

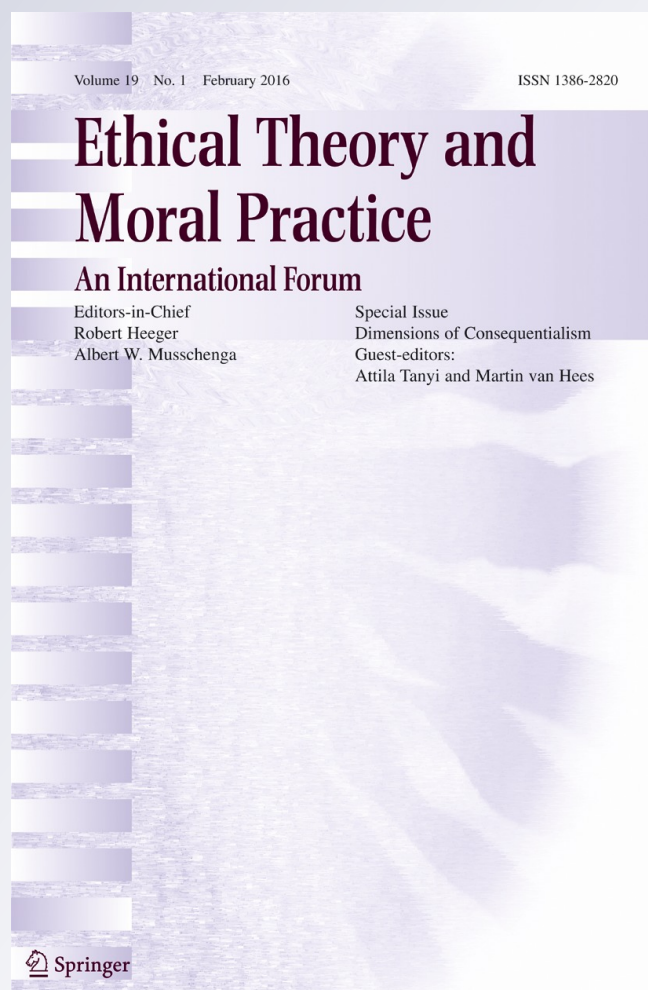
# *Guilt and Child Soldiers*

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**Ethical Theory and Moral Practice**  
An International Forum

ISSN 1386-2820  
Volume 19  
Number 1

Ethical Theory Moral Prac (2016)  
19:115-127  
DOI 10.1007/s10677-015-9595-3



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## Guilt and Child Soldiers

Krista K. Thomason<sup>1</sup>

Accepted: 17 April 2015 / Published online: 25 April 2015  
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**Abstract** The use of child soldiers in armed conflict is an increasing global concern. Although philosophers have examined whether child soldiers can be considered combatants in war, much less attention has been paid to their moral responsibility. While it is tempting to think of them as having diminished or limited responsibility, child soldiers often report feeling guilt for the wrongs they commit. Here I argue that their feelings of guilt are both intelligible and morally appropriate. The feelings of guilt that child soldiers experience are not self-censure; rather their guilt arises from their attempts to come to terms with what they see as their own morally ambiguous motives. Their guilt is appropriate because it reaffirms their commitment to morality and facilitates their self-forgiveness.

**Keywords** Child soldiers · Guilt · Moral responsibility · Coercion · Self-forgiveness

The use of child soldiers has become an increasing global concern in the past decade (Wessells and Kostelny 2008).<sup>1</sup> Philosophers working in the just war tradition have written extensively about whether child soldiers are properly considered combatants and whether it is permissible to kill child soldiers in cases of self-defense (Breen 2007; McMahan 2009; Gade 2010; Vaha 2011). Much less attention, however, has been devoted to the issue of moral responsibility of child soldiers (McMahan 2009; Fisher 2013). It is plausible to think that child soldiers either cannot be morally responsible for their actions or that their moral responsibility is greatly diminished both because of their age and because of the conditions that led them to conflict.<sup>2</sup> But scholars who write about this issue have provided reasons to think that child soldiers are not so diminished in their moral agency that they cannot be held responsible at all (Boyden 2003; Wessells 2006; McMahan 2009; Wainryb 2011; Fisher 2013). The focus of this debate

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<sup>1</sup>Although the exact number is difficult to determine, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, it was estimated that there were between 250,000 and 300,000 child soldiers worldwide.

<sup>2</sup>Although this is the paradigm for child soldiers, it is by no means universal. For example, several children volunteered to be a part of the resistance fighters during South African apartheid (Boyden 2006, Wessells 2006).

