77   Medina, *Epistemology of Resistance*, 71.

78   Tirman, *The Deaths of Others*, 338.

these wars feature later in my paper. Analysing public polling, Tirman claims that "American casualties and achievement of war aims tend to be the key variables of popularity, not local impact", which reflects indifference towards civilian casualties.[79] Tirman identifies that the public sphere also reflected indifference: "few major politicians… expressed compassion for the Iraqis' suffering; no major religious figures came forward with calls to help the victims of violence…; editorials about Iraq in major newspapers rarely mentioned civilian casualties".[80] Tirman doesn't specify which epistemic attitudes are reflected in the public polling, but his description of the public sphere's reaction indicates that Americans' insensitivity involves both beliefs about the moral seriousness of civilian casualties and emotions directed towards those casualties. Tirman gives several causes of this insensitivity: government narratives, psychological defence mechanisms, orientalism, and the frontier myth.[81] The latter two will be the focus of my analysis, because they most clearly demonstrate why Americans are meta-blind.

Tirman identifies both orientalism and the frontier myth as causes of American insensitivity, and while Tirman doesn't use this term, both are dominant imaginaries. Margaret Kohn and Kavita Reddy define Edward Said's concept of orientalism as referring to "a structured set of concepts, assumptions, and discursive practices" prevalent during colonial Europe "that were used to produce, interpret, and evaluate knowledge about non-European peoples".[82] These assumptions included associating negative traits with non-European people, with Said giving the example of seeing "the Arab" "as an oversexed degenerate,… sadistic, treacherous, low."[83] Said also identifies

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79   Tirman, *The Deaths of Others*, 339. His analysis is that several polls from 2007 to 2009 showed a majority supported American withdrawal from Iraq, even though a majority believed such withdrawal would lead to Iraqi civilians being more vulnerable to attacks by insurgents. On the other hand, Operation Desert Storm's public support went from 50% to 80% as the American military began to see success.

80   Tirman, *The Deaths of Others*, 340.

81   Tirman, *The Deaths of Others*, 342-359.

82   Margaret Kohn and Kavita Reddy, "Colonialism," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2017 edition), edited by Edward N. Zalta, https://plato.stanford.edu/cgi-bin/encyclopedia/archinfo.cgi?entry=colonialism; Tirman, *The Deaths of Others*, 344.

83   Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (Vintage, 1979), 278-9, quoted in Tirman, *The Deaths of Others*, 345.

that Arab people are not seen in their specificity as human beings under orientalism: "The Arab is always shown in large numbers. No individuality, no personal characteristics or experiences".[84] Tirman identifies that these orientalist assumptions have underlain American attitudes towards the civilian populations of American wars, and have reinforced insensitivity.[85] These populations have often been Asian and Arab populations who are subject to orientalist stereotypes. Furthermore, Tirman notes that American empire has been "based in part on a supposition of white superiority", and that the American military has notably used such racial slurs as "gooks" and "hajis".[86] Orientalism is a social imaginary which Americans inhabit, since it is based on representations of Asian and Arab populations. Moreover, it is a dominant imaginary, insofar as non-orientalist imaginaries are less accessible to Americans than orientalist imaginaries.

This imaginary engenders insensitivity. In their research on Israeli citizens' reactions to Palestinian civilians dying at the hands of Israeli forces, social psychologist Noa Schori-Eyal and collaborators found that viewing civilians harmed in war in dehumanising ways leads to perceiving them as less common with oneself.[87] This, in turn, makes one more likely to tolerate harms to those civilians.[88] Americans influenced by orientalism see civilians in derogatory and dehumanising ways, and are therefore less likely to form concerned attitudes about civilian casualties.

Tirman defines the frontier myth as a "set of ideas, myths, and self-identities" in which America is seen as having a "mission" of "taming… the wilderness" and the "savages" who live there.[89] The earliest example of this in the public conscience is the violence European-American colonisers committed against Indigenous peoples, and Tirman claims

84   Said, *Orientalism*, 278-9, quoted in Tirman, *The Deaths of Others*, 345;

85   Tirman, *The Deaths of Others*, 344

86   Tirman, *The Deaths of Others*, 236, 344.

87   Noa Schori-Eyal, Eran Halperin, and Tamar Saguy, "Intergroup Commonality, Political Ideology, and Tolerance of Enemy Collateral Casualties in Intergroup Conflicts," *Journal of Peace Research* 56, no. 3 (2019): 434.

