

Biological warfare essay



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War has been an inevitable part of human history. With advancements in technology, the art of war has become sophisticated. Biological warfare, which is the “ use of disease causing microorganisms as military weapons,” has been made possible by modern technology (“ Biological warfare”).

Although biological warfare has been utilized by certain nations many centuries ago, the refinement of the method has taken a different turn as attested by the anthrax attack in the US last 2001. Biological warfare can also be utilized to further a goal or cause. Presently, rogue states develop and keep biological agents to pose as a threat to other countries. The detrimental effects of biological warfare include mass casualty, tumultuous reaction within the targeted population, and economic instability within a specific nation. Also, the fact that producing it is inexpensive, easily accessible, difficult to detect, and easy to conceal makes biological warfare the preferred choice for people who do not have the means to elicit greater harm unto others. But obtaining, preparing, and handling biological agents do not come easy.

However, the use of biological warfare has been prohibited by the 1925 Geneva Protocol and the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention. Unfortunately, there is no guarantee that every country that signed these treaties will actually comply. There are nations that will do anything to win a war. This brings up the issue regarding the morality of war. Countries usually engage in war because they believe that they are fighting for a just cause.

Nevertheless, wars always have foreseeable negative consequences. Even if the intention is good, this does not make it morally right according to the

philosopher Thomas Aquinas. Thus, something that may seem good might actually be bad, which is known as ulterior motive popularized by Immanuel Kant. Also, Kant's definition of goodwill and duty becomes unclear when war happens because people distort its meaning to further their own interest.

In addition, one's moral obligation, conned by Kant as categorical imperative, is what people base their action on. In contrast, Aristotle believes that a moral person will know what to do when faced with any circumstance.

Although during war, Mill's Utilitarianism concept is being used to justify the purpose of going to war. Terms are bound to change when war happens because rational beings enforce moral laws.

Without humans, moral laws will not exist in the first place. Hence, the meaning of words can be attributed to a group of people. These people possess enormous power to be able to dictate to society what something currently means or should mean. Biological warfare has been used in war very early on. Near the end of the French and Indian Wars (1689-1763), " a British military officer is said to have given blankets infected with smallpox germs to a tribe of Native Americans, resulting in their infection with the often fatal disease" (" Biological warfare").

While German agents infected horses, mules and cattle of Americans with anthrax as they were setting on their journey to join their allies in 1915, the United States was stocking up on "[s]ufficient quantities of botulinum toxin and anthrax... to allow unlimited retaliation if the German forces first used biological agents" in 1943 (" Biological Warfare"). In 1970, there were suspicions that the USSR and its allies were using " yellow rain"

(trichothecene mycotoxins) while holding campaigns in other countries (i. e. , Laos, Cambodia, and Afghanistan) (“ Biological Warfare Agents”).

During the Cold War, the possible use of biological warfare was seen by military scientists in a new light because they believed that they could further harness its capability to inflict damage (Novak). Indeed, technological and scientific advancements were made. The latest anthrax attack within the United States last 2001 illustrated this. The US media and government offices were attacked with powdered anthrax distributed by mail, resulting in 4 deaths. The powdered anthrax seemed to be taken from a government facility engaged in testing biological agents (“ Biological Warfare”).

All of these instances imply that people use biological agents mainly to attack their enemies or targeted victims in a guile manner. There are some who would use biological warfare to get a message across. For example, “[t]he Rajhneeshees, who attempted to influence local elections in The Dalles, Oregon, contaminat[ed] salad bars with Salmonella Typhimurium” (Kortepeter and Parker). Nonetheless, rogue states store biological agents not only to ensure their safety but to be able to impose demands on other nations due to this. The biological agents that they possess serve as a tool to convey a more threatening position despite the lack of power and control that they have over other nations. In addition, rogue states will resort to biological warfare because of limited funds.

This is because biological warfare is more commonly known as the “ poor man’s nuke. ” Also, acquiring biological agents may not be so hard to do because “ tests could be carried out under the guise of legitimate medical or

bacteriological research” (Moran). Terrorist groups who plan to engage in biological warfare may even receive assistance from rogue states. Every year, since 1979, the U. S. has released a list of countries which, according to the U.

S. , support groups of terrorists. “[F]ive of these, Iraq, Iran, Libya, North Korea and Syria, have biological weapons programs” (Moran). The detrimental impact of biological warfare is a good enough reason for nations to fear it. Mass destruction can ensue if biological warfare is unleashed as biological agents are lethal.

Anthrax and small pox clearly fit this description. These two biological agents have the “ greatest potential for mass casualties and civil disruption” (Kortepeter and Parker). This is due to the fact that anthrax and small pox can be easily transmitted by aerosol and produced on a large-scale basis. When either agent is used, it would surely have “ devastating psychological effects on the target population, potentially causing widespread panic” (Kortepeter and Parker). This can be attributed to the potential of the agents to bring about vast disease outbreaks, which was largely demonstrated in the history of their use.