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has been whether or not child soldiers possess the *mens rea*—given their youth and the fact that they are often coerced—to be properly responsible for the wrongs that they do during conflict. But much less attention has been devoted to the way that former child soldiers view *their own* responsibility for their actions. When child soldiers reflect on their actions they report feelings of guilt, shame, and remorse and they sometimes believe themselves to be bad people for doing what they did (Boyden 2006; Wessells 2006; Fisher 2013). Feelings of guilt, shame, and remorse are precisely the sorts of feelings we expect from people who hold themselves responsible for doing something wrong. Guilt is one of the reactive attitudes involved in our practices of holding others responsible and seeing ourselves as responsible (Wallace 1994; Korsgaard 1996; Strawson 2003; Darwall 2006; Smith 2007). When someone wrongs us, we blame her and resent her. When we do wrong to others, we experience the first-person versions of those feelings of censure in the form of guilt and remorse. The feelings of guilt that child soldiers experience seem to indicate that they see themselves as at least to some degree responsible for their actions even if other people may not think they are responsible. Yet given that child soldiers are violently coerced into conflict, why do they feel guilt and should they feel guilt?

In this paper, I will argue that their feelings of guilt are both intelligible and appropriate. It is tempting to think that the guilt child soldiers feel is simply irrational. Those who think that child soldiers aren't responsible for their actions may likewise think that their feelings of guilt are due to false beliefs about their own responsibility. But I will argue that their feelings of guilt make sense because they see themselves as having morally ambiguous motives. Because they act out of a fear of death or assault, they find themselves (as I will put it) partially endorsing the intentions of their captors. As such, the guilt they feel arises from the realization that to a certain extent they agreed with the violence they were coerced into committing. I will argue further that their feelings of guilt are morally appropriate. It seems cruel to suggest that child soldiers should feel guilt given how much suffering they have already endured, but I will argue that this skepticism relies on the assumption that guilt is always a form of self-blame or self-punishment. Guilt has other functions besides self-censure: feelings of guilt are part of the appreciation of the wrongness of their actions, which signals that they see both themselves and their victims as moral agents. We ought not dissuade child soldiers from feeling guilt because it can allow them to reaffirm their standing as moral agents and can facilitate their self-forgiveness.<sup>3</sup>

## 1 Guilty for What?

The first step in my argument to show that the feelings of guilt that child soldiers experience is intelligible or rational—that it makes sense that child soldiers feel guilty for what they do. The second step is to show that their feelings of guilt are morally appropriate—that it is (all things considered) morally good for them to feel guilt. This first section deals with the intelligibility of the guilt that child soldiers feel.

<sup>3</sup> Let me be clear that I am setting aside any questions about the extent to which child soldiers should be held legally responsible for the violence. I do not intend my arguments to support any recommendations about the possibility of punishing child soldiers. My arguments are moral, not legal; they are only meant to apply to the kinds of emotions child soldiers do and should experience.

What does it mean for guilt (or any emotion) to be rational or intelligible? Although the philosophical literature on emotions is rich and complex, one of the widely accepted ways of understanding an emotion's intelligibility is using what D'Arms and Jacobson have called "fittingness" (2000, 68). To know if an emotion is rational, we ask whether it "fits" its object. Take fear as an example: I might be afraid if I stumble upon a coiled venomous snake while hiking alone.<sup>4</sup> My fear "fits" the situation because I perceive that I am in danger: the snake might bite me and I might be unable to get medical attention, so my health and life are threatened. Contrast this case with a case where fear doesn't fit: I stumble upon a baby bunny while hiking alone. If I am afraid in this situation, it is hard to see why. The bunny poses no danger to me and so my fear in this case appears to be irrational or unintelligible. Of course, my fear might be made intelligible in this situation if I had some explanation for it. Suppose I have had a long-standing recurring nightmare about bunnies in the woods. Absent that special story, however, my fear does not fit in the case of the baby bunny because the bunny lacks the features that make fear intelligible. So to claim that fear is rational in a given case is to claim that it fits the situation in which it arises. Intelligible fear arises when we perceive threats or danger.<sup>5</sup> When threats or danger are absent, fear seems unintelligible.

We can use the notion of fit to understand how guilt is likewise intelligible. Traditionally, guilt arises when we realize we've done wrong.<sup>6</sup> Of course, we might do something wrong and fail to feel guilt, but when we do feel guilt our feelings are traditionally explained by an appeal to a wrong we've done. This explanation will arise even in cases when we believe we have done something wrong that others might not classify in those terms. I might think, for instance, that I have done something wrong by using a swear word and yet others might see nothing wrong with it. For the purposes of the emotion, guilt usually depends on how the agent perceives her actions. If she perceives herself as having done a wrong, her guilt can still be intelligible even if others may disagree.<sup>7</sup> One of the primary features of intelligible guilt is that the agent perceives herself as the author of the wrong.<sup>8</sup> Being the author or source of a wrong can be understood in a wide way: I can intelligibly feel guilt when I, for instance, break someone's picture frame by accident. By contrast, irrational or unintelligible guilt is thought to occur when the agent feels guilt and either (a) denies she has done wrong or (b) is not the source of the wrong even in a wider sense (Greenspan 1992; D'Arms and Jacobson 2003; Raikka 2005). Again, absent a further explanation, it seems unintelligible if I claim that I feel guilty for the assassination of Abraham Lincoln: I was not the author of the wrong nor am I causally connected to it in any wider sense.<sup>9</sup> Since guilt arises when we see ourselves as in some way connected to a wrong done, when that connection is absent, guilt appears to be irrational.