88   Schori-Eyal, Halperin, and Saguy, "Intergroup Commonality," 434.

89   Tirman, *The Deaths of Others*, 350-351

that the myth has underlain American global expansion.[90] He identifies a particular conception of violence as central to this myth. Firstly, the violence is seen as "defensive" or "reactive", responding to provocation from external forces (for example, to provocation from "Indian savagery").[91] Secondly, the violence is seen as "regenerative", as reaffirming the "moral worth of its practitioner." In the modern context, this takes the form of reaffirming "the natural rightness of Anglo-Saxon liberty", among other things.[92]

      This is a dominant imaginary, and Tirman claims that it underlies American responses to civilian casualties and engenders insensitivity. While Tirman doesn't label it as an imaginary, he notes it is deeply rooted in the American psyche and "powerfully shapes the attitudes and behaviour of Americans from childhood."[93] This imaginary structures how Americans see wars and the civilians in them, since American wars are often framed under the lenses of defensive and regenerative violence (for example, The Iraq War was seen as regeneration after "a period of softness" which had resulted, in this imaginary, in 9/11).[94] This way of seeing wars engenders insensitivity. Tirman identifies that it creates a script on which civilians are not the focus, being rather "players in this drama" which is truly about America's moral redemption.[95] Americans' reactions to civilian casualties are determined by this script, which stifles concern insofar as it accords no harm to civilians, or frames harms that do occur as justified insofar as they are defensive and regenerative.[96]

      Tirman claims that another side of orientalism fosters insensitivity, namely hierarchies of knowledge which mediate

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90   Tirman, *The Deaths of Others*, 350.

91   Tirman, *The Deaths of Others*, 351. Tirman cites empirical evidence which shows that support for reactive violence among Americans is "positively correlated with the embrace of "frontier values"" (Tirman, *The Deaths of Others*, 352; James Shields and Leonard Weinberg, "Reactive Violence and the American Frontier: A Contemporary Evaluation," *Western*

92   Tirman, *The Deaths of Others*, 351-352.

93   Tirman, *The Deaths of Others*, 360.

94   Tirman, *The Deaths of Others*, 353.

95   Tirman, *The Deaths of Others*, 353.

96   Tirman, *The Deaths of Others*, 354

the way in which people in "The Orient" are understood.[97] These knowledge hierarchies are meta-attitudes. American orientalist knowledge hierarchies unduly privilege the American social sciences, such as historiography and international relations. These disciplines are thought to lead to "knowledge" of other cultures, while voices from those cultures "are not heard", and "are discounted as… ignorant" on the rare occasions when they are heard (Tirman cites the US public's reaction to the polls of Iraqi civilians).[98] Such knowledge hierarchies constitute a meta-attitude about what counts as "knowledge" of these civilians, namely that "knowledge" of them does not come from their mouths, hearts, and bodies, but from American expertise. Tirman claims that these knowledge hierarchies engender American insensitivity because they makes it such that the American public "knows", with "scientific veracity", that foreign populations have traits which justify violence (for example, having "no appreciation for freedom").[99] This makes Americans see their unconcerned attitudes towards civilian casualties, that are in fact insensitive, as justified.

The preceding analyses indicate that American citizens are meta-blind because these citizens have epistemic structures which block epistemic counterpoints, and can avail themselves of several justifications for their cognitively and affectively insensitive attitudes.[100] Medina calls epistemic attitudes that conflict with one's own "epistemic counterpoints".[101] The imaginaries of orientalism and the frontier myth inhibit Americans from experiencing such counterpoints by rendering concerned attitudes towards civilian casualties unimaginable. This unimaginability inhibits Americans from coming to concerned attitudes themselves, which might act as counterpoints to their other epistemic attitudes. For example, perhaps without the imaginary of orientalism an American might feel sympathy for the family of a civilian casualty, which

97   While this could be analysed as part of the social imaginary of orientalism, I prefer to analyse the imaginary as involving imaginings, and I do not see knowledge ascription as an imagining.