Kortepeter and Parker adds that “[i]nitial recognition of both diseases is likely to be delayed.... Availability of vaccines for either disease is limited. ” This kind of situation will definitely cause a tumultuous reaction among people because of the tremendous damage that will result from it.

Another harm that can be done by biological warfare is the “ destruction of economic progress and stability” (DaSilva). This is because extensive

damage can halt the economic activity of a particular country. Moreover, it may take awhile for a country to get back to its feet after such a devastating event. Biological warfare is a viable option for people who want to inflict the maximum amount of damage yet do not want to pay huge sums of money for it. Biological agents are inexpensive to produce because they are an intrinsic part of our surroundings. Hence, this makes them easily accessible.

For instance, anthrax spores can survive on the soil for fifty years and can also be obtained from the carcasses of dead animals that are infected. Spores are also found in the feces of infected animals (Fishbein). Another feature of biological agents that is convenient is its “ easy transportation from one location to another” (DaSilva). In addition, biological agents are hard to detect because they have “ properties of invisibility and virtual weightlessness” (DaSilva).

Lastly, biological agents are easy to conceal because ““ viruses and other such pathogens are ‘ dual-use’, meaning that they can be both used for illegal [and] legitimate purposes....

” (“ Advantages of Using...”). However, engaging in such a process and practice is not as easy as it seems. The fact still remains that “[i]t is not easy to acquire, handle, and disperse deadly biologic agents in quantities that would cause disease epidemics” (“ Bioterror FAQ”). Also, a biological agent has to be “ isolate[d] and culture[d]... they would have to [be] contain[ed] and deliver[ed] [to the intended victims properly].... Containing an agent is the most troublesome part of using biological weapons” (“ Biological Warfare”). Nonetheless, proper containment of biological agents has been

procured by two treaties, namely the 1925 Geneva Protocol and the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention.

These treaties “outlaw[s] various activities associated with the use and acquisition of germ weapons” (Smithson). Treaties can be relied on more than norms to enforce rules because “treaties possess a tangible quality that norms lack” (Smithson). Hence, if a country will go against the treaty, it can be questioned upon by showing their signature on the treaty. However, it seems like war discards all known rules, obligations, and moral conduct that society has established and put into place.

This is because “if victory is sought then all methods should be employed to ensure it is gained at a minimum of expense and time... [it can also be argued that] that no morality can exist in the state of war” (Moseley).

During war, the way things are and should be seems to be set aside because it now becomes an arena wherein “to each his own” aptly applies. Even though the reason for engaging in a war is just, the manner in which this notion and task is carried out, more often than not, has an unpleasant effect. This is because a country will do everything in their power to become victorious in war (Moseley). The use of biological weapons during a war will definitely violate international law. It will surely result in pointless suffering to soldiers of war. In addition, bioweapons do not have the capability to discriminate civilians from combatants (Matthiessen-Guyader).

Thus, if moral conduct is determined by a nation’s actions, the use of biological weapon will certainly fall under the immoral conduct category. This is because “ethical duties are framed in terms of what effects our behavior

can have for others" (" Ethical and Legal Considerations"). Since biological warfare harms a massive number of people, even innocent ones, it is an immoral way of dealing with issues. It is naive to think that war casualties do not include or affect civilians. Thus, if the Summa Theologica of Thomas Aquinas is applied to the concept of war, it can be deduced that war in general is not good.

Negative foreseeable consequence of war is familiar to everyone. Even if the intention is good, the negative consequences that war entails make the act itself bad. On the other hand, if an act has no foreseeable negative consequence and the intention is good, then the act itself is deemed to be good. Similarly, the notion of just cause which seems like a good reason to engage in war might actually be bad.

This is according to Kant's definition of ulterior motive. The only way that " goodness" can be achieved is if " something springs from a desire to do good with no expectation of reward or benefit" (" Theories of Moral"). This does not apply to biological warfare because people engage in such a dangerous act to attain a desired reward or benefit as the final outcome of the event. The ulterior motive also includes the view point of acting " in such a way that you always treat humanity, including yourself and others, as an end in itself, and never as a means to an end" (" Theories of Moral"). In biological warfare, this is something that is not definite and does not always occur.

During war, the definition of goodwill becomes blurred. Goodwill is a concept more associated with Kant and is known as the act of doing good regardless

of the outcome of an action. Unfortunately, this does not usually apply to war. The purpose of war is to achieve a desired outcome, whether defeating enemies, subduing them, conquering a territory.

Often times, people justify attacking another country by saying that they are liberating the civilians of that nation from an oppressive and tyrannical government. Hence, they view what they are doing as good. However, their expressed desire is used as the sole basis of the outcome of the event, without considering the serious implications that are involved in the act of war. If a person actually thinks about it, assaulting another country is not an act of goodwill despite the good intention that motivated the action.

