Task 2: “War is an ugly thing, but not the ugliest of things: the decayed and degraded state of moral and patriotic feeling which thinks that nothing is *worth* a war, is much worse […] A man who has nothing which he is willing to fight for, nothing which he cares more about than he does about his personal safety, is a miserable creature who has no chance of being free, unled made and kept so by the exertions of better man than himself.” John Stuart Mill: The Contest in America, p31 (1862)

**War is an ugly thing, but not the ugliest of things…**

John Stuart Mill presents in the Contest in America that one thing that is uglier then war, is in fact not being willing to go to war, and the decayed and degraded state of moral and patriotic feeling which thinks that nothing is worth a war, is much worse than the war in itself. The claim also indicates that the person which is not willing to go to war, is in fact a miserable creature, who has no chance of being free, unless made and kept so by the exertions of better men than himself. Mill does here also show an opportunity as to which this person can be somehow free, but also underestimate the power of the person by only making him one in the mass for the person in power or of “the better men”

I will in this essay discuss if John Stuart Mill was wright about this claim, but also see the claim in a problematic historical surrounding. The claim was presented in 1862, but it is still relevant today. We can look back at history and see the eternal samsara taking place of historical events. Wars, revelations, hungers, extremism, different political waves, people being oppressed and people taking too much power. As of which the claim may be relevant in all of history that has been, that is and that will be. There will always come times, as to where your standings and opinions are being oppressed, or your own rights or the rights of others are being overlooked or oppressed. I believe that it is in these cases Mill wants people to stand up and be willing to fight for what you believe in.

It is reason to believe that there is also a humane degree of caring. In the claim Mill approaches to saying “for nothing which he cares more about than he does about his personal safety…”. This indicates that the person does not see longer than his own needs, and maybe also the needs of his nearest, but there is no caring for people outside of the personal sphere. It is possible to believe that fighting for your own rights should be as important as fighting for others rights. Take women’s rights as an example; if you as a woman has fought for equal pay as a man in the same position as you, and gained that, you should not step back until all women and men are paid equal. You can also take it to a much wider scale by saying that when your country has reached full equality between the sexes, you should not step back until the whole world is equal.

It is also relevant to look at the scale of surrender that Mill wants people to do. It is a deep surrender to what you believe in, and are willing to fight for. The Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard talked about this surrendering regarding choices, and Kierkegaard’s philosophy could help support the claim of Mill. When you make a choice, whether it is your political standings, a religion or an everyday choice, you must surrender your hole being to that choice, and follow it with your whole body and mind. So to relate to the claim, you must be willing to fight for your standings and choices to the bitter end, and therefore be able to go to war for what you believe in. Kierkegaard uses the biblical example of Abraham and Isaak, as of when God tells Abraham to sacrifice his own son to show how strong his faith is. Abrahams faith is that strong, and he prepares the sacrifice of his son. He is almost at the point of reaching his sons body with the knife when God stops him, and says that his faith is strong enough. It is important to mention that God stopped Abraham before he killed Isaak, and therefore a cruel act never actually happened but it showed that his faith in what he believed in was so strong that he was willing to let it happen. This is how strong of a faith you should have to what you stand for and the choices you make. But could this extreme version of faith lead to extremism?

If we take a look back at history, the strong patriotic feeling of some, and the extreme willingness to fight for what you believe in, has led to mass destruction, oppression, discriminations and homicides. The Nazi-regime and the fascist-regime, as well as other totalitarian regimes is examples of this. Also today we have a situation in the Middle East where people go to a dramatic and bloody war for their standings. ISIS as well as other terrorist groups are willing to sacrifice their own life and the life of others to what they believe in. They could as well as I, argue as of why Mill is right in this claim. They could in fact use the claim to legitimate their actions, which leads to the problematic part of the claim in a historical surrounding. It is really easy to say that the members of ISIS are fighting for the wrong side or the wrong point of view. For them, on the other hand, they are fighting for the wright point of view. It is an action of ideological evil, as Hannah Arent might have claimed. They do wrong but believe that they are doing it for the greater good.

