What Is War? What Is Technology?

•••

Group work

Working in a group of three or four students, discuss these questions.

- What is the definition of war?
- What is the definition of technology?

Please have a member of your group email a summary of your answers and your group members' names to tozzic@rpi.edu.

Research paper update

- See syllabus

Lecture goals

- Assess approaches to defining war
- Discuss theories for the origins of war
  - Biological vs. political/cultural explanation
- Identify different types of war
- Discuss the relationship between war and the state
- Understand motives for war
- Examine changes to war over time

Lecture goals (continued)

Defining technology

- Understand the meaning of technology
- Consider whether technological advances are "good"

What is war?

- A state of armed conflict between at least two groups.

Approaches to defining war

- As distinct from a state of peace.
- As a highly organized activity.
- As opposed to other forms of <u>organized violence</u>.
- As a conflict between distinct groups (and not individuals).
- As conflict that involves significant mortality.
- As conflict with a specific start and end.

Origins of war

Earliest evidence of violent inter-group conflict: Nile Valley, circa 12,000 B.C.

Theories on the origin of war: The Hobbesian view

Biological thesis: The tendency toward violent conflict is innate in living beings.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HZ3M9X0uyi8

https://youtu.be/a7XuXi3mqYM

Theories on the origin of war: Rousseau's view

Political/cultural: Civilization, property and hierarchies lead to war.

"It is because property exists that there are wars, riots and injustices." - Saint Augustine (early fifth century)

"The first person who, having enclosed a plot of land, took it into his head to say this is mine and found people simple enough to believe him was the true founder of civil society. What crimes, wars, murders, what miseries and horrors would the human race have been spared, had some one pulled up the stakes or filled in the ditch and cried out to his fellow men: 'Do not listen to this imposter. You are lost if you forget that the fruits of the earth belong to all and the earth to no one!'" - Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (1762)

Types of war

- Conventional warfare
- Civil war
- Defensive war
- Asymmetric warfare
- Guerilla warfare
- Wars of independence/liberation
- Total war

War and the state

What is the state?

Could warfare happen without the state?

Why do people make war?

- Psychological impetus
  - Expression of rage
- Evolutionary
  - Social competition, sexual competition, territorial control
- Economic incentive
  - Marxist/capitalist theories
- Religion
- Escape from domestic politics

The changing nature of war

Overarching trends toward:

- More limited violence
- Better organized violence
- Specialization in war-related violence ("soldier castes")
  - War without soldiers?
- Technologically sophisticated violence

What is technology?

- An improvement upon earlier ways of doing things

Examples of technology, broadly defined

- Language
- Counting (numeracy)
- Clothing
- Writing
- Cooking
- Government

What drives technology?

- Systematic collection of knowledge
- Empiricism
- Opportunity to experiment
  - Provided by conditions of abundance/surplus
- Sharing of information
- Positive-feedback cycles
  - Those who benefit from technology produce more technology

Technology and progress

Progress in the western narrative of history

● Scientific Revolution, Enlightenment

How do you measure progress? Some attempts:

● Life expectancy
● Happiness/attitude
● Economic prosperity
● Work requirements
● Security/safety from violence

Technicism / Fetishization of technology

Critics of technology

Luddites

Marxist critiques

Conclusion: Key questions

- What defines a war?
- Why do wars happen?
- What are the motives for war?
- What is technology? What is the opposite of technology?
- Does technology make things better?