<sup>4</sup> This example is similar to Prinz's (2004).

<sup>5</sup> There is a complex discussion in the literature on emotions about whether intelligible emotions involve judgments, beliefs, or perceptions. These disagreements are subspecies of the cognitivist/non-cognitivist debates about emotions. I wish to remain agnostic about this debate. The notion of fit or intelligibility that I am appealing to could be compatible with either a cognitivist or a non-cognitivist account. Taylor (1985), Roberts (1988), Gibbard (1990), Greenspan (1992), Wallace (1994), D'Arms and Jacobson (2000, 2003), Prinz (2004), Raikka (2005), and Brady (2008) all address this debate to varying degrees in their accounts.

<sup>6</sup> Rawls is often cited as the primary advocate of this definition (2003).

<sup>7</sup> Recalcitrant (or irrational)

<sup>8</sup> Taylor (1985), Greenspan (1992) and Taylor disagree about what kind of responsibility is required for guilt, but I will return to this issue later.

<sup>9</sup> There are less clear cases, such as survivor's guilt, but these cases are controversial precisely because we do not understand how the agent sees herself as connected to the wrong done. Survivor's guilt is puzzling because we are unsure what the agent feels guilty for. It does not follow that survivor's guilt is thus irrational. It only means that we must treat it as a special case. Greenspan addresses survivor's guilt specifically (1992).

Now that we have a sense of what makes guilt intelligible, we can turn to the question of the guilt that child soldiers feel. The first question we might ask is: are child soldiers the source of the wrongs they do? The answer is not obvious. On the one hand, they are the ones who do the violence; no one pulls the trigger for them. On the other hand, they are forced or coerced into the conflict in the first place. Understanding the guilt of child soldiers will require thinking about precisely how they are forced or coerced into violence.

The nature of the relationship between coercion and responsibility is complex and has a long philosophical tradition (Wertheimer 1987; Frankfurt 1988; O'Neill 1989; Pallikkathayil 2011; Hyman 2013). But the nature of coercion and feelings of guilt has received far less attention.<sup>10</sup> It should be noted first that not all child soldiers are forced into conflict. Some of them volunteer to join armed conflicts either because of perceived opportunities or out of loyalty to the cause of the conflict (Wessells 2006; Boyden 2006; Wainryb 2011). But the cases where child soldiers feel guilt even when they are forced or coerced into committing violence are the most challenging. Child soldiers are frequently kidnapped by armed groups. Their parents are often killed in front of them so that they know they have no home or families to which they can return if they were to escape. They are cut off from anything that resembles their previous life: they are often given new names with militaristic themes (Wessells 2006). They are subject immediately to strict rules of conduct and any form of behavior that could be taken as disobedience is punished severely, usually with beatings (Wessells 2006). They are often drugged against their wills: child soldiers in Sierra Leone, for example, had "brown brown" (a mix of heroin and gun powder) packed into gashes in their foreheads which were then stitched up so that the children were unable to remove them (Singer 2005). Details like these lend support to the skepticism that child soldiers can be properly held responsible for their actions. Under these conditions, it seems clear that they are not in control of what they do.

Yet child soldiers who experience this kind of duress still report feelings of guilt for what they've done. Consider a specific case from the documentary "The Flute Player." The film tells the story of Arn Chorn-Pond, who is a former child of the Khmer Rouge regime (Glatzer 2003). In the 1970s, the Khmer Rouge led by Pol Pot took over Cambodia. They forced Cambodians from their homes in the cities to the countryside into labor camps. Families were separated and the children were raised together so that they could be indoctrinated into the Khmer Rouge beliefs. These children were then forced to participate in the murder of anyone who disobeyed the Khmer Rouge (Pran 1997). In the film, when Arn is visiting the Killing Fields, he describes some of the things he was asked to do:

They made me help them with the killing. Many times [the Khmer] asked us to take off [the victims'] clothes before they stuck the bayonets in their bodies. So I helped take off the clothes...I was asked to do that for many years.

Arn was forced to help with the killings; he knew that he could not protest and he knew that the Khmer Rouge would kill him if he refused. But when Arn visits the memorials of the Killing Fields, he says, "I continue to think that inside of me I am a perpetrator and a victim. And that inside of me I've never thought I'm a good person. I always think I'm a bad kid and I'm a bad person."

