Approaches to Peace

A Reader in Peace Studies

Edited by

David P. Barash
University of Washington

New York  Oxford
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
2000
War and Other Essays

Sociological perspectives on war tend to fall into two camps. A German school, under the influence of the philosopher Georg Hegel, and later, sociologists such as von Bernhardi, Gumplovicz, and Ranzenhofer, developed a "sociology of conflict," which saw warfare as necessary and desirable for the evolution of society. "War," wrote Hegel, in Philosophy of Right, "has the higher meaning that through it... the ethical health of nations is maintained;... war prevents a corruption of nations which a perpetual peace would produce."

By contrast, an Anglo-French-American tradition, represented initially by John Stuart Mill, Auguste Comte, and Emile Durkheim, focused on the differentiation and integration of social groups, the role of group consensus, and what they saw as the problem of "in-group amity, out-group enmity." They were interested in the role of war in the development of the nation-state, and they treated national competition less as a desired outcome than as an objective fact of life to be analyzed and understood.

Others have sought to understand the relationship between industrialization and war, as well as the powerful and complex phenomenon of nationalism. The following selection is by William Graham Sumner, one of the founders of American sociology.

We have heard our political leaders say from time to time that, "War is necessary," "War is a good thing." They were trying to establish a major premise which would suggest the conclusion, "Therefore let us have a little war now," or "It is wise, on general principles, to have a war once in a while." That argument may be taken as the text of the present essay. It has seemed to me worth while to show from the history of civilization just what war has done and has not done for the welfare of mankind.

In the eighteenth century it was assumed that the primitive state of mankind was one of Arcadian peace, joy, and contentment. In the nineteenth century the assumption went over to the other extreme—that the primitive state was one of universal warfare. This, like the former notion, is a great exaggeration. Man in the most primitive and uncivilized state known to us does not practice war all the time; he dreads it. He might rather be described as a peaceful animal. Real warfare comes with the collisions of more developed societies... War arises from the competition of life, not from the struggle for existence. In the struggle for existence a man is wrestling with nature to extort from her the means of subsistence. It is when two men are striving side by side in the struggle for existence to extort from nature the supplies they need that they come into rivalry, and a collision of interest with each other takes place. This collision may be light and unimportant, if the supplies are large and the number of men small, or it may be harsh and violent, if there are many men striving for a small supply. This collision we call the competition of life. Of course, men are in the competition of life with beasts, reptiles, insects, and plants—in short, with all organic forms; we will, however, confine our attention to men. The greater or less intensity of the competition of life is a fundamental condition of human existence... The members of the unit group work together. The Australian or Bushman hunter goes abroad to seek meat food, while the woman stays by the fire at a trysting place with the children and collects
plant food. They cooperate in the struggle for existence, and the size of the group is fixed by
the number who can work, together to the greatest advantage under their mode of life.
Such a group, therefore, has a common interest. It must have control of a certain area of
land; hence it comes into collision of interest with every other group. The competition of
life, therefore, arises between groups not between individuals, and we see that the mem-
ers of the ingroup are allies and joint partners in one interest while they are brought into
antagonism of interest with all outsiders.

Each group must regard every other as a possible enemy on account of the antagonism of
interests, and so it views every other group with suspicion and distrust, although actual
hostilities occur only on specific occasion. Every member of another group is a stranger;
he may be admitted as a guest, in which case rights and security are granted him, but, if not
so admitted, he is an enemy. We can now see why the sentiments of peace and cooperation
inside are complementary to sentiments of hostility outside. It is because any group, in order
to be strong against an outside enemy, must be well disciplined, harmonious, and peaceful
inside; in other words, because discord inside would cause defeat in battle with another
group. Therefore the same conditions which made men warlike against outsiders made
them yield to the control of chiefs, submit to discipline, obey law, cultivate peace, and create
institutions inside. The notion of rights grows up in the ingroup from the usages estab-
lished there securing peace. There was a double education, at the same time, out of the same
facts and relations. It is no paradox at all to say that peace makes war and that war makes
peace. There are two codes of morals and two sets of mores, one for comrades inside and the
other for strangers outside, and they arise from the same interests. Against outsiders it was
meritorious to kill, plunder, practice blood revenge, and to steal women and slaves, but
inside none of these things could be allowed because they would produce discord and
weakness. Hence, in the ingroup, law (under the forms of custom and taboo) and institutions
had to take the place of force. Every group was a peace group inside, and the peace was sanc-
tioned by the ghosts of the ancestors who had handed down the customs and taboos. Against
outsiders religion sanctioned and encouraged war, for the ghosts of the ancestors, or the gods,
would rejoice to see their posterity and worshippers once more defeat, slay, plunder, and enslave the ancient enemy.

