Oberlin College
Department of History

History 392: Theory & History of War

Spring 2015; seminar format; Thu 1:00-2:50 PM, King 335
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Office hours: after class or e-mail/call to coordinate time and location

Overview: This course will examine the theory and history of war in Euro-America and East Asia from the ancient to the modern period. Theory will examine the art and science of strategic and operational thought. History will examine the role of war as an agent of the historical course of society, politics, economics, philosophy, and culture.

Prerequisite: at least one year of college level history course on any region, period, or theme.

Learning Objectives: Some of the basic questions and issues the course will address and that we will attempt to understand include:

- Why should we study war?
- What is war?
- Why do wars exist? Is war intrinsic to human nature and society?
- How do wars start? are fought? end?
- Are wars governed by unchanging principles or vary by time and place?
- How have the character and conduct of war changed or not changed?
- What impact did wars have on politics? economy? society? culture?
- Can wars be controlled, governed, constrained? If so, under what framework?
- What is the ethical dimension of war?
- Is war a force of destruction or construction in history?
Course organization:

- Part I: War and Human Civilization (weeks 1-4)
- Part II: Theory and History (weeks 5-12)
- Part III: Reflection and Future (week 13)

Readings: You do not need to purchase any readings. Readings will be available in open sources (OS), digitally through the library (ME), on Blackboard (Bb), and/or on library reserve (MR).

Recommendations or suggestions are made as appropriate for purchase of inexpensive books if I think it’s a useful permanent addition to a personal library. See Part I (Gat) and weeks 5 (Strassler), 11 (Keegan) and 12 (Walzer).

I have not conducted an exhaustive search for free ebooks so if you find one used for the course and it’s not listed PLEASE LET ME KNOW!

Grading

- MID-TERM
  - Attendance, participation & oral response: 50%
  - Reflection paper: 50%

- FINAL
  - Attendance, participation & oral response: 50%
  - MID-TERM grade: 25%
  - Final Project paper: 25%

Attendance & participation: Diligent attendance and active participation based on informed preparation are essential for the success of seminar learning.

Oral Response:

I will randomly assign each student to present a short (10 min) oral response in class starting week 2 on selected readings. I will send out the sequence of the students just before the first day or announce at the first day. The actual reading to be assigned will be decided 1-2 weeks out. You will do this at least once during the course, but it could be more. When the sequence is finished we will start from the beginning again.

This is a response not a presentation. You are to assume the entire class has read the item, therefore, DO NOT provide a summary that will put us to sleep because we read it, rather, state the main point/argument and, most importantly, YOUR THOUGHTS about it: agree/disagree, make sense/no sense, relevant/dated, enlightening/boring, etc.

The response will be presented at an appropriate moment determined by the instructor.
Writing assignments:

- **MID-TERM Paper – Reflection Paper**: Due by midnight 19 Mar (week 7, by e-mail).
  - Maximum 2,000 words reflecting on weeks 1-6 (War and Human Civilization, Thucydides and Sun Tzu).
  - Address the following learning objective questions:
    - What is war?
    - Why do wars exist?
    - Is war intrinsic to human nature and society?
  - Double space, 1” margin, 12 point font of your preference.
  - Footnotes/endnotes as required.
  - Provide your selected topic for the Final paper – see next.

- **FINAL PROJECT Paper**: Due by e-mail at the time determined by the college final exam schedule (11 AM, Sat 16 May).
  - Maximum 5,000 words on a topic of your choice relevant to this course. Some possibilities are listed below. Select one of them, modify it or come up with an entirely new topic. If modified or new I will review and provide feedback on its suitability and suggestions.
    - Apply one or more strategic theory to an existing or potential national security challenge faced by the U.S. or another country of your choice.
    - Extend Azar Gat’s theoretical thought process from *War in Human Civilization* (weeks 1-4) to the future.
    - Discuss the role of geography, ideology, and/or environment, in war.
    - Discuss the role of technology in war. Is technology determinative by itself or is the conceptual use of technology (culture) by more important?
    - Role of key individuals in the start of wars start, its conduct, and outcome. Can an individual determine/change the principles of war?
    - FOR THE TRULY AMBITIOUS: My Theory of War and History
  - Double space, 1” margin, 12 point font of your preference.
  - **DRAFT Review option**: You have the option to submit a draft, partial or full, (by e-mail) of your final paper for preliminary review and feedback. Submit the draft by no earlier than last day of class (Thu 7 May) and no later than the next day (Fri 8 May). I will provide the feedback ASAP but NLT Tue 12 May.

- **Extension and late paper**: extensions will be granted only under extenuating circumstances. Late paper will be penalized one-third of a letter grade (e.g. B to B-) for each 1 hour period.

