



THE ROOTS OF WAR & TERROR

ANTHONY STEVENS

*The Roots of
War and Terror*

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The Roots of War and Terror

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Chapter 1

War and Peace

Jeremy Isaacs: Do you still worry about a nuclear holocaust?

Martin Amis: No, the planet is now safe for war.

The Late Show, BBC 2, 10 October 1993

Had I conducted an opinion poll among my readers just before the Berlin Wall came down in 1989 concerning their attitudes to war, it would have revealed virtual unanimity concerning one thing: they would have been against it. Memories of the horror inflicted by two world wars and the Vietnam War, combined with Cold War fears of nuclear annihilation, meant that all intelligent men and women regarded war as a terrible catastrophe and were convinced that everything possible should be done to prevent it. The collapse of the Soviet Union ended the threat of global war, but, in the years that followed, the world witnessed an alarming increase in violent confrontations between different ethnic, national, and religious communities. This changed to some extent our collective willingness to condone the use of armed force by governments as a means of containing such conflicts – a willingness that was considerably enhanced by the events of 11 September 2001.

But fears of a full-scale nuclear war have receded. For the time being, there is only one superpower, and no nation is going to engage in a nuclear exchange with the United States of

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America. Comforting though that thought is, there is no guarantee that this relatively secure state of affairs will continue indefinitely. There are at least three other potential superpowers in the making – Europe, Russia, and China – each with its own nuclear armoury, each with its own political agenda and economic ambitions, and each showing a reluctance to submit passively to American hegemony. In the decades that lie ahead, there is no knowing what bitter rivalries may develop between them, or what the consequences could be. When, for whatever reason, superpowers square up to one another, there is always a danger that flashpoints, such as the Palestine-Israeli or Pakistan-Indian conflicts, could drive them to take sides and get them locked into a collision course, as happened in the run-up to two world wars. It was one of these flashpoints – the Cuba missile crisis of 1962 and the terrifying game of ‘nuclear chicken’ played out by Kennedy and Khrushchev in the course of it – that created a global fear of war and a determination, shared by everyone except the generals, that it must be avoided at all costs. Though suicide terrorism has subsequently become a major threat to the continuation of civilized life, the threat of war is still with us, and, in its nuclear form, could ultimately put an end to life altogether.

The shared repugnance for war that characterized much of the second half of the twentieth century was a relatively new phenomenon. In previous centuries there had been no shortage of philosophers, poets, and statesmen willing to extol the virtues of war, arguing that it brought out the best in people, prevented economic stagnation, promoted innovation, spread the gospel, and carried civilization to backward lands. ‘War must be taken as part of the divinely appointed order,’ declared the nineteenth-century German historian Heinrich von Treitschke. ‘It is both justifiable and moral, and the idea of perpetual peace is not only irresponsible but immoral as well.’ To the philosopher G.W. Hegel, war was a requirement of public hygiene: ‘Just as the

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movement of the ocean prevents the corruption which would be the result of perpetual calm, so, by war, people escape the corruption which would be occasioned by perpetual peace.' And Niccolò Machiavelli advised that 'A prince should . . . have no other aim or target, nor take up any other thing for his study, but war and its organization and discipline.'

To the post-Vietnam generation such statements seemed grotesque anachronisms; yet it was too easy to forget that, within the memory of people still alive, the outbreak of World War I in Europe in 1914 was greeted with rapturous enthusiasm in France, Britain, Germany, and Austria. Rupert Brook captured this brief moment of joy in his incredible sonnet celebrating the end of *Peace*:

Now, God be thanked Who has matched us with His hour,
And caught our youth, and wakened us from sleeping,
With hand made sure, clear eye, and sharpened power,
To turn, as swimmers into cleanness leaping,
Glad from a world grown old and cold and weary,
Leave the sick hearts that honour could not move,
And half-men, and their dirty songs and dreary,
And all the little emptiness of love!

