

A Philosophy of War Informed by Scientific Research.

This essay is offered as an example of how scientific understanding of human nature can inform and deepen one's philosophy war and peace.

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Philosophies of war will be determined in part by one's worldview. This in turn will be shaped by one's religious beliefs, personal and professional experiences, awareness of technologies, politics, social relationships, governments, history, etc. For example, if we ask Muslim terrorists for their philosophy of war we would expect a perspective very different from that of Quakers. We would expect a philosophy of war from Hitler to differ greatly from that of Mahatma Gandhi. The philosophy of war implicit in the Old Testament of the Bible is very different from that of the New Testament; the first depicts a God of vengeance and favoritism, the second a God of love, peace and inclusiveness.

A military nurse is likely to have a philosophy of war different from that of a foot soldier. The soldier's parents may have differing philosophies of war. The philosophy of war of a professor of philosophy is likely to differ from that of a national politician. A conservative politician is likely to have a philosophy of war different from that of a liberal one.

My four decades of professional activities as a psychologist, including 10 years recently of research in political psychology, has shaped my philosophy of war.

Early in my research I reviewed political philosophy. This field provides a history of careful thinking on governments in general. This thinking is relevant to war, because much of what governments are held responsible for are periods of peace and war. Indeed, much of the history of humanity is couched in terms of political power and the war abilities that establish and protect it.

A philosophy of war implicitly must also be a philosophy of peace, its opposite. For example, the Roman Empire had a four-principle philosophy of empire that embodied both war and peace and summarized its *modus operandi*: Religion, War, Victory and Peace. Presumably their religion embodied expectations of total subservience to and respect for their authoritarian leaders, some of whom were viewed as gods. Authoritarian political leaders must be obeyed without question, as must military leaders. Religion can be fashioned to reinforce subservience to leaders, religious, political and military. For the Roman Empire, militarism and war were the mechanism by which the Empire protected itself from invasion and extracted resources from neighboring lands. Victory in war was necessary to maintain citizen faith in militarism and its objectives. Peace was the end result of the first three components of this philosophy, a reward for Romans of safety and resources to enjoy the good life, while keeping neighbors subjugated. For the Romans, *peace* was synonymous with *subjugation of neighbors*.

Political philosophy also struggles with ethical issues, such as *just wars*. When is war just, justified, legitimate? Warmongers would argue that it is legitimate anytime a person has enough political and military power to wage war, and that war is legitimate to oppress and take from other nations whatever one wants and needs. More peaceful citizens might argue that war is legitimate only as a defensive activity to protect one's nation and allies from invasive warmongering, as the Allies did in World War II against the Axis powers. Strict pacifists might argue that war is never justified.

Another issue in war philosophy is how one should treat prisoners of war, and enemy civilians in time of war, and which weapons can one legitimately use. Is it appropriate to torture prisoners of war, as the United States has been accused of in the Middle East wars of recent years? Should nations honor international

principles in this regard, such as the Geneva Convention and principles espoused by the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights? In combat should unarmed citizens be killed either as an act of terrorism to subdue a nation or as an expedient simply to eliminate all possible enemy combatants, as United States did in My Lai in Vietnam, massacring 500 civilians? Should genocide be permitted? Which weapons of war should be banned, as poison gas and personnel land mines have been. Should atomic explosives be banned?

Should individual soldiers refuse to obey military commands that the soldier believes will be a crime, such as massacres? Should pension funds invest money in corporations that manufacture military weapons without consulting the source of the pension funds or the employees who will eventually depend on those pension funds for retirement income? Should citizens have the right to refuse to participate as soldiers, claiming conscientious objection?

Should nations and governments provide citizens with alternative forms of government service in such cases? Should a nation promote youth participation in scouting programs to train them in skills that they will need as an infantrymen in combat as adults? Should nations promote combative team sports such as football, hockey and boxing to prepare citizens for combat? Should the Olympics include sports involving military activities, such as skiing and shooting rifles? Should nations market rifles and pistols to civilians to nurture skill in handling and using guns, as might be needed in military combat?

Another aspect of this arena of philosophy is the question of who should answer these questions for a nation. Should leaders be depended on and trusted to answer them for citizens or should citizens themselves have the right to provide the answers, as by public opinion polling or referenda? Hitler, as dictator, determined German philosophy of war with disastrous results.

My research in political psychology has revealed many interesting facts that strongly inform and shape my thinking about the place of war in human behavior. Specifically, it has augmented my understanding of psychological traits that are related to liberal and conservative political worldviews and their facets, which include attitudes about types of government, foreign-policy, religious beliefs and

war and peace. A sample of these findings will show how information gained in a professional discipline can shape one's worldview on the philosophy of war.

The trait of warmongering endorsement can be measured very reliably with a questionnaire of as few as 10 items. Many other traits correlate significantly and substantially with this trait, including social disenfranchisement, authoritarianism and religious fundamentalism.