98   Tirman, *The Deaths of Others*, 345-346.

99   Tirman, *The Deaths of Others*, 346-347

100   Medina gives arguments for why imaginaries and meta-attitudes generally cause meta-blindness, which I have drawn on for my specific claims here (Medina, *Epistemology of Resistance*, 82, 149, 306).

101   Medina, *Epistemology of Resistance*, 70, 75.

would challenge their belief that "that killing was, on balance, justified." The unimaginability of sensitive attitudes can also distort Americans' interpretations of epistemic counterpoints that others articulate. Imagine someone expresses the belief that a civilian casualty was unjust. Such concern is incompatible with the orientalist imaginary, so it might be distorted for someone living under that imaginary – they might see it as a mere expression of the speaker's sadness about their day, rather than a claim about the world. Thus, the imaginaries preclude Americans from experiencing concerned attitudes (whether held by themselves or others) which would challenge their insensitivity. This makes them unable to acknowledge that their beliefs and emotions are insensitive, rendering them meta-blind.

Even if Americans did experience epistemic counterpoints, however, their imaginaries and meta-attitudes would diminish the counterpoints' ability to make them aware of their limitations. This is because these structures distort Americans' judgments of which attitudes are sensitive and which insensitive. I have argued that knowledge hierarchies engender first-order insensitivity by justifying unconcerned attitudes, but this justification also entrenches meta-blindness by making Americans see their insensitive attitudes as sensitive.[102] According to these meta-attitudes, unconcerned attitudes are correct or fitting since they accord with American "expertise" and are not blinded by "inferior" forms of knowledge. The imaginaries similarly justify unconcerned attitudes. The frontier myth renders unconcerned beliefs and emotions about civilian casualties sensitive, since they correctly respond to the properties of American moral regeneration, and are not blinded by considerations irrelevant to the expansion of the frontier. Deep concern is an insensitive attitude towards civilian casualties according to the orientalist imaginary, on which civilians are unworthy of respect and lack the individuality which might give special value to their lives. According to this imaginary, callous attitudes, rather than concerned ones, correctly perceive the properties of civilian casualties. Thus, these imaginaries and meta-attitudes make Americans see their unconcerned attitudes, which are insensitive, as sensitive. These are incorrect attitudes towards

102   I am using "sensitive" in a technical sense here to mean correct belief or fitting emotion, and Americans would likely not describe their attitudes with this word. My point is that they see attitudes which are in fact incorrect beliefs or unfitting emotions as correct or fitting.

their beliefs and emotions about civilian casualties, and thus constitute meta-blindness.

3. Combatting Insensitivity

I have claimed that American citizens are meta-blind with respect to their insensitivity to civilian casualties, and that this meta-blindness is rooted in the dominant imaginaries of orientalism and the frontier myth, as well as the meta-attitudes of orientalist knowledge hierarchies. I will now show how this analysis suggests ways in which insensitivity should be combatted. I will first outline two seemingly intuitive strategies for combatting insensitivity, which do not target meta-blindness or background epistemic structures: highlighting insensitivity and presenting sensitive attitudes. I will then argue that such strategies are inadequate, and background epistemic structures and meta-blindness must be directly targeted. I will suggest strategies that directly target each of these. Epistemic structures can be challenged by utilising different imaginaries and meta-attitudes, while meta-blindness can be challenged by engendering comparison of different epistemic perspectives. I will give concrete examples of these strategies from the MoMA's exhibition "Theater of Operations: The Gulf Wars 1991-2011".[103]

An intuitive way of combatting American insensitivity focuses on first-order insensitive attitudes without regard to their background epistemic structures or Americans' meta-blindness. Two strategies which do this are highlighting insensitivity and presenting sensitive attitudes. Imagine that someone expresses a callous attitude towards a civilian casualty like "their life wasn't worth much". Highlighting insensitivity involves telling the speaker that what they said was insensitive, for example by saying "that's quite callous of you". Presenting a sensitive attitude involves exhibiting a concerned attitude towards the casualties, for example saying "that attack was horrific".

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103   I have not seen this exhibition in person, and my knowledge of it is from the following sources: "Theater of Operations: The Gulf Wars 1991-2011," MoMA, accessed June 10, 2020, https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/5084; Tim Arango and Jason Farago, "These Artists Refuse to Forget the Wars in Iraq," *New York Times*, November 14, 2019; Neil MacFarquhar, "Mourning Iraq's Destruction, a Native Son Creates," *New York Times*, December 31, 2019; Eleni Zaras, "New York City's MoMA PS1 "Gulf Wars" Exhibition Caught in Crossfire," *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* 39, no. 3 (2020): 48-50.