Few then, it seemed, dissented from this joyful anticipation of the carnage to come. Those who did found themselves in a despised minority: 'I discovered to my amazement that average men and women were delighted at the prospect of war,' wrote Bertrand Russell (1967) in his *Autobiography*. 'I had fondly imagined what most pacifists contended, that wars were forced upon a reluctant population by despotic and Machiavellian governments.' But the terrible truth of the matter is that the opposing armies of 1914–18 could never have gone on slaughtering one another with such dreadful efficiency had they not been given massive popular encouragement. And so

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European civilization was shattered and millions maimed or slaughtered, a catastrophe triggered by the assassination of an archduke in a sleepy Balkan town.

How are we to account for this bizarre behaviour? Were our grandfathers mad? Probably no more so than any other generation that has cheerfully gone off to war. There has often been a rational aspect to warfare, and one should not overlook the benefits which nations owe to this murderous institution. For example, the United States would not have existed for over two centuries as an independent sovereign state were it not for the war of 1776–83, and it would not exist now as a single unified nation were it not for the war of 1861–5. Israel owes its very existence as a state to the wars of 1949 and 1967. If Britain had not resisted the onslaught of National Socialism in 1939–45, what would have become of her?

It is, therefore, untrue to argue, as many well-meaning people do, that war is a mug's game that confers no advantage on anyone, not even the victors. The spoils of victory have proved irresistible to generation after generation of men, and wars, like milestones, have marked the growth and development of our civilization. As the ethologist Iranäus Eibl-Eibesfeldt (1979) remarked, 'It seems almost as if mankind were slotted into an escalating process of bloody selection for war.'

Sadly, it is not just the prospect of victory that attracts us but the activity itself. War brings out both the best and the worst in us. It mobilizes our deepest resources of love, compassion, courage, cooperation, and self-sacrifice; it also releases our capacities for xenophobia, hate, brutality, sadism, destruction, and revenge. When human beings perceive themselves as being under external threat, they close ranks. Distinctions based on age, sex, class, status, or creed tend to dissolve and remain in solution for as long as the danger continues (they tend to reform once the threat is removed). 'The comradeship of war, the fact that under conditions of stress,

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our capacity for identification with our fellow is increased, has been one reason for the continued popularity of war', wrote the psychiatrist Anthony Storr (1964). Those who lived in Britain in 1940–45 remembered this sense of increased fellowship and human warmth with gratitude and nostalgia.

War frees people from routine and the need to be responsible for their actions. As Storr said, people who have no sense of purpose in their lives, or who are dissatisfied by the mundane incentives of ordinary existence, 'find an almost religious satisfaction in devoting themselves to one main objective, and in orientating their lives in submission to the single wartime aim of victory'.

Much the same view was taken by Glenn Gray in his book, *The Warriors* (Gray, 1998). Gray served with the American Army throughout World War II, seeing action in North Africa and Western Europe. His book is a series of reflections on the subject of men engaged in total war. While unsparing in his description of the horrors of modern warfare, he nevertheless had a long chapter entitled 'The Enduring Appeals of Battle'. He wrote eloquently of its 'powerful fascination', 'the encompassing environment of threat and fear', and the 'confraternity of danger' which forges links between people with otherwise incompatible desires and temperaments. He argued that for many young men World War II fulfilled a desire 'to escape the monotony of civilian life and the cramping restrictions of an unadventurous existence'. Union with their fellows in a military unit liberated them from a sense of personal impotence and filled them with feelings of power. They came to regard their previous civilian identity as constrained, anaemic, and isolated. They experienced an awareness of kinship that they had never known before. Gray (1998) wrote:

At its height, this sense of comradeship is an ecstasy . . .

Some extreme experience – mortal danger or the threat

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of destruction – is necessary to bring us fully together with our comrades . . . Until now, war has appealed because we discover some of the mysteries of communal joy in its forbidden depths. Comradeship reaches its peak in battle.

It seems that organization for a common goal brings its own deep satisfaction. Cooperation and collaboration, whether for a military operation, a team game, hunting, or clearing the bush, yield a powerful sense of belongingness and self-importance within the group. Uniting for a shared purpose is a means of submerging self-interest in the interests of the common weal. This is particularly true when the shared purpose is one of *survival*.

