ABSTRACT: In this presentation, I will introduce the account of responsibility for war crimes that Jessica Wolfendale and I develop in our recent book, War Crimes: Causes, Excuses, and Blame (OUP 2019). After introducing our account, I will consider several examples of war crimes that seem, at least initially, to present difficulties for our approach.

Wolfendale and I advance a theory of responsibility that grounds culpability for war crimes in the attitudes displayed through combatants’ actions, regardless of how these attitudes were acquired. Child soldiers present a problem for this account insofar as they may possess attitudes that warrant blame on our approach, and yet they are often regarded as blameless insofar as they act at the behest of, and under the control of, adult combatants (who may seem to be the more appropriate targets of blame). Various causally complex cases also raise problems for our account. Such cases include those in which perpetrators are at a significant physical distance from those they harm, as well as cases involving harm caused by actors in hierarchical institutions, and scenarios in which individual wrongdoers make marginal contributions to collective efforts. Blame seems intuitively appropriate in these cases, but it will often be unclear which perpetrators (if any) can be said to have the attitudes that license blaming responses on our view.