Similarly, how people perceive duty is twisted by war propaganda.

When a country enlists men to engage in war, they tell them that it is a duty they have to perform for their country. They even tell them that it is their utmost obligation to defend their country. For instance, some terrorists may use biological warfare because of their religious duty to get rid of infidels. However, killing people goes against the very tenet of morality and this applies to any religion.

This is because killing another person is inherently wrong. The reason behind this is it disregards a person's worth, and in this case, it is in relation to their life. Slaying someone conveys the notion that a particular person's life is not valuable enough to be preserved. Nevertheless, the categorical imperative of Kant states that moral obligation is something that a person is compelled to do, whether one likes it or not, when faced with a certain situation. The

categorical imperative also implies that a person thinks and feels that anyone in their given situation will do the same thing (Slakey).

This does not hold true in all circumstances. For example, there are many countries who oppose biological warfare due to the damage it can bring. Still, there are those who will resort to such measure if it becomes necessary for their nation's " survival. Likewise, a person's moral obligation is the very essence of ethics. Ethics should enable people to act appropriately in order to be moral (Clayton). Of all the philosophers, Aristotle is the only one who " does not and in fact cannot give us a fixed set of rules to be followed when ethical and political decisions must be made" (Clayton).

This is because Aristotle firmly believes that moral people " will know the correct thing to do, will understand why it is the correct choice, and will choose to do it for that reason" (Clayton). This faith in humanity is very optimistic. In reality, this does not happen often. People know what they should do, but for some reason, they deviate from the proper course of action. For instance, rogue nations know that developing biological agents is in clear violation of international law, yet they are not concerned about it. One does not see rogue nations scrambling to get their act right by destroying biological agents that cost years of research and testing as well as some considerable amount of money.

On the contrary, war confuses people. This is because what they have come to know as right, such as their sense of duty, starts to become vague. People have a tendency to redefine matters, even values, for their own sake. Thus, those who are pro-war will use Mill's idea of Utilitarianism, which states that

“ the greatest happiness for the greatest number” of people (“ Utilitarianism”). Taken into this context, what the majority of people deem as right is the proper course of action to pursue, despite the act being in opposition to set or establish norms in any given society.

All of the arguments that have been mentioned show that during war, definite concepts vary. The reason for this is brought forth by Kant. He said that we are obligated to obey the law because we are, in effect, the source of the moral law—we are the one who give the moral law its force. Indeed, our everyday interaction with one another constantly and subtly states expected moral laws that people have to abide by. Unfortunately, war alters this because people give in to their innermost desires—power, control, hegemony- without considering the negative impact it entails to society.

Rogue nations should realize that biological warfare is an act of genocide. Everyone is aware that “ endangerment of human life is wrong” (Reyes). However, rogue nations or groups such as terrorists think that their cause outweighs the lives that will be lost. Hence, for these people the end definitely justifies the means. The value of human life should not be disregarded easily.

Most people view life as a blessing from God. The Christian-Judeo belief teaches that we are created after God’s image and likeness. Therefore, each one of us is special. Moreover, one of the commandments in the Bible states not to kill another person. This order in itself shows and places a high value on a person’s life. Therefore, deliberately taking someone’s life is considered a sin.

With this belief in mind, inflicting suffering or harm to another individual can be seen as a violation of our spiritual duty, which at times translates to moral obligation as well. This belief also translates into how society should function as a whole. The government has a responsibility to its citizens to protect them by ensuring their safety at all times. According to Thomas Jefferson, “[t]he care of human life and happiness and not their destruction is the first and only legitimate object of good government” (“National Sanctity of”). Thus, protecting one another from harm is a moral duty of a civil society (“National Sanctity of”). Hence, for nations to engage in war and the use of biological warfare is to go against their moral duty to their people and civilized society at large.

Overall, if history has taught us anything about biological warfare, it should be to abstain from it. Destruction of human lives and surrounding is not worth any disagreement or any supposed just cause or reason. Nations should settle matters appropriately and in a civilized way instead of attacking each other like some barbarians. This just shows that even though methods have become sophisticated—people now use biological warfare instead of spears, guns and cannons—people still manage to resort back to olden times. It also does not help rogue nations to know that biological agents are inexpensive to produce, easily accessible, difficult to detect, and easy to conceal.

This makes biological warfare more appealing and a convenient method to elicit massive damage. However, the 1925 Geneva Protocol and the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention as well as moral obligations laid out by Aquinas, Kant and Aristotle should restrain rogue nations from

carrying out such a heinous act. Biological warfare has the potential to wipe out thousands of people all at once. This technology can be a fatal blow to society.

Therefore, this kind of technology should be contained and not be used at all. There is no matter that is so grave that it needs this kind of retribution. It is not up to nations to decide the fate of another nation or its people.