These methods, while effective to some extent, are insufficient as a complete strategy for combatting American insensitivity, since forms of insensitivity may remain in the face of such challenges unless epistemic structures and meta-blindness are directly targeted. If Americans' epistemic structures are not targeted, the challenges identified above will often be unimaginable or unjustified to them. As previously identified, Americans often interpret sensitive attitudes incorrectly due to the imaginaries' distortions. Even if sensitive attitudes can be correctly interpreted, they might be written off as insensitive since meta-attitudes and imaginaries distort judgments of sensitivity and insensitivity. Similarly, highlighting insensitivity might be ineffective, as the insensitive subject might think that their attitude is not insensitive – they're not callous, they're having a clear-thinking reaction to a justified killing. Because of these ways in which insensitivities can remain in the face of first-order challenges to insensitivity, orientalism and the frontier myth must be directly targeted. Because I analysed them as imaginaries and meta-attitudes, I can avail myself of Medina's strategy for combatting such epistemic structures. This is the strategy of challenging epistemic structures from different epistemic structures that Americans may access.

Recall that subjects in dominant imaginaries are not wholly stuck there, but can enter different imaginaries. Alternative social imaginaries can challenge the dominant one.[104] For example, perhaps certain American citizens can enter a pacifist imaginary and see the world through its lens. This might lead them to outrage at civilian casualties. Nonetheless, alternative imaginaries might be inaccessible to one who is stuck within a dominant imaginary that renders the contents of alternative imaginaries unimaginable or unjustified. The frontier myth renders it unimaginable that peace could be sustained, because that would end the frontier myth.[105] Therefore, subjects who inhabit the frontier myth might be unable to inhabit a pacifist imaginary. This means that resistance from within a different dominant imaginary could be necessary.[106] For example, Dia al-Azzawi's painting "Mission of Destruction" directly challenges the frontier myth by drawing

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104   Medina, *Epistemology of Resistance*, 257

105   Tirman, *The Deaths of Others*, 366.

106   Medina "Racial violence", 32-33.

on Picasso's "Guernica" (American troops are on the right, Iraqis on the left):[107]

Dia al-Azzawi, "Mission of Destruction"

"Guernica" is not a dominant imaginary in American society as a whole, but it is in the context of a modern art gallery. This painting uses this imaginary to frame American troops not as saviours or as engaging in regenerative violence, but as engaging in violence equivalent to the horrifying violence of "Guernica". This uses a different dominant imaginary which people in the art gallery inhabit ("Guernica") to challenge the frontier myth.

Similar strategies can be used to challenge meta-attitudes. Challenges can come from meta-attitudes the subject doesn't currently possess, but can come to possess, such as meta-attitudes which privilege local knowledge over American "expertise". Alternatively, challenges can come from a different meta-attitude the subject currently possesses, for example using the meta-attitude of empiricism to challenge the meta-attitude of privileging American expertise, as this expertise gets things empirically wrong (for example, being wrong about what will be politically stabilising). Thus, combatting Americans'

107   MacFarquhar, "Mourning Iraq's Destruction."

insensitivity requires directly targeting background epistemic structures, and my analysis of their insensitivity suggests doing this by challenging Americans' epistemic structures from different epistemic structures they can access.

Combatting insensitivity to civilian casualties also requires targeting meta-blindness directly. Combatting meta-blindness involves creating an awareness of first-order insensitivities.[108] For Americans, this would be an awareness of their inability to have certain beliefs about and affective attitudes towards civilian casualties. In order to ensure that Americans overcome insensitivities in new contexts that generate new insensitivities, Americans must be vigilant about checking their epistemic limitations and seeking out alternative perspectives that might correct those limitations. These habits can be fostered by combatting meta-blindness to make them aware that they have limitations. It might be that some level of awareness of limitations is achieved by highlighting insensitivities and presenting sensitivities, since one might become humbler upon being corrected. This is by no means guaranteed, however. We should therefore consider strategies which try to directly combat meta-blindness.