Thus war puts us in a painful double bind: although we may hate it as brutal, cruel, and wantonly destructive, there is something evilly seductive about it which, under certain circumstances, renders it difficult to resist. As a result, armed conflict has repeatedly and remorselessly afflicted every part of our planet where human beings have come into contact with one another – not only in recent times but, in all probability, since our species came into existence.

THE UNIVERSALITY OF WAR

The most persistent sound which reverberates through man's history is the beating of war drums.

Arthur Koestler

The nineteenth-century philosopher Pierre Joseph Proudhon believed we all have a direct, intuitive knowledge of war because scarcely a generation passes in any nation without some exposure to it. The statistics of history are in line with this assumption: between 1500 BC and AD 1860, for example, there

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were in the known world an average of thirteen years of war to every year of peace; and between 1820 and 1970 the major nations of the world went to war on average once every twenty years – that is to say, once per generation (Walsh, 1976).

Warfare is a constantly recurrent and universal characteristic of human existence. The mythologies of practically all peoples abound in wars and the superhuman deeds of warriors, and preliterate communities apparently delighted in the recital of stories about battles. Since our species became literate – a mere 5,000 years ago – written history has mostly been the history of wars. Practically all frontiers between nations, races, and religions have been established by wars, and all previous civilizations perished because of them. The earliest records known to archaeology, apart from lists of utensils, are the records of war. Armed conflict, like sex, seems to be a primary obsession of mankind. And it is appropriate to use the generic term *mankind* since war has universally been a masculine problem. Women do not make war; men do.

There have always been, however, both men and women of goodwill who have exerted their energies to prevent war – demonstrating a capacity within us for peaceful coexistence as well as armed belligerence. Thousands who knew war evidently sickened of it and dreamt of lasting peace, expressing their vision in literature and art, in philosophy and religion. They imagined utopias freed of martial ambition and bloodshed which harked back to the Golden Age of classical antiquity, to the Christian vision of a paradise lost, and to the Arcadia of Greek and Latin poetry, so richly celebrated in the canvases of Claude and Poussin.

The religious genius of humanity has sought peace in the *Wu-Wei* of Taoism, the *ahimsa* of Buddhism, Christ's Sermon on the Mount, the Hinduism of Mahatma Gandhi – all of which touched the spirit more deeply than secular attempts to establish peace on earth such as the *Pax Romana*. Such powerful ideas

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have inspired every movement for peace up to the present day, making possible the Geneva Convention, the League of Nations, the United Nations, and so on.

These achievements bear eloquent testimony to a human longing for peace, but they have not triumphed over our powerful propensity to war. There have always been treaties and non-aggression pacts, but all have been equally unsuccessful in eradicating war. Between 1500 BC and AD 1860 more than 8,000 peace treaties were concluded. Each one of them was meant to remain in force forever. On average they lasted two years.

Peace treaties do not create peace. They are a sign that peace has, for the time being, returned. The only principle that has been consistently applied is that of the Roman senate: 'If you want peace, prepare for war.' The Russians have an old proverb: 'Eternal peace lasts only until next year.'

It is as if war and peace come in cycles like the tides and the phases of the moon. They seem to stand at opposite ends of a continuum. They both are aspects of the same condition, namely, relations between groups of people. In this sense, war and peace are complementary states of mind which qualify one another like our perceptions of light and dark, hot and cold, noise and silence; for war as a concept is inconceivable without peace, and peace is inconceivable without war. Clearly, they are relative, not absolute conditions; there are degrees of war and degrees of peace. The Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland never formally declared war on one another, but for the later decades of the twentieth century Ulster was not a peaceful place to live in. As one Belfast citizen put it, 'Anyone who isn't confused here doesn't really understand what's going on!'

Everywhere it is much the same. History, both ancient and modern, demonstrates an apparently inexorable alternation between periods of war and periods of peace. The yang of war

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and the yin of peace represent fundamental forces at work which have proved, up to the present, to be inescapable.

