

## Is War Natural?

n.b.) Various theories assume it is natural & not all in readings for this session:

- (1) Sociobiology – will do that next session
- (2) “Realism” in International Relations theory (**Machiavelli, Hobbes, Morgenthau, Waltz**):

domestic/international split

anarchy in the international sphere

the strong prey on the weak unless they protect themselves

dominant view in IR today, though debate with:

(a) *institutionalists* – how far can UN etc go?

(**Ruggie** e..g)

(b) *culturalists* like **Tilly**:

war evolved with state power

Bard **Schmookler** & anthropological version of Tilly: war is not natural, but warlike societies defeat peaceful ones or force mimicry

- (3) Feminists: war is offshoot of patriarchy

Pseudo-anthropological literature on lost matriarchy

Women seen as intrinsically cooperative

They see Freud, IR theory as patriarchal thinking

**Marilyn French**, Beyond Power

1) **Freud**

1932 context of Nazism in which writing to Einstein

later writing (Civilization & Its Discontents) more pessimistic!

War “seems to be quite a natural thing, to have a good biological basis and to be scarcely avoidable.”<sup>i</sup>

Shared animal/human nature

War & violence = same, instinctual – no difference between the impulse and the institution

Hydraulic language to describe human nature (pressures etc)

Instinct = dual: eros & death instinct, intertwined

(recognizes with **William James & Chris Hedges** that war not all about destruction)

but power of dark side in love with destruction

Violence also has had functionality – though that might be ending (war → exterminism?)

Elitist: elite who “subordinate their instinctual life to the dictatorship of reason.”<sup>ii</sup>

## 2) Margaret Mead

Who she was, writing 1940

Ambiguity: service to national security state, supported US in Vietnam, yet revered progressive

Like Freud, sense that answer lies with “primitives” (in history or culture):

There we see essential human nature – problematic assumption!

Breaks connection of violence to war; war = institution, invention with rules

One (impulse to violence) universal, other (war as institution) not

Crucial move

Nothing to do with whether a people are aggressive and violent (so much for peace education!)

Highlights fact that war = highly rule-bound, not instinctual purging

Clincher: societies with no word for, or experience of war

Relocates universalism from instinct to make war to cultural processes within it: dehumanization of enemy, purification for killing.

### 3) William James

Harvard psychology professor, writing 1906.

Instinctual argument about “innate pugnacity.”

“our ancestors have bred pugnacity into our bone and marrow.”<sup>iii</sup>

Evolution central to his argument, as to Freud’s, but hope “war may be a transitory phenomenon in social evolution”<sup>iv</sup>

“pure loot and mastery seem no longer allowable motives.”<sup>v</sup>

Stresses positive, erotic qualities of war, not death instinct

Excitement, nobility, manhood, being part of something bigger

But war increasingly irrational

Functionalism: find function of war, substitute more rational alternative

### 4) Chris Hedges

NY Times war reporter

I read as mixture of Freud and James: sees addiction to destruction, but also heroism, nobility, war as place one can be most alive

Pessimistic sense wars becoming more & more destructive

They're addictive

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<sup>i</sup> Freud, "why War?" p.24.

<sup>ii</sup> p.24

<sup>iii</sup> p.66, James

<sup>iv</sup> James, Moral Equivalent of war, p.67

<sup>v</sup> p.66