The strategy Medina proposes for combatting meta-blindness is encouraging people to compare different epistemic perspectives with their own.[109] Through a comparison of sensitive and insensitive perspectives on civilian casualties, insensitive subjects can become more aware of their epistemic limitations. If an American compares their perspective on civilian casualties with an Iraqi's, the more concerned attitudes in the latter than in the former are highlighted. The American might thereby realise that such concern is sensitive, and their absence of concern is insensitive.[110] "Theater of Operations" encourages its audience to engage in such comparison. It contains works by both Western and non-Western artists, including artists from Iraq and Kuwait, allowing comparison not merely between cognitive perspectives, but affective ones as well, insofar as these perspectives are expressed in emotionally

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108   Medina, *Epistemology of Resistance*, 186-190.

109   Medina, *Epistemology of Resistance*, 199-201.

110   I acknowledge that this strategy is limited insofar as many of the perspectives presented for comparison with the American one will be distorted or rendered insensitive by Americans' background epistemic structures. The two strategies I have proposed in this section should therefore

charged artworks.[111] For example, many works focus on media representations of the Gulf War. Michel Auder's "Gulf War TV War" plays footage from contemporary news broadcasts.[112]

Michel Auder, "Gulf War TV War"

These images depict the war as, in Tim Arango's words, "a sanitized… war without a lot of casualties".[113] They convey the dominant epistemic perspective, and it is insensitive to civilian casualties. The work also conveys Auder's perspective, which criticises the dominant perspective without showing what that perspective misses. Yet the exhibition also contains works from Iraqi artists which present sensitive attitudes that the dominant perspective misses. Hanaa Malallah's "She/He Has No Picture" is a series of portraits of the victims of a US bomb strike that killed 400 people in the Amiriyah shelter.[114]

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111   Arango and Farago, "These Artists Refuse to Forget," and Zaras, "Exhibition Caught in Crossfire," 48-50 mention this comparison of perspectives.

112   Arango and Farago, "These Artists Refuse to Forget".

113   Arango and Farago, "These Artists Refuse to Forget".

114   Arango and Farago, "These Artists Refuse to Forget".

Hanaa Malallah, "She/He Has No Picture"

The texture of these paintings is disrupted, making it seem like they are disintegrating. This disintegration is juxtaposed with the often lively, smiling faces, conveying a great sense of loss.[115] Mallalah's works mourns these casualties, and this is a sensitive attitude towards them. Considered alone, Auder's work and Malallah's highlight an insensitivity and present a sensitivity, respectively. The exhibition as a whole, however, allows for direct comparison of Malallah's sensitive perspective with the perspective of the American media, promoting awareness of the absence of concern in the latter perspective. Viewers can also compare it with Auder's critical perspective, seeing that Auder does not perceive what is missed by the dominant perspective and acknowledging this as a blind spot in Auder's perspective.

4. Conclusion

American citizens are meta-blind with respect to their insensitivity to civilian casualties: they do not know that they are insensitive. Their insensitivity is rooted in the dominant social imaginaries of orientalism and the frontier myth, as well as in the meta-attitude of orientalist knowledge hierarchies. This means Americans are likely meta-blind, since these epistemic structures prevent them from engaging with epistemic counterpoints that would make them aware that they

115   This analysis is inspired by John Farago's in Arango and Farago, "These Artists Refuse to Forget".

are insensitive, and distort their judgments of which attitudes are sensitive and which insensitive.

Identifying the role of imaginaries, meta-attitudes, and meta-blindness in American insensitivity has implications for how insensitivity should be combatted. Effectively combatting insensitivity requires directly targeting Americans' meta-blindness and their background epistemic structures. I thus suggest two strategies for combatting insensitivity –- comparing differing epistemic perspectives to combat meta-blindness, and using different epistemic structures Americans can access to challenge the epistemic structures of orientalism and the frontier myth.

I have provided a novel analysis of Americans' insensitivity to civilian casualties, and suggested novel ways for combatting this insensitivity. The effectiveness of various strategies is not settled by the arguments I have presented, and interdisciplinary empirical work needs to be done to determine which strategies are the most effective. Finding the best strategy possible is necessary for producing the moral-epistemic and political benefits of combatting insensitivity to civilian casualties.

Acknowledgments

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