A peaceful society must be industrial because it must produce instead of plundering; it is for this reason that the industrial type of society is the opposite of the militant type. In
any state on the continent of Europe today these two types of societal organization may be seen
interwoven with each other and fighting each other. Industrialism builds up; militancy
wastes. If a railroad is built, trade and intercourse indicate a line on which it ought to run;
military strategy, however, overrules this and requires that it run otherwise. Then all the interests of trade and intercourse must be subjected to constant delay and expense because the line
does not conform to them. Not a discovery or invention is made but the war and navy bureaus of all the great nations seize it to see what use can be made of it in war. It is evident
that men love war; when two hundred thousand men in the United States volunteer in a
month for a war with Spain which appeals to no sense of wrong against their country and to no
other strong sentiment of human nature, when their lives are by no means monotonous or des-
tinate of interest, and where life offers chances of wealth and prosperity, the pure love of
adventure and war must be strong in our popula-
tion. Europeans who have to do military service have no such enthusiasm for war as
war. The presence of such a sentiment in the midst of the most purely industrial state in the
world is a wonderful phenomenon. At the same
time the social philosophy of the modern civi-
lized world is saturated with humanitarianism and flabby sentimentalism. The humanitarian-
ism is in the literature; by it the reading public
is led to suppose that the world is advancing along some line which they call "progress" toward peace and brotherly love. Nothing could be more mistaken. We read of fist law and
constant war in the Middle Ages and think that life must have been full of conflicts and blood-
shed then, but modern warfare bears down on
the whole population with a frightful weight
through all the years of peace. Never, from the
day of barbarism down to our own time, has
every man in a society been a soldier until now,
and the armaments of today are immensely
more costly than ever before. There is only one
limit possible to the war preparations of a mod-
1
ern European state; that is, the last man and the last dollar it can control. What will come of the mixture of sentimental social philosophy and warlike policy? There is only one thing rationally to be expected, and that is a frightful effusion of blood in revolution and war during the century now opening.

It is said that there are important offsets to all the burden and harm of this exaggerated militancy. That is true. Institutions and customs in human society are never either all good or all bad. We cannot adopt either peacefulness or warliness as a sole true philosophy. Military discipline educates; military interest awakens all the powers of men, so that they are eager to win and their ingenuity is quickened to invent new and better weapons. In history the military inventions have led the way and have been afterward applied to industry. Chemical inventions were made in the attempt to produce combinations which would be destructive in war; we owe some of our most useful substances to discoveries which were made in this effort. The skill of artisans has been developed in making weapons, and then that skill has been available for industry. The only big machines which the ancients ever made were battering rams, catapults, and other engines of war. The construction of these things familiarized men with mechanical devices which were capable of universal application. Gunpowder was discovered in the attempt to rediscover Greek fire; it was a grand invention in military art, but we should never have had our canals, railroads, and other great works without such explosives. Again, we are indebted to the chemical experiments in search of military agents for our friction matches. . . . We find, then, that in the past, war has played a great part in the irrational nature process by which things have come to pass. But the nature processes are frightful; they contain no allowance for the feelings and interests of individuals—for it is only individuals who have feelings and interests. The nature elements never suffer, and they never pity. If we are terrified at the nature processes, there is only one way to escape them; it is the way by which men have always evaded them to some extent; it is by knowledge, by rational methods, and by the arts. The facts which have been presented about the functions of war in the past are not flattering to the human reason or conscience. They seem to show that we are as much indebted for our welfare to base passion as to noble and intelligent endeavor. At the present moment things do not look much better. We talk of civilizing lower races, but we never have done it yet; we have exterminated them. Our devices for civilizing them have been as disastrous to them as our firearms. At the beginning of the twentieth century the great civilized nations are making haste, in the utmost jealousy of each other, to seize upon all the outlying parts of the globe; they are vying with each other in the construction of navies by which each may defend its share against the others. What will happen? As they are preparing for war, they certainly will have war, and their methods of colonization and exploitation will destroy the aborigines. In this way the human race will be civilized—but by the extermination of the uncivilized—unless the men of the twentieth century can devise plans for dealing with aborigines which are better than any which have yet been devised. No one has yet found any way in which two races, far apart in blood and culture, can be amalgamated into one society with satisfaction to both. Plainly, in this matter which lies in the immediate future, the only alternatives to force and bloodshed are more knowledge and more reason. . . .