The French political scientist Alexis de Tocqueville understood the phasic nature of the belligerent and pacific states to which peoples are collectively disposed, and he saw these phases reflected in the status accorded at any given moment in history to members of the armed forces. 'When the military spirit forsakes a people,' he wrote, 'the profession of arms immediately ceases to be held in honour, and military men fall to the lowest rank of public servants' (*Democracy in America*).

In his (1979) book *On the Psychology of Military Incompetence*, Norman F. Dixon conceived of peace as a state in which our warlike propensities are sublimated or repressed. He pointed out that books and films dealing with war and violence become increasingly popular during prolonged periods of peace – like pornography following an age of sexual repression – and argued that this 'attests to the pleasure provided by the vicarious satisfaction of hitherto frustrated desires'.

Peace, then, is in many ways a misnomer. Perfect Peace has never ruled exclusively over the affairs of men. Conflict and Discord are always with us. Peace is, if we are honest about it, the name we give to times of non-violent conflict. Clausewitz's notorious definition of war as 'a continuation of policy by other means' implies that the policy to be continued is one involving conflict. Conflict is endemic to the human condition, as it is indeed in the nature of our universe.

THE INEVITABILITY OF CONFLICT

Shall I tell you what this collision means? They who think it is accidental, unnecessary, the work of interested or fanatical agitators, and therefore ephemeral, mistake the case altogether. It is an irrepressible conflict between

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opposing and enduring forces, and it means that the United States must and will, sooner or later, become either entirely a slave-holding nation, or entirely a free-labour nation.

Senator William Henry Seward, 1858

The more we discover about the cosmos and about human psychology, the more apparent it becomes that the insights embodied in ancient mythologies, which portray all creation as the product of struggle between opposing forces (a theme taken up much later in their different ways by Karl Marx, Charles Darwin, Sigmund Freud, and Carl Gustav Jung), are both profound and true. For example, radio telescopes have brought home to us the alarming fact that we inhabit a universe of unimaginable violence, and the effort to comprehend something of the extent of this cosmic ferocity has turned astronomy into a branch of high-energy physics. Instead of the gentle harmony of the spheres dreamed of by the poets, we now know the heavens to be filled with the cacophonous pandemonium which accompanies the birth pangs and death throes of stars and galaxies.

Human transactions are no less discordant than celestial ones, as the astrologers have always told us. Wherever human communities exist, conflict is generated both *within* them and *between* them at all levels of intimacy – conflict between husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters, teachers and pupils, workers and bosses, leaders and followers. Cooperation is found too, but then conflict is cooperation's shadow. Conflict has always characterized relations between communities, tribes, city-states, nations, and alliances right up to the present. Within democratic countries, political parties polarize to the left and to the right, and even within individual parties a similar polarization occurs. Wherever one looks, one sees evidence of the powerful human compulsion to polarize things into opposites, to make preferences, and to take sides.

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Conflict is a principle of nature. Indeed, Darwin recognized it as the primary force at work in evolution. Better adapted forms of life are selected through success in the competitive struggle for survival and propagation of their genes which goes on between different species and between members of the same species for the finite resources of the earth.

Conflict is also endemic to our own personalities – as all schools of depth psychology agree. For example, Freud's thinking was profoundly influenced by the notion of polar oppositions and the clash between them, and conflict is the central dynamic of psychoanalysis. The Oedipus complex arises out of conflict between desire to possess the mother and fear of the father's retaliation; personality is the product of conflict between the pleasure principle and the reality principle; every neurosis, every psychosis, every slip of the tongue arises out of conflict between the superego and the id. In his later years, Freud conceived the whole of organic existence as dominated by conflict between two great contradictory forces – the life instinct (Eros) and the death instinct (Thanatos).

For his part, Jung also conceived psychic life to be entirely determined by dynamic opposition, conflict and equilibrium, between the functional components of the human personality: ego vs self, persona vs shadow, reason vs unreason, thinking vs feeling, sensation vs intuition, extraversion vs introversion, good vs evil. And dreams are the means by which the balance of this infinitely complex homeostatic system is maintained.