Another thing that is important in the claim of Mill, is that a man who has nothing to fight for, has no chance of being free. So the basic human right of freedom is not covered if the person is indifferent or has nothing that he is willing to fight for. Also the known John Lock had a negative viewing of the indifference, and that this really is root to evil. This part of the claim is relevant to the modern existentialism, in which you should first realize your freedom and then take choices which is all up to you, and then hold on to these. The freedom is not being used if you are not realizing your freedom and using it to exist as only you would like to exist. And if you do not use your freedom, are you then free? These can be answered by the claim of Mill, but he also indicates that if you do not use this freedom and stand for your point of view, you can be used by the exertions of better men than yourself. To make it clear; if you have nothing you are willing to fight for, you could be used as an object in others peoples fights for what they are willing to fight for. This part of indifference, can be used for totalitarian regimes that gather masses. They tell people what they should stand for, and imprints opinions and standings, and the man himself does not discuss and reflects over the truths he is imprinted with. This could be explained as the banality of evil, an evil action caused by the absence of reflection, and is another one of Arents types of evil as well as the ideological evil mentioned above.

So comes the question, is the indifference really worse than the war in itself? There are different definitions of war, but to view it as a happening in which two or more sides of one interest is fighting, and the sides are willing to sacrifice life of oneself or others for what side you are fighting for, is the cruelest or “ugliest” sort of war as Mill might have said. The claim is then saying that a thing much worse than this war “is the decayed and degraded state of moral and patriotic feeling which thinks that nothing is worth a war”. The paragraphs above are proving that it is important to fight for what you believe in, but we cannot ignore the cruelty of a war and the destructions of land and humans as a war may lead to. It is hard to support the claim, while you have images of war affection civilians, and especially children. It is hard to support the claim because it can legitimate the most horrific acts. The reason why the claim is supported is the fact that fighting for beliefs also means fighting for the good side, and the fights of this side is what leads to a better world for many. The claim may be hard to except because we have to trust that one does not fight for evil, but good. The idea of human beings born good or that there is an objective moral in the world, helps to support that one will not stand for false truths and bad moral. But this cannot be state as a fact, and therefore it is needed to take a leap to support the claim of Mill.

An old Punjab saying is “I would rather see your body covered with holes of bullets, than to hear about your cowardice at the battlefield”. This saying indicates that a willingness to fight is better than the willingness to live. Of course this again can be seen as a legitimation of the cruelty happening in the world, but it can also support the fights for goodness, equality and human rights. For if no man nor women would fight for what they believed in, would the world change? If no one would fight for change, if no one would bring up inequality to the table, if no one would stand for a different opinion of others and really fight for this, would things change? It is reason to believe not, and this may indicate that change in the world comes from people fighting for their opinion, good as well as bad to the moral standards. Maybe the wars and fights has to have negative consequences if we want to approach the positive outcome. The Arabic Spring is an act of freedom and democracy, but is also view as a bloody massacre of the different countries involved. It may be the example of two wrongs make a right, or to others it means that the mathematical term does not work in real life.

The claim is problematic, but possible to support. It is important to stand for what you believe in, and having a cause you are willing to fight for. The idea of war is not a good thing, but the idea of indifference might be or is worse. As a human you are born to be free, but if you do no use your freedom to have your own opinions and fight for this, you may not be free. This essay has discussed the reliability to the claim, but also its downsides as of which it legitimates acts of extremists. It is not easy to state for a fact how willing you should be to fight, or for what. The essay will only lead to another philosophical question; what is good and what is not, what is good moral and what is not. It is impossible to sum up this essay with saying that whatever you believe in, you should be willing to fight for it, if what you believe in might be oppression, racism or discrimination. It is for another essay to discuss the philosophical moral question, but for this I would support and legitimate the claim of Mill, but we should also be aware of the misconceptions of it in which indicates bad moral and actions which does not lead to any good. This again is subjective as of whom you are asking, but as to make an objective side of good moral, you should always be willing to fight for what you believe in. If you have nothing worth fighting for, you are not free for you do not use the freedom you are given as a human being. To use your freedom is the same as being free, and if you do this you are in lesser danger as to be a part of a mass who is guilty of the banality of evil, as you do reflect over your standings and support your own point of view. Also wars and revolutions have led to a better world, as hard as it can be to believe. Wars can also be viewed as non-optional and that war is in fact a consequence of humans coexisting on this earth.

To fight for what you believe in, might be hard. To be willing to go to war might be even harder. But to except the claim of Mill and be willing to believe that indifference is worse than war might be the hardest. As humans we need to be individuals and we need to stand up for ourselves and others. As humans we have the ability to reflect and make choices. As humans we are born to be free. As humans we should be willing to except the claim, as hard as it might be.