
Book Reviews



Bruce Vandervort, Editor

War and Its Causes. By Jeremy Black. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019. ISBN 978-1-5381-1790-3. Notes. Index. Pp. x, 241. \$89.00.

War can range from tribal conflict to global conflagration. The benefit of such a broad definition is its explanatory power, but its lack of clarity can erode its usefulness. Jeremy Black's most recent book looks to provide some clarity and thus better understand war. He also seeks to place this understanding of war in a global context, not limited by geography or chronology.

Black starts with a typology of war: wars between cultures, wars within cultures, and civil wars. He takes issue with the idea that early modern Europe was unique in terms of the types of wars fought or the political changes these wars created. Black reframes European warfare through the lens of religious conflict, both within and outside Europe. For Black, many of the conflicts up to 1500 (the focus of Chapter 2) stem from intersections between cultures or ideological differences within cultures.

The Thirty Years' War, Black argues, is an example of the difficulty of understanding war. Viewed in a simplistic religious framework, it was between Catholics and Protestants. This does not explain French support of Protestant states against Austria and Spain though. For Black, the better explanation is the erosion of the power of the Catholic Church through limited warfare between Europeans prior to the Thirty Years' War. Once this restraining element was gone, European states sought as much political power as possible. War offered an effective way to limit the growth of competitors or gain influence.

The difficulty with this framework is in dividing cultures. Were Catholic and Protestant Europeans of different cultures? Black acknowledges the arbitrariness of these distinctions, but argues that they allow multiple points of view from which to more holistically assess a conflict.

Black takes to task the Europe-centered view of military progress in the eighteenth century. He argues that viewing the development of European warfare in the eighteenth century, with the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars as the natural end of these changes, is an artificial explanation that ignores many competing narratives. Black argues, for example, that an understanding focused on Prussia ignores French and Russian successes, and overlooks the inability of Prussia to defeat Austria decisively in 1761–62 or 1778–79. He argues that a Prussian paradigm makes a complex series of changes misleadingly simple. He posits Russia

as a better example of effective military transformation in the eighteenth century, because it was able to invade and control Eastern Europe through 1915. This is one of the stronger critiques Black makes.

In the final chapters, Black discusses the implications of the rise of ideological warfare in the twentieth century. Ideology did not eliminate other reasons for fighting, such as resources, prestige, and fear. Rather, ideologies provide a way to better understand the decisions of those involved in these conflicts; a particular ideology offers an explanatory framework that guides the interpretation of events and the actions of other powers.

After the end of the Cold War, for Black the importance of ideology waned, as the bilateral world withered. In the twenty-first century, he contends, conflicts have more in common with civil wars than with twentieth-century conflicts. The supposedly new conflicts, Black points out, look more like conflicts that came about as a result of imperial decline, like African states warring in the wake of British decolonization.

Black effectively argues that some historical models are too narrow, in terms of both geography and time. He attempts to provide a different approach for understanding warfare on a global scale. This is a daunting task for a book that spans ancient warfare to the twenty-first century in just 227 pages. There is little time for Black to dwell on any one conflict. This gives him more space for elaborating his typology of warfare, but also leaves the readers significant work if they are unfamiliar with any of the conflicts Black leverages as examples.

The book is ambitious, and Black is in good company in seeking to bring clarity to our understanding of war. Others, such as Azar Gat (*War in Human Civilization*) and John Lynn (*Battle: A History of Combat and Culture*), have taken on similar challenges but with more space and specificity than Black provides. The lack of detail makes it difficult for the reader to fully agree or disagree with Black's typology, or with its application to specific conflicts. Black rightfully points out the lack of clarity that is an obstacle to understanding warfare as a human endeavor, but he leaves the resolution of this problem to others.

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Espionage and Treason in Classical Greece: Ancient Spies and Lies. By Andre Gerolymatos. Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2020. ISBN 978-1-4985-8338-1. Notes. Appendixes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. xvi, 105. \$85.00.

Andre Gerolymatos, the late former director of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Center for Hellenic Studies at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia, spent his entire career dedicated to the study of Greece, ancient and modern. His dissertation on the *proxenia* was published by J. C. Gieben in 1986 as *Espionage and Treason: A Study of the Proxenia in Political and Military Intelligence Gathering in Classical Greece*. I

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