Neurophysiologists have demonstrated that the brain, the central nervous system, the autonomic system, and the endocrine system all operate in accordance with the same principle of dynamic opposition. All the essential functions of the body (as Jung believed of the mind) are arranged in opposing systems which, in health, are kept in balance through a process of positive and negative feedback. This is the principle of homeostasis. Body temperature, blood sugar levels, blood

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oxygen levels, and so on, all are regulated in this way. Thus, hunger is balanced against satiation, sexual desire against gratification, thirst against fluid retention, sleep against wakefulness. The principle of homeostasis is, of course, a scientific rediscovery of an ancient truth; it is Taoism in modern dress.

We must conclude, therefore, that conflict is not a phenomenon that is particularly susceptible to rational explanations, and as a consequence it is not very helpful to turn to politics, economics, sociology, or history if one wishes to discover the fundamental causes of conflict between groups of human beings. Politico-economic ‘explanations’ of conflict often prove on examination to be *rationalizations* of imperatives arising from darker, deeper realms of experience. The *origins* of conflict have little to do with reason; they are rooted in the very nature of our species and the universe which we inhabit.

REASON AND UNREASON

We, the lineal representatives of the successful enactors of one scene of slaughter after another, must, whatever more pacific virtues we may possess, still carry about with us, ready at any moment to burst into flame, the smoldering and sinister traits of character by means of which they lived through so many massacres, harming others, but themselves unharmed.

William James

Of all disciplines, history has been particularly prone to the rationalist fallacy. The host of different ‘explanations’ advanced by historians to account for the outbreak of individual wars seldom throw much light on the fundamental mystery of war – namely, why men do it. Thus, nationalism was blamed for the Austro-French war of 1859 and for the Austro-Prussian war

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of 1866; imperial rivalries and the associated arms race were blamed for World War I; while conflicting belief systems were held responsible for the French Revolutionary wars (Jacobinism vs reaction) and for World War II (fascism vs democracy and communism). A World War III would doubtless have been similarly attributed to conflicting belief systems (capitalism vs communism; democracy vs totalitarianism).

The historian A.J.P. Taylor (1979) listed these and other 'causative' factors, such as the overweening ambition of certain leaders (e.g. Napoleon, Hitler, and Alexander the Great), a jingoistic press inflaming public opinion, lobbying by the military industrial complex, the activities of diplomats, even the influence of historians themselves. Wars of conquest, wars of succession, wars of religion, preventive wars, punitive wars, wars of all shapes and sizes have been named after their putative causes, and a vast literature chronicles their history. But few have attempted to establish the nature of war itself, or the common causative factors of *all* wars. How, when, and why do wars begin and why do they have to occur?

If we are ever to find an answer to these questions, we must look a good deal further than the self-imposed boundaries of history, for two major limitations constrict the usefulness of history as an aid to the study of war. One is its restricted timescale; the other its neglect of the unconscious. Our capacity for warfare is, after all, much older than history. *Homo sapiens* has been in existence for more than 500,000 years, while history derives its data from a wafer-thin layer of the recent past. If we are ever to understand what lies at the bottom of all wars, we have no choice but to adopt a perspective which includes our natural history as a species as well as our political history as civilized people. When we examine a phenomenon which is as universal and biologically ancient as intergroup conflict we must leave the parochial limitations of history and enter the immensity of biological time. When we do that, it begins to

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appear that the causes attributed to past wars by historians are not really causes at all, but merely the triggers that set them off.

Moreover, it seldom seems to occur to historians, even the best of them, that all human events are a progression on two levels of reality – conscious and unconscious, manifest and latent. As a result, history tells us about consequences, not about causes. One must acknowledge, however, that to make good this deficiency would be an enormous undertaking. It would require that the whole of history be rewritten in the light of our growing understanding of the evolved psychological structures of our species.

To regard war, or the threat of war, as a rational activity does not take us very far when we try to analyse the international situation which prevailed between 1948 and 1989. Let us briefly review the circumstances.