The conservative worldview is positively associated with endorsing a militaristic foreign policy while the liberal worldview is negatively associated with such a policy and positively associated with a peaceful foreign policy. These issues are complicated by the fact that the average score for strong liberals and strong conservatives are both on the peace-promoting side of the continuum, though liberals are stronger on the peace continuum than conservatives.

A sample of several hundred university students revealed that 70% endorsed participation in war as combatants in a defensive activity, such as in World War II by Americans. 5% endorsed war as an aggressive, invasive activity, as waged by the Axis powers in World War II. The remainder, 25% of citizens, preferred not to participate actively in war in any fashion, preferring to have international conflicts resolved by other means, such as via the United Nations.

Political worldviews of humans are complex. For example, persons who endorse warmongering tend to prefer government types that small special-interest groups can control, including monarchies, military dictatorships and special interest group democracies. Special interest group democracies are defined in research questionnaires as governments that serves citizens as members of special interest groups rather than as members of the community overall. About 25% of U.S. citizens studied endorse special interest group democracy so defined. Fully 90% of citizens typically endorse an alternate form of democracy, defined in the polls as government that serves citizens as members of the community overall rather than as members of competing special interest groups.

A related body of research in psychology, biology and neurology suggests rather strongly that the liberal and conservative worldviews evolved in the human species to serve two specific functions in the interest of clans. The conservative

worldview is associated with disease phobia and fears in general and seems to have served the role of protection for local groups, including protection against disease pathogens in neighboring groups against which the local group does not yet have immunity. The liberal worldview and related traits seems to have evolved to serve a more peaceful function, based on trusting and cooperative relationships with neighboring groups of people to benefit from trade of raw materials, finished goods, technologies and genetic material, which eventually provides immunity to neighboring diseases.

These findings lead to the present author's opinion that the liberal and conservative worldviews both have been necessary for the survival of the human species and indeed gave it advantages over other primate species that did not have these two worldviews. The challenge for humanity at present then it is to understand these two worldviews well enough to manage humans constructively. A zookeeper housing lions and zebras will be more successful if she understands these two species well enough not to put them in the same pen.

In the present author's opinion, any form of government that can be controlled by small minority groups, such as special-interest groups under special interest group democracy, remains vulnerable to warmongering. For example, the warmongering-*prone*ness of political leaders can be reliably measured with a 50-item rating scale. This instrument is very reliable and very valid. G.W. Bush has a very high score on this trait, consistent with the notion that given an excuse to wage war he would jump on it. In the opinion of many it was folly to engage in war in the Middle East in response to the 9/11 terrorist attack, as it was the brainchild of an individual person, not a nation.

The fact that 90% of Americans seem to long for a more sophisticated form of government, specifically common good democracy, has inspired me to imagine a specific model for how such a new form of democracy will evolve. I imagine a political party that will appeal to both liberals and conservatives, base its party agenda on sophisticated public opinion polls, and fund campaigns of its candidates for office exclusively from party member dues, thus protecting from the contaminating influence of special interest group money from any other sources. I imagine that this new form of democracy will manage community problems much

more effectively than current governments do, including addressing issues related to war, such as unchecked population growth, unchecked environmental degradation through the use of fossil fuels, and excessive investment in military forces. I can imagine that this party, if and when its representatives control national politics, will pay more effective attention to such issues and will screen out applicants for top military and political positions who are high on warmongering proneness. Thus, my philosophy of war/peace includes the notion that common good democracy is good and a political party that promotes such government would be good.

These aspirations and ideals can be considered features of a philosophy of war and provide an example of how such a philosophy can be grounded in scientific information. The scientific can thus be essential to formulating a worldview and philosophy of war. Implicit values underlying this model include the notion that government should serve the best interests of the community overall, as defined by carefully measured majority opinions of informed, concerned adult citizens. Another value or assumption is that these majority opinions will constitute a noble agenda for running a nation, again based on empirical data: the majority of citizens and those citizens who endorse common good democracy also endorse the principles of human rights delineated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations.

The fact that the United States government tends to underfund and oppose many of the efforts of the United Nations is consistent with the notion that democracy in the United States currently serves special interest groups rather than the common good and to this extent violates the best interests of the community overall. The fact that this government also tends not to endorse international climate change treaties is further evidence of this.

Thus, in conclusion, we can speak of philosophies of war as living expressions of a culture by the behavior of governments, political groups and citizens or of the carefully focused thinking of philosophers, scientists, politicians, journalists, poets and novelists.

The present essay is offered as an example of the latter and recommends encouraging interested parties to deepen their scientific understanding of human nature to better inform their philosophies of governments and politics, war and peace. The author's research papers appear at his non-profit corporation web site: [Http://www.politicalpsychologyresearch.com](http://www.politicalpsychologyresearch.com).