Can peace be universal? There is no reason to believe it. It is a fallacy to suppose that, by widening the peace group more and more, it can at last embrace all mankind. What happens is that, as it grows bigger, differences, discord, antagonisms, and war begin inside of it on account of the divergence of interests. Since evil passions are a part of human nature and are in all societies all the time, a part of the energy of the society is constantly spent in repressing them. If all nations should resolve to have no armed ships any more, pirates would reappear upon the ocean; the police of the seas must be maintained. We could not dispense with our militia; we have too frequent need of it now. But police defense is not war in the sense in which I have been discussing it. War in the future will be the clash of policies of national vanity and selfishness when they cross each other’s path.

If you want war, nourish a doctrine. Doctrines are the most frightful tyrants to which men ever are subject, because doctrines get inside of a man’s own reason and betray him against himself. Civilized men have done their
fiercest fighting for doctrines. The reconquest of the Holy Sepulcher, "the balance of power," "no universal dominion," "trade follows the flag," "he who holds the land will hold the sea," "the throne and the altar," the revolution, the faith—these are the things for which men have given their lives. What are they all? Nothing but rhetoric and phantasms. Doctrines are always vague; it would ruin a doctrine to define it, because then it could be analyzed, tested, criticized, and verified; but nothing ought to be tolerated which cannot be so tested. Somebody asks you with astonishment and horror whether you do not believe in the Monroe Doctrine. You do not know whether you do or not because you do not know what it is, but you do not dare to say that you do not because you understand that it is one of the things which every good American is bound to believe in. Now when any doctrine arrives at that degree of authority, the name of it is a club which any demagogue may swing over you at any time and apropos of anything. In order to describe a doctrine, we must have recourse to theological language. A doctrine is an article of faith. It is something which you are bound to believe not because you have some rational grounds for believing it true, but because you belong to such and such a church or denomination. The nearest parallel to it in politics is the "reason of state." The most frightful injustice and cruelty which has ever been perpetrated on earth has been due to the reason of state...

What has just been said suggests a consideration of the popular saying, "In time of peace prepare for war." If you prepare a big army and navy and are all ready for war, it will be easy to go to war; the military and naval men will have a lot of new machines, and they will be eager to see what they can do with them. There is no such thing nowadays as a state of readiness for war. It is a chimera, and the nations which pursue it are falling into an abyss of wasted energy and wealth. When the army is supplied with the latest and best rifles, someone invents a new field gun; then the artillery must be provided with that before we are ready. By the time we get the new gun, somebody has invented a new rifle, and our rival nation is getting that; therefore we must have it—or one a little better. It takes two or three years and several millions to do that. In the meantime somebody proposes a more effective organization which must be introduced; signals, balloons, dogs, bicycles, and every other device and invention must be added, and men must be trained to use them all. There is no state of readiness for war; the notion calls for never-ending sacrifices. It is a fallacy. It is evident that to pursue such a notion with any idea of realizing it would absorb all the resources and activity of the state; this the great European states are now proving by experiment. A wiser rule would be to make up your mind soberly what you want, peace or war, and then to get ready for what you want; for what we prepare for is what we shall get.

**Barbara Tuchman**

**The Guns of August**

In searching for the causes of war, many historians, and psychologists as well, emphasize the importance of crisis decision-making, the particular circumstances as well as the personalities of those (relatively few) individuals in power whose decisions shape the course of world events. In some cases—Attila, Tamerlane, Hitler—such leaders are considered especially villainous. In others, the absence of strong, far-sighted leaders has been cited.