We knew that a Third World War would have been a disaster of such magnitude that few living organisms could hope to survive. We agreed that everything possible should be done to avert it. Yet, at the same time, a large number of men and women expressed fears that the policies pursued by governments, however successful they might be in the short term, would not ultimately prevent this terrible catastrophe from happening. We justly prided ourselves on our democratic institutions, through which we believed we could influence our destiny; and yet the dreadful awareness haunted many of us that, at the national level – and even more at the international level – there were times when we seemed no longer in control of our behaviour. At such moments we experienced ourselves as being at the mercy of events which proceeded out of our reach and beyond our understanding.

We were the playthings of a terrifying paradox. We inhabited a world split into two immensely powerful yet hostile camps, both of which devoted vast resources to improving and

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maintaining their capacity to annihilate one another while loudly proclaiming that they had absolutely no intention of putting this incredible capacity into effect. Yet despite these vehement disclaimers and diplomatic efforts to achieve reduction in the number of warheads at the disposal of both power blocs, many people on both sides of the Iron Curtain continued to believe that a nuclear war remained a dreadful possibility.

How could we have been trapped in this hideous dilemma? How was it possible that the two richest, most powerful, and most advanced groups of human beings in the world could earnestly declare that they would never perform a certain disastrous act while at the same time ensuring that they possessed every means to do so? Was this rational behaviour? Or were we in the grip of mysterious forces operating beyond our control leading us towards a destiny which none of us wished to meet? One does not have to be a psychiatrist to perceive that we were collectively in the grip of something complex, irrational, and largely unconscious.

Whatever explanation we may favour, we cannot escape the truth that now, as during the Cold War, we remain heavily invested in the concept of war. Money, in our materially obsessed culture, is a symbol of libido – not only in our dreams but in our actions. We put our money where our libido is. And when one reflects on how much libido we invest in the paraphernalia of war, it becomes apparent just how huge a proportion of our human and natural resources we put to this use. Having poured so much of ourselves so long and so determinedly into the creation of such superbly engineered machines of destruction, it is remarkable that for so long we were able to resist the temptation to set them off. But why did we go on adding to this horrifying military capability to the point where it threatened to run out of control and create the very disaster which it was designed to prevent?

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These were crucial questions and they had little to do with sweet reason. But that should not deter us from trying to answer them. The trouble is that these issues are so fundamental and so unconscious that any attempt to examine them is bound to create dissent. Once one attempts to explain the archetypal structures underlying conflict, one *activates* them – and conflict is the inevitable result. Wars, like any other form of human disagreement, are an expression of our penchant for polarizing issues and taking sides. Partisanship occurs as invariably in intellectual matters as it does in politics and international affairs, and it comes as no surprise to discover that academics who advance theories about the causes of wars can be as aggressive towards each other as the soldiers who fight them. Indeed, nothing can more readily provoke the belligerence of liberal intellectuals than an open debate on how to maintain peace. Léon Daudet went so far as to coin a special term, *invidia*, to describe the intense hostilities that develop between academic writers who support opposing theoretical standpoints. ‘My sad conviction is,’ commented Bertrand Russell, ‘that people can only agree about what they’re not really interested in.’ Not even convocations of bishops, orders of monks, or associations of analytical psychologists are *invidia*-free. As the analyst, Adolf Guggenbühl-Craig (1971), wrote, ‘There are few fields in which internal conflicts are fought in a more unfair, unconscious and destructive manner than among analysed . . . and allegedly “conscious” psychotherapists.’ It would be remarkable if peace researchers were exempt.

I am not saying that one can predict a punch-up every time a group of philosophers or psychologists assembles to discuss human warfare, but they often manage to display a fair amount of disagreement with one another. In fact when hostilities do break out, they can be downright vicious – not with minor skirmishes between disgruntled individuals, but with set-piece battles between alliances of powerfully committed parties,

drawn up along clearly defined lines of demarcation. And once the battle is joined, no quarter is given. The belligerents take up strategic positions which they claim as their own but which, on investigation, often prove to have been prepared by generations of scholars before them. They have their origins in antiquity and, ultimately, in the structure of our brains.

WHY DO WE DO IT?