Later in the film Arn visits another surviving former child soldier. That man tells Arn that he shares Arn's feelings: "Yes, there is definitely guilt. I feel ashamed and disappointed. I feel remorse." It is important to note that both men fully acknowledge they were forced into the

<sup>10</sup> Williams (1993) and Wolf (2004) talk about this link in terms of involuntary actions, but not coercion.

situation they found themselves in: the former child soldier that Arn visits says, "I tried to avoid it, but I had no choice...in the end I couldn't escape. I was thrown into it." Throughout the film, Arn repeatedly stresses that he obeyed the Khmer Rouge because he knew he had to in order to survive. Neither man believes that he was acting voluntarily or that he chose to do what he did.

If Arn and his friend both acknowledge that they were forced to do what they did, what precisely do they feel guilty for? Their feelings of guilt are in tension with the plausible claim that they are either not responsible for those actions or that their responsibility for those actions is diminished. It is common to think that control over one's actions is a precondition for feeling guilt and remorse (Taylor 1985; Gibbard 1990; Darwall 2006).<sup>11</sup> If someone pushes me into a shelf, which causes a picture frame to fall and break, it seems plausible to think that the person who pushed me (rather than me) should feel guilt. In this way, we tend to assume that feelings of guilt track responsibility. Yet Arn seems to feel guilty for the very things he is forced to do: helping the Khmer Rouge kill people. He says that he sees himself as both "a perpetrator and victim." Although he talks about his inability to resist the Khmer and the fact that the Khmer's control over him was total, he does not seem to feel guilty for failing to fight back or run away (he later does run away). In the Killing Fields, Arn vividly remembers that the victims struggled against him as he tried to remove their clothes: "Sometimes when I tried to remove their pants, they would kick me. And I feel that very much. I feel the kicking." The source of his guilt seems to be the violence he participated in and the fact that he helped kill innocent people rather than his failure to resist his captors. His thought is not that he should have resisted, but rather that the blood of the victims is on his hands as well as the hands of the Khmer Rouge.

Since Arn seems to feel guilty for the very actions he was forced to commit, it might be tempting to think his feelings of guilt are irrational (Greenspan 1992; D'Arms and Jacobson 2003; Velleman 2003; Raikka 2005; Brady 2008). Irrational guilt has been explained two different ways. First, someone may feel guilt because she believes or judges that she has done something wrong even though she hasn't. Parents, for example, might feel guilty that they cannot afford to send their child to private school even though there is nothing wrong with sending the child to public school. Irrational guilt can also occur when the agent feels guilty for some act that she does not judge morally wrong. A common example of this kind of irrational guilt is when an agent who no longer considers herself religious breaks some religious taboo and feels guilty in spite of her judgment that the taboo is nonsense (Rawls 2003). She simply feels *as if* she has done something wrong even though she hasn't.

But the guilt that Arn feels does not fit either model. The parents who feel guilty because they cannot send their child to private school are not actually doing anything wrong. They falsely believe or judge that there are failing their child. Arn, on the other hand, did something that was actually wrong even though he was forced to do it. Participating in another person's murder is morally wrong, so his beliefs and judgments about his act are not false or misguided like the beliefs and judgments of the parents. We may instead argue that Arn simply feels *as if* he has done something wrong in playing a part in the death of the victims.<sup>12</sup> The agent who

<sup>11</sup> Darwall, for example, writes, "To feel guilt, consequently, is to feel as if one has the requisite capacity and standing to be addressed as responsible" (2006, 71). Gibbard says that guilt is "tied to the voluntary" (1990, 99). Likewise Taylor claims, "It is true to say that when feeling guilty...I must think myself responsible for the relevant state of affairs" (1985, 91). Taylor, however, envisions responsibility widely to include cases of causal responsibility (1985).

<sup>12</sup> This view is broadly known as a "nonjudgmentalist" account of guilt. See Greenspan (1992), Roberts (1988), Raikka (2005).

breaks the religious taboo fits this account: she does not believe that she has done anything wrong, but she feels as if she has. We could say the same of Arn's feelings about his own responsibility: he feels *as if* he is responsible for the murders even though he is not. But if we claim that Arn feels as if he is responsible rather than judges that he is responsible, we still need to explain why he could *feel* responsible in the first place. He was beaten and threatened with death if he did not comply with every order of the Khmer Rouge. We are still left with the problem of explaining how he could feel as if he was responsible while at the same time admitting and accepting that he was forced to do what he did.