**Honor Code**: at the end of the mid-term and final paper write in full and sign the Honor Pledge, *I have adhered to the Honor Code in this assignment*, to affirm that you have not plagiarized, fabricated, or falsified information, nor assisted others in these actions.
Students with Disability policy: for documented disability that may impact on your work for this class and require accommodation, notify me and see the Office of Disability Services for assistance.

Cell phone: Cell phones must be turned off or muted in class. No texting.

Laptop: use in class is permitted.

Seminars & Readings

READING SOURCE CODES – contact me if you have problem locating any reading

   ME - Mudd electronic resource (journals and books) – access through OBIS
   NOTE: books in public domain and no or expired copyright may also be available through free e-book sources such as Project Gutenberg, itunes, kindle, nook, etc.
   MR - Mudd reserve
   Bb – Blackboard
   OS – Open source on web

CLASS FORMAT: Generally each class will begin with a mini lecture and then transition to discussion facilitated and moderated by the instructor.

DYNAMIC SYLLABUS: As a first time offering of this course this is a dynamic living syllabus and changes will occur. This will be particularly true for assigned readings. You will receive timely notice and updates of such changes.

PART I: War in Human Civilization

We will spend the first 4 weeks reading and discussing Israeli historian Azar Gat’s remarkable and monumental interdisciplinary study of the place and role of war in history. He asks the most fundamental question of all: is war an integral part of human nature? There is no other attempt to address so comprehensively how the phenomenon of war fits within the story of man. Gat’s book has spawned and will undoubtedly continue to stimulate other studies, but one of the most interesting, which we will look at for our final class, is Ian Morris’ War! What is it Good For? Morris’ answer inspired by Gat may surprise you.

Gat can be dense, repetitive, at times way off base in terms of war and history, but it is a tour de force of an incredible intellect at work. He will force you to bring out what you have learned in many other fields. He will challenge you to follow his exquisite logic. He will be maddening and enlightening. I am looking forward to starting the course with a journey through this book that I hope we will frequently reference for the rest of the course.
A copy is on reserve, but your best free bet is the e-book available through OBIS from the ProQuest ebrary service. If you must have a hard copy and the reserve doesn’t work for you, used copies are available for about $16-17 from Amazon.


**Week 1 (5 Feb): War and Human Nature**

**NOTE:** Drop/Add deadline is 11 Feb

- Self-introductions: background, aspiration, why course
- Course introduction
  - Study of War and liberal education
  - History and Historiography
  - History and Memory
  - History and Culture

**READINGS**

  - Preface (p. xi-xiii)
  - Part 1. Warfare in the First Two Million Years: Environment, Genes, and Culture, chapters 1-7 (pp. 1-145)

**Week 2 (12 Feb): Cultural Evolution and War, Part 1**

**READING**

  - Part 2a. Agriculture, Civilization and War, chapters 8-10 (pp. 149-322)

**Week 3 (19 Feb): Cultural Evolution and War, Part 2**

**READING**

  - Part 2b. Agriculture, Civilization and War, chapters 11-12 (pp. 323-442)

**Week 4 (26 Feb): Modernity, Wealth, Power, and War**

**READING**

  - Part 3. Modernity: The Dual Face of Janus, chapters 13-17 (pp. 445-673)
PART II: Theory and History of War

In weeks 5 through 12 we will do our best to cover key theoretical works and concepts about our war and the reality of war in history. As you read keep in mind some key questions:

- What is war?
- What is the cause of war?
- How does it start?
- How is it fought? Why is it fought that way?
- Does it end? How does it end? Why does it end that way?
- What is the role of individuals, environment, technology, culture & ideology?
- How do the thoughts of the past relate to the present?
- How applicable are they today and in the future?

Week 5 (5 Mar): Thucydides: *History of the Peloponnesian War*

This is the widely noted foundational study of the principles of war in the western tradition.

- **READINGS**
  - Thucydides, *History of The Peloponnesian War* (written c. 400 BCE) *(ME, MR).* There are a number of good translations available and you are to choose one that is available and preferable to you. Mudd has several versions of which 5 versions have been put on reserve.
    - If you are interested in purchasing a volume, an edition I recommend is the following, which is comprehensively annotated, supplemented and thus very useful. A copy is on reserve.
    - The following edition is available as an e-book through OBIS ProQuest ebrary. A copy is also on reserve.
  - Readings are indicated in the standard format of Book number (there are 8 books) and chapter number within the book i.e. 1.66-88 means Book 1, chapters 66 to 88. This annotation is used instead of page numbers as the pagination varies in different translations.
Week 6 (12 Mar): Sun Tzu: The Art of War

The East Asian counterpart to Thucydides.