So that in the nature of man, we find three principal causes of quarrel. First, competition; secondly, diffidence; thirdly, glory. The first maketh men invade for gain; the second for safety; and the third, for reputation. The first use violence, to make themselves masters of other men's persons, wives, children, and cattle; the second, to defend them; the third, for trifles, as a word, a smile, a different opinion, and other sign of undervalue, either direct in their persons or by reflection in their kindred, their friends, their nation, their profession, or their name.

Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 1651

Broadly speaking, theorists who write about war belong to one of two camps: (1) those who conceive man to be an essentially rational creature who is prone to aggression, cruelty, and warfare solely as a response to intolerable circumstances; (2) those who conceive of him as an irrational creature, aggressive by nature, and prone to violence unless curbed by sanctions. Both groups are vast and include legions of eminent thinkers of the past and present.

Historically, the first group belongs to the humanistic tradition which attained its apogee in the French Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. It sees man as a virtuous, rational being, capable of performing evil or destructive acts only as a consequence of living in a corrupt society. This is the doctrine

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of Rousseau's 'noble savage', adopted by other eminent *philosophes* such as Buffon, Condorcet, and Diderot. Their whole position was summed up by Count Buffon, who declared, 'Virtue belongs more to the savage than to the civilized man and vice owes its birth to society.' In eighteenth-century England, essentially the same position was adopted by the 'sentimental' novelists Samuel Richardson, Sir Richard Steele, and Laurence Sterne, and by the philosophers William Godwin, David Hume, Francis Hutcheson, and Lord Shaftesbury. This attractive philosophical tradition advanced the optimistic belief that the human condition was infinitely perfectable. All that was necessary to improve things was to institute the necessary educational and social reforms; then we could all look forward to a future of happiness, peace, and prosperity.

The second group of theorists belongs to a less appealing philosophical tradition, whose main advocate was the seventeenth-century English philosopher Thomas Hobbes, and which culminated in the German Romantic movement of the nineteenth century. This tradition conceived of man as an irrational creature, primarily motivated by his passions, whose life in the natural state is devoted to a competitive struggle with his fellows in which only the fit could expect to survive. In the state of nature, Hobbes declared, there were 'no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short'. Left to their own devices, Hobbes believed, men were inevitably selfish, warlike, and greedy, and civilized existence only became possible when these natural instincts were quelled through fear of punishment at the hands of a sovereign power. Justice, kindness, and peaceable conduct were so 'contrary to our natural passions' that 'only the terror of some power' could make them prevail. 'Covenants without the sword,' he said, 'are but words, and of no strength to secure a man at all' (*Leviathan*, Part II, Chapter XVII).

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Both these philosophical traditions are based on assumptions about the 'natural state of man' which betray a startling degree of anthropological naivety. But, for all that, they continue to exercise a profound influence over our culture, in particular over our political and academic institutions. Thus, belief in human innocence and in the perfectability of the human condition by 'changing society' – the primary tenets of Enlightenment humanism – continues to provide the chief inspiration of the liberal left in politics, and has resulted in an academic consensus that denies the existence of anything so tangible as 'human nature' (the main preoccupation of Hobbes and the Romantics) and places full emphasis on the study of variables arising from the environment and society. So it is that the whole edifice of twentieth-century social science has been raised on the 'culturalist' vision of man as a *tabula rasa*, or blank slate, wholly dependent for his psychology on social influences impinging on him from birth to maturity. This was as true of the Pavlovian 'conditioned reflex' tradition of Soviet social science as it was of the behaviourism and learning theorism of American academic psychology. Humanism has been particularly influential in the study of aggression, where the academic consensus has proved hostile to the view that human bellicosity has anything to do with genetics, biology, or the *a priori* nature of our species.

However, the influence of Hobbes and the Romantics has proved no less hardy than that of the humanists, and nowhere has this influence been more powerfully felt than in depth psychology and the modern sciences of ethology, behavioural ecology, and evolutionary psychology. Not only did such original thinkers as Nietzsche, Freud, and Jung espouse the Romantic tradition, but the ethologists Konrad Lorenz (1966), Niko Tinbergen (1951), and Iranäus Eibl-Eibesfeldt (1979) gave detailed descriptions of the aggressive patterns of behaviour which characterize the interpersonal relations of social animals