We could say that the source of Arn's guilt is his *active* role in the killings: he actively participated in them and so sees himself as somehow complicit in them. Arn after all had a key role in the process. He had to remove the clothing of the victims, which is a job that the Khmer needed to do in order to stab the victim (they kept the clothes for others to use). Arn not only had to help the Khmer in this way, he had to actually struggle with the victims in order to remove their clothes. He was not just a witness or a passive spectator in the killings. Removing the clothes of the victim is an intentional act even though it takes place within a wider context of coercion. In this way, he becomes more like a perpetrator because he is not merely a helpless bystander. We might think that his guilt can be attributed to the active role—albeit a lesser one than the actual killers—he played in the victims' deaths.

Arn's active participation in the activities of the Khmer Rouge, however, does not seem to be enough to explain his guilt. No doubt the Khmer Rouge would have found another child to do Arn's job had he not done it, so his role was not an essential or necessary one. Moreover, Arn does several things in service of the Khmer that he does not feel guilty for. He is forced to be in the music group that the Khmer forms because he knows how to play the flute. Although he hates having to play the pro-Khmer songs, he never expresses remorse over glorifying the Khmer Rouge regime. He is aiding the Khmer by being in their music group, but he is not racked with guilt for it. Of course, removing the murder victim's clothes is much worse than playing the flute, but Arn still actively participates in both. Although the fact that murder is morally worse than playing music for the Khmer can go some distance in explaining Arn's guilt, merely appealing to his active participation in the murders does not go far enough.

The precise nature of the guilt that child soldiers like Arn feel is more elusive than it first seems. On the one hand, it makes sense to think that moral agents would feel guilty for committing murder even if those moral agents are children and even though they were coerced into violence. On the other hand, if we want to maintain the claim that child soldiers have either no or diminished responsibility for their actions, it seems odd that they feel guilt for doing something they acknowledge they were forced to do. When Arn is coerced by the Khmer Rouge to help kill the victims, he does not determine his own actions: if it were up to him to decide, he wouldn't aid in the murders. He only helps with the murders because he is forced by his captors to do so. Why does this diminished responsibility not inoculate him from feelings of guilt?

In spite of the fact that captors force them to do violence, child soldiers like Arn are never mere automatons.<sup>13</sup> It would be a mistake to think that the children no longer have *any* will of their own even though they are coerced into doing violence. Given the details of the way in

<sup>13</sup> “[Child soldiers] are not robots who passively adopt the rhetoric and morals of the armed groups the live within” (Wessells 2006, 144). “Well aware that they have committed wrongs in the eyes of their community and society, many young people who have killed in war do experience and sense of shame or remorse and many yearn for forgiveness” (Boyden 2006, 356).



which children are conscripted into conflict, the captor coerces the children by using their own feelings of fear against them. Since most of the violence they commit is done out of their own fear of death or harm, their fear actually endorses the will of their captors. The closest analog to the experience of child soldiers can be found in victims of torture. Sussman provides an illuminating account of torture that explains what is uniquely morally problematic about it. In torture, the agent is pitted against himself where his own pain works to undermine his commitments: “[T]he victim finds in his pain...a surrogate for the torturer. The victim’s own voice, the voice of his body, has come in part to speak the torturer’s mind” (Sussman 2005, 24). The victim of torture is forced by his captors to betray himself because the pain he experiences at their hands becomes the internalized “voice” of the captor; his own pain tries to convince him to give up.<sup>14</sup>

While pain is the voice of the captor in torture, fear is the voice of the captor for child soldiers. Their fear “speaks” on behalf of the will of their captors and makes them feel as though the motivation to do violence comes from their own will. Child soldiers, like the torture victims, engage in self-betrayal. The Khmer used Arn’s own fear against him, making Arn feel as though he was choosing his own life over the life of the murder victims. Although it is not completely up to him to help with the killings, there is a part of him that endorses the intentions of the Khmer Rouge. Arn’s fear of death was real and salient for him; it provided him with reasons to comply with the Khmer’s orders. His fear was not alien to him or outside of him, and he recognized it as his own. Because of this, Arn has no real way of knowing whether or not he *really did* want to help kill the victims of the Khmer. His fear gave him reasons to want help with the murders, even though that fear was forcibly elicited by the Khmer Rouge. Arn worries whether he is a good person precisely because he cannot really tell if he wanted to help with the killings or not: his fear spoke on behalf of the Khmer, but against his own will.

This explanation captures what is truly heinous about forcing children into armed conflict and the ways in which children are not automatons in the hands of their captors. Those who force children to kill use the children’s own emotional life against them. But then the children are forced into endorsing the violence they commit because their own emotions give them reasons—from within—to comply with the wishes of their captors. The guilt that Arn feels is in response to that part of him that approved the killers’ actions even though it was contrary to his own will. Because he has no way to know whether he actually endorsed murders, Arn is left to wonder as an adult if he was a perpetrator or a victim.