- READING
  - Sun Tzu (Sun Zi), The Art of War (written c. 500 BCE) (ME, MR). As with Thucydides there are many different translations of this classic. All are acceptable. On reserve is a classic edition translated by Samuel B. Griffith (Oxford UP, 1963) (MR). Available as ebook from Mudd ProQuest ebrary is a recent translation Victor H. Mair (Columbia UP, 2009) (ME).
    - READ Mair: Introduction (pp. 1-55), Sun Tzu’s text (pp. 76-131)
  - Henry Kissinger, On China (Penguin, 2011) (Bb, MR)
    - Ch. 1 “The Singularity of China,” (pp. 5-32)

Week 7 (19 Mar): Clausewitz: On War

NOTE: Midterm reflection paper due by midnight by e-mail.

The hegemonic foundational study of modern war. Clausewitz’s classic work On War was based on his personal experience and observation of the Napoleonic Wars in the early 19th century. Napoleonic warfare broke new grounds in several ways such as the rise of mass armies inflamed by nationalism, complex large scale maneuvering of forces and unrestricted fighting.

- READINGS
    - Ch. 5 Peter Paret, “Napoleon and the Revolution in War,” (pp. 123-142)
    - Ch. 7 Peter Paret, “Clausewitz,” (pp. 186-213)
    - Introductory essays: Paret, “The Genesis of On War,” (pp. 3-25); Howard, “The Influence of Clausewitz,” (pp. 27-44); and Bernard Brodie, “The Continuing Relevance of On War,” (pp. 45-58)
    - Book I “On the Nature of War,” Chs. 1-8 (pp. 75-123)
    - Book VII “The Attack,” Ch. 22 (pp. 566-573)
    - Book VIII “War Plans,” Chs. 1, 2. 6B (pp. 577-581, 605-610)
  - Michael I. Handel, Masters of War: Classical Strategic Thoughts, 3rd ed., (Frank Cass, 2001) (Bb)
    - Ch 2 “Comparing Sun Tzu and Clausewitz,” pp. 19-32
    - Ch 3 “The Definition of War: A Question of the Level of Analysis,” pp. 33-39
SPRING BREAK 21-29 Mar

NOTE: Selection of specific wars and theoretical works for weeks 8-10 is not yet finalized. Details will be provided sufficiently in advance.

Week 8 (2 Apr): Mid-19th – 20th Century Wars & Theories I

Week 9 (9 Apr): Mid-19th – 20th Century Wars & Theories II

NOTE: Mon 6 Apr is last day to declare Pass/No Pass (PNP) option

Week 10 (16 Apr): Mid-19th – 20th Century Wars & Theories III

Week 11 (23 Apr): The Soldier’s View

- READINGS
    - Ch. 2 “Agincourt, October 25th, 1415” (pp. 79-116)
    - Ch. 3 “Waterloo, June 18th, 1815,” (pp. 117-203)
    - Ch. 4 “The Somme, July 1st, 1916,” (pp. 204-284)
    - Ch. 5 “The Future of Battle: The Moving Battlefield,” (pp. 285-298)
    A classic that opened a new chapter in the historiography of military history, Keegan takes you down to the level of the individual soldier’s experience on a battlefield from the medieval to the modern. This is a book you may want to add to your personal library. Used copies are widely available and cheap (latest on Amazon lists over 100 at about $7 including postage).

    - Ch. 4 “Assault into Hell,” (pp. 63-113)
    - Ch. 12 “Of Mud and Maggots,” (pp. 259-282)
    Gut wrenching memoir of a marine in the Pacific during World War II in two of the bloodiest battles, Peleliu (Sep-Nov 1944) and Okinawa (Apr-Jun 1945). If you have access you may want to watch the HBO mini-series *The Pacific*, which is partly based on this memoir. Parts 7 and 9 roughly correspond to these chapters.

Week 12 (30 Apr): War & Ethics

- **READINGS**
    The whole book is assigned. Use your judgment and technique to skim judiciously to digest the main themes, points, sub-points, and arguments.

    It may be worth getting a personal copy. This is a classic and one you will want to have as a permanent addition to your bookcase and reference frequently as you live through undoubtedly many more wars in your lifetime. It is widely available and used copies can be had for as little as 1 cent on Amazon (plus $3.99 postage).

PART III: Reflection and Future

Week 13 (7 May): Reflection and Future

*(NOTE: If you wish to submit a draft of your paper submit by midnight Friday 8 May, by e-mail, and it will be returned to you, by email, by Tuesday 12 May)*

NOTE: This class is under development. Final version will be sent out sufficiently in advance.

- **READINGS**

11 AM, 16 May: Final Project paper due by e-mail (date-time determined by the college final exam schedule)