## 2 Should They Feel Guilt?

Even if the guilt that child soldiers feel can be made rational or intelligible on my account, this does not lead to the conclusion that their feelings are morally appropriate. Just because an emotion “fits” in some circumstance it may still be bad to feel. D’Arms and Jacobson give the example of envy to illustrate: it may be intelligible to feel envy when someone has something that you want for yourself, but it does not mean that your envy is thus good to feel (2000). To see whether the guilt that child soldiers experience is morally good, we must know more about what it means for an emotion to be morally appropriate.

<sup>14</sup> “This continuous dynamic of inflicting and withholding pain...puts the victim in the unavoidable position of betraying or colluding against himself, an experience the victim undergoes whether or not he actually informs or confesses” (Sussman 2005, 24).

The philosophical literature on moral emotions is vast, and philosophers have given numerous and varied accounts of what makes an emotion morally appropriate. Accounts of moral appropriateness generally fall into two types: the first type shows that an emotion is *morally permissible* and the second type shows that an emotion is *morally valuable*.<sup>15</sup> On the permissibility account, an emotion's moral appropriateness is determined on an episodic basis. That is, an emotion is morally appropriate if, given a particular instance, it is directed toward a morally appropriate object. For example, we tend to think that envy is never a morally appropriate emotion, but suppose you are envious when someone has received a benefit she does not deserve. In this case, your envy might be morally appropriate because it is directed toward an unfair inequality.<sup>16</sup> Envy in this case is directed toward the morally relevant features of a situation and it is part of your sense that the situation is unfair. As such, feeling envy toward someone who receives an undeserved benefit would be morally permissible. By contrast, on the value account, whether an emotion is morally permissible in any given case is not the focus. Instead, an emotion is morally valuable if it is closely connected to valuable features of moral life. Resentment functions this way: feelings of resentment are morally valuable because they are a part of our sense of self-respect and they are part of our perception that we've been wronged in a way that is undeserved (Strawson 2003; Murphy 2003). Of course there are individual cases when resentment is morally permissible and there are individual cases when it is morally impermissible. But resentment's value is not determined by whether it is morally permissible to feel in any given individual case; its value is determined by the important role it plays in moral agency and moral life.

Here I will argue that the guilt that child soldiers feel is morally valuable rather than morally permissible. Of course, if their guilt is morally valuable it follows that there will be individual cases when it is permissible. In other words, if the guilt child soldiers feel is morally valuable, then there will be times when they ought to feel it. It does not follow, however, that their feelings of guilt will be permissible in every case. Just like there can be individual cases when we ought not feel resentment, there might be individual cases when child soldiers ought not feel guilt. But the permissibility of guilt in individual cases does not affect the overall value of their feelings of guilt. The fact that permissibility varies from case to case does not then mean that it would be better all things considered for child soldiers to not experience guilt at all. So the focus of my argument will be to show how their feelings of guilt can be morally valuable by showing how they are connected to important features of the recovery of their moral agency.

It sounds heartless to suggest that child soldiers should feel guilt, especially given the extreme conditions they live through. We assume that encouraging child soldiers to feel the painful feelings of guilt merely adds to their suffering and may even hinder their own recovery—we speak of people being “racked,” “consumed,” or “plagued” with guilt. But to claim that it is appropriate for child soldiers to feel guilt does not entail that they should feel excessive guilt or that others should try to force them to feel it. We can encourage people to feel guilt without encouraging them to feel excessive guilt, and we can encourage guilt without scolding or blaming. Think, for example, of the ways in which parents might encourage a young child to feel guilt; this task is not always a harsh one. Rather than thinking that we should try to elicit guilt from child soldiers, it is better to think that we shouldn't tell them not to feel it when they do. Many child soldiers experience feelings of guilt on their own without

<sup>15</sup> For this distinction, see Thomason (2015).

<sup>16</sup> La Caze makes this argument about envy (La Caze 2001).

the input of anyone else. As such, my suggestion is that others ought not discourage child soldiers from feeling guilt for their past actions when they do feel it. Their feelings of guilt can be an important part of their moral recovery. Additionally, it does not follow from my argument that third parties cannot help child soldiers through their feelings of guilt. Again, think of the way parents help their children through painful feelings. If a child feels guilty for hitting her sibling and starts to cry, her parents will (and should) comfort her. Her parents can comfort her while still maintaining that she should feel badly for hitting her sibling. Helping someone work through their own difficult emotions does not require trying to alleviate those emotions. We can see this clearly in cases of grief: comforting a grieving person requires being a stable and sympathetic presence for her, but that does not entail trying to make her not feel grief. Likewise, we can comfort someone who struggles with appropriate feelings of guilt without then encouraging them to not feel guilty. Given what child soldiers go through, they will likely require a great deal of comfort as they work through their feelings of guilt. Finally, let me be clear that none of my conclusions are meant to advocate that child soldiers should be legally punished. I only wish to claim that it is morally appropriate for child soldiers to feel guilt for the violence of which they were a part.

Before I defend the claim that the guilt child soldiers feel is appropriate, let me briefly explain the recovery process that child soldiers sometimes go through. After child soldiers are removed from the organizations in which they perpetrate violence, the standard response takes the form of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs (Singer 2005). Most of this work is done by non-governmental organizations. There are generally three phases involved in helping child soldiers reintegrate and rehabilitate: disarmament, physical and psychological rehabilitation, and reintegration into their communities. Disarmament removes the children from the military organizations and so removes them from the direct control of their captors. Once the children are removed from the military, they then require various forms of counseling and methods of normalization. Most of the time the therapy aims to alleviate their post-traumatic stress. The violence in which they engage is treated as a severe trauma similarly to the PTSD experienced by adult ex-combat soldiers.<sup>17</sup> The final task is to return child soldiers either to their parents and families (provided they are living) or into their communities (Singer 2005).

These tasks are surely important parts of rehabilitating child soldiers and I do not wish to claim that they are inappropriate or misguided. But the rehabilitation process posits that child soldiers are primarily victims rather than perpetrators. When, for example, Ishmael (a former child soldier from Sierra Leone) recalls his first few months at the Benin Home for former child soldiers, he remembers the staff telling him and the other boys, "It's not your fault that you are like this" (Beah 2008, 140). The staff repeated these words to them even after the boys beat up the storage manager for no reason. Of course, Ishmael, Arn, and other child soldiers are victims. But, as Arn himself notes, they also experience themselves as perpetrators. They have no illusions that even though they were forced into the violence, they killed people and they recognize these things as wrong. The focus on rehabilitation as therapy for trauma does not do enough to address the way child soldiers see their own actions as morally wrong in spite of the fact that they were coerced.

The claim that child soldiers should feel guilt seems cruel if we think of guilt as a form of self-punishment or self-censure. In everyday cases, if I do something wrong and feel guilt for

<sup>17</sup> Some psychologists have called into question this use of this model applied to child soldiers. See Litz et al. (2009) and Wainryb (2011).

it, others can also blame me and resent me for what I've done. As such, guilt is often characterized as the first-person analog to blame: the guilt I feel for my wrongdoing is just like the blame that others direct toward me (Taylor 1985; Greenspan 1992; Wallace 1994; Gibbard 1990; Darwall 2006). Recall that Am's guilt arises out of the experience of the moral ambiguity of his own motives. In other words, he cannot really tell whether he actually wanted to kill the victims or not because his own fear endorsed the intentions of his captors. It is tempting to think that Am's feelings of guilt are his way of punishing himself for these apparent bad motives, but I want to suggest that his guilt has another function.

Feelings of guilt are often part of an agent's appreciation for the wrongness of her past actions and not simply part of her self-punishment. We can see how emotions are part of the appreciation or recognition of the wrongness of an action when we consider cases of resentment. Agents feel resentment toward others who do them wrong. Their feelings of resentment are constitutive of their recognition that such treatment is unjust and undeserved (Strawson 2003; Murphy 2003; Griswold 2007). As Strawson points out, I will be in the same physical pain if someone accidentally stomps on my foot or if she intentionally stomps on it, but I will only feel resentment in the intentional case (2003). Hence resentment is part of the perception or judgment of unjust treatment and not just harm. Similarly feelings of guilt are not simply ways we punish ourselves, but also part of the recognition that we have done something wrong. We feel guilt when we "see vividly the harm we have inflicted on others" (Murphy 1999, 332). This feature of guilt is highlighted by the fact that we often find penance without guilt an unsatisfying response to wrongdoing. If a wrongdoer tries to make amends for her wrong, but seems to feel no remorse, we might reasonably doubt that she actually appreciates the full force of her wrong (Greenspan 1994). Additionally, when agents express regret rather than guilt for some wrong they have done, we are likewise suspicious.<sup>18</sup> We think that they fail to see themselves as adequately connected to the wrong done and so we suspect that they are not really admitting to it. Thus feelings of guilt are part of an agent's acknowledgement that she did something wrong. As Am wrestles with his past, the wrongness of his actions no doubt weighs on him and he vividly recalls the suffering of the people he helped kill. Reflecting on the murders forces Am to realize the ambiguity of his own motives and confront the fact that he may have in some sense wanted to kill the victims. His guilt thus comprises part of his realization that he may have endorsed the motives of the Khmer Rouge.

Since feelings of guilt are part of the realization of the wrongness of our actions, the guilt that child soldiers feel is an important part of reintegrating them into the moral community. It is one of the emotions that arises out of the "participant" stance that we take toward others and ourselves as moral agents (Strawson 2003, 79). Emotions like resentment, blame, guilt, and gratitude arise within the context of moral interaction. We feel resentment when others do wrong to us and we blame them. We likewise feel guilt when we wrong another. Emotions like these presuppose that we see others and ourselves as members of the moral community (Darwall 2006). It is because I see the person who, for example, stomps on my foot as a fellow moral agent that I blame her and resent her for what she does. I do not, by contrast, blame or resent the stone that falls on my toe because it is not a participant in the shared enterprise of morality. As a reactive attitude, guilt presupposes both (a) that I see myself as a moral agent who has done something wrong and (b) that I see the person I have wronged as a fellow moral agent. If a child soldier feels guilt about his past actions, that signals that he

<sup>18</sup> Greenspan provides an example from Russell's autobiography in which he breaks a promise to a woman with whom he was in love. He describes himself as feeling "sorrow for this tragedy" (Greenspan 1995, 116).

recognizes what he did was morally wrong and that the person he helped kill did not deserve it. Feelings of guilt that child soldiers experience are part of their commitment to morality—not the values of their captors, but the values and commitments they share with the moral community. Dissuading child soldiers from feeling guilt might be well meaning because we do not think that they should punish themselves, but doing so fails to acknowledge that their guilt reaffirms their standing as moral agents.

Reaffirming their status as moral agents is one of the ways that child soldiers can come to terms with their violent past and ultimately forgive themselves. Treating child soldiers as traumatized victims can help them reestablish trust, reconnect them with their civilian lives, and alleviate their traumatic stress symptoms. Arn has spent most of his adult life in counseling and touring the world telling his story of being a child in the Khmer Rouge regime, but these experiences have not helped him forgive himself. In the film, as Arn leaves the home of the other former child soldier, Arn makes a point to hug him. He explains:

I don't know if anyone, before he dies, will tell him that he was a good person. Or hug him. I do it because I want him to know before he dies that one person understands [him] and is able to give [him] a hug. People in the world forgive me, but by hugging that boy, I forgive myself.

Regardless of the fact that other people forgive him and in spite of his many years of counseling, Arn still has trouble forgiving himself for what he has done. Likewise, at the boy's home Ishmael has been told again and again that what he did as a soldier was "not his fault." After one of the staff members had tried to reach out to him by repeating the phrase, he recalls:

Even though I had heard that phrase from every staff member—and frankly I had always hated it—I began that day to believe it...That didn't make me immune from the guilt that I felt for what I had done. Nonetheless, it lightened my burdensome memories and gave me the strength to talk about things. The more I spoke about my experiences...the more I began to cringe at the gruesome details (2008, 165-166).

The fact that others forgive Arn for what he has done and the fact that the staff members tell Ishmael that "it wasn't his fault" do nothing to alleviate the guilt that they feel. I have argued that the feelings of guilt that child soldiers experience are part of their appreciation the wrongness of their past actions. Their feelings of guilt mean that they have begun to see themselves as moral agents and members of the moral community. If they come to see themselves this way, they can then come to see themselves as worthy of respect that all moral agents deserve even when they do wrong. They can also come to see themselves as having the possibility of redemption that moral agents possess. In hugging his fellow former child soldier, Arn communicates to him that he isn't a truly bad person even though he has done terrible things. Arn tells his friend what he wants to believe about himself. Once Ishmael begins to talk about what he has done, he begins to "cringe" at his own actions. He starts to see himself as a moral agent belonging to the same moral community as his victims rather than as a soldier surrounded by civilians. My suggestion is that Arn and Ishmael start to forgive themselves only once they reaffirm their standing as moral agents (Holmgren 1998; Blustein 2000; Dillon 2001). The guilt that they feel is part of this reaffirmation since it presupposes both their moral agency and the moral agency of their victims.

The feelings of guilt that child soldiers experience are not only intelligible, but also appropriate. Because child soldiers are often coerced into conflict and violence, they experience their own moral motivations as ambiguous. Their feelings of guilt are due to the fact that

at times they endorsed the wills of their captors; they wonder whether they are good or bad people given the ambiguity of their motives. Although guilt is usually thought of as a form of self-punishment, feelings of guilt that child soldiers experience reflect the fact that they are reestablishing their commitment to morality. We recognize others and ourselves as moral agents when we feel guilt. Moreover, feelings of guilt are a part of coming to terms with one's past, which allows for self-forgiveness. Allowing child soldiers to feel guilt does not cruelly fail to acknowledge their status as victims. On the contrary, allowing their guilt acknowledges their own moral agency and the moral complexity of their experiences.

**Acknowledgments** I am grateful to Owen Ware and Aly Passanante for their comments on earlier versions of this paper. I am also grateful to the anonymous reviewers at *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* for their helpful feedback and suggestions.

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