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Remembrance in Context: A Centenary Perspective on World War I

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Anthropology

Thanks to a German bomb which landed on the War Office archives in 1940 and destroyed a large proportion of the records of previous servicemen we do not know the precise number of British combatants in the First World War. The figure is generally estimated to lie between 7 and 9 million. We do, however, know precisely the number of official *female* British combatants in that war. That number is one: Flora Sandes, who after arriving in Serbia with the St John's Ambulance Brigade decided, when her unit ran out of medical supplies, to pick up a rifle and join the Serbian Army. That proportion of 7 or 9,000,000 to one tells us something important about war. In the words of the great military historian, John Keegan:

> If warfare is as old as history and as universal as mankind, we must [. . .] enter the supremely important limitation that it is an entirely masculine activity [. . .] with the most insignificant exceptions [. . .] [w]omen[. . .] do not fight.[1]

Well, the perspective of 2014 is not that of 1914: in the last year women have been formally admitted to combat roles in the US army. That difference of perspective is the subject of this paper, for it only makes more visible, and more in need of explanation, this extraordinary fact about all previous historically recorded human behaviour, a fact that by reason of its universality cannot be explained by recourse to cultural peculiarities or particular economic or geographical circumstances. We are clearly here in a region of human behaviour where biological sexual difference impinges directly on social life. War is gender-specific.

However, in trying to explain this gender-specific nature of war we are not looking for a war gene, or even a bodily aggression gene, peculiar to human male individuals. In the words of Robert Hinde, one of the great pioneers in relating ethology – the study of animal behaviour – to anthropology, "individual aggression plays only

[1] John Keegan, *A History of Warfare* (London: Pimlico, 2004), p.76.

a minor and mostly indirect role in modern war.... Modern war is [...] an institution in the same way that marriage or parliament are institutions."[2] In this crossover realm between ethology and anthropology, the realm, as the anthropologist Marvin Harris called it, of cultural evolution,[3] we are not looking for some factor that may incline individual men to go to war but for a structure that has made war an available option in male, and only male life.

It is not difficult to see in outline what that structure might be. If we take as our starting point the Darwinian-Dawkinsite principle that genes seek only their own maximal replication, then it is at once clear that in the human species there is initially an enormous asymmetry between the prospects for genes carried in a female body and the prospects for those carried in a male body. For a human female can reproduce her genes at most only once a year but a human male, if he has sufficient females available to him, can reproduce his genes indefinitely many more times. Given that the normal sex-ratio in human births is about 1:1, and that a woman once pregnant with the child of one man is not available to become pregnant with the child of another, it is obvious that the purely genetic incentive to compete for mates – that is to exclude others of the same sex from the reproductive process – is an order of magnitude greater for men than it is for women. A woman can as an absolute maximum have something over 30 pregnancies in a lifetime. Augustus the Strong of Saxony however acknowledged 354 bastards and the King of Morocco in the early eighteenth-century claimed 888 children.[4] And whereas the reproductive success of each of those concubine mothers had a minimal effect on the reproductive success of any other woman, every one of those 888 children represented a competitive advantage for the genes of the King of Morocco over those of his fellow male Moroccans.

The potential for competition between male and male implied by the human reproductive process is thus very much greater than any need for competition between females. How that potential is realized, what form the competition between males takes, will depend on the options that a particular society makes available. Modern Euro-American males have on the whole given up the remote chance of becoming King of Morocco for the relatively secure attainability of the monogamous nuclear family. In a society where monogamy is the

[2] R. A. Hinde, 'Aggression and the Institution of War' in: R. A. Hinde (ed.), *The Institution of War* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), pp.1–12, 6.

[3] Marvin Harris, "A Cultural Materialist Theory of Band and Village Warfare: The Yanomamö Test", in: R. Ferguson (ed.), *Warfare, Culture, and Environment* (New York, London etc.: Academic Press, 1984), pp.111–140, 112.

[4] M. Potts and R.V. Short, *Ever since Adam and Eve. The evolution of human sexuality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.47.

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norm and all marry, the reproductive chances of all males are more or less equal and equal to those of the females. But the road followed by the "civilising process", as Norbert Elias called it,[5] the road that reduces to equality that original enormous asymmetry is a long one. Its starting point, and the starting point for any attempt to understand the human institution of war, lies in the distant past, at the time when distinctly human society emerged from the societies of our non-human forebears. Even at that hypothetical starting-point there were physical features of our species which are still with us now as relics of the pre-existing animal social order. The most important of these for our purpose is sexual dimorphism. Human males are on average taller and heavier than females – better adapted, some would say, for fighting – and in the state of nature are readily distinguished by their abundance of bodily, and especially facial, hair. The particular significance of this dimorphism is that in mammals generally, and among primates such as gorillas and chimpanzees in particular, it is associated with polygyny, that is with a mating system in which one male mates with several females. Conversely, monogamous species, such as marmoset monkeys and gibbons, show "little or no sexual dimorphism" and an outside observer can hardly tell the sexes apart. Furthermore, polygynous species, not surprisingly, show a readiness for violent competition between males alongside relatively pacific relations between females: "In a polygamous mating system [. . .] males usually tend to be stronger and better equipped than females with offensive weapons such as canine teeth, claws, horns, spurs or antlers" while on the other hand among the monogamous and monomorphic marmosets and gibbons there is no difference between males and females in the degree of hostility individual members of the species show to each other.[6] In their relations with other members of the same sex, female gibbons are less passive and male gibbons more pacific than their gorilla equivalents. It is clear enough, I fear, where humans stand in this spectrum of possibilities: at the outset of the civilizing process humans were dimorphic, polygynous and given to intrasexual male on male violence. Hobbes may have been right to say that in the state of nature human life was "poor, nasty, brutish and short" but he was certainly wrong to say it was "solitary" and without "society": human life was always social, and human society was in its origins characterized not, as Hobbes asserted, by a war of all against all, but by a war of males against males in a fight for dominance, status, and women.

[5] Norbert Elias, *Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation. Soziogenetische und psychogenetische Untersuchungen* (Basel: Haus zum Falken, 1939).

[6] Potts and Short, *Ever since Adam*, pp.31, 47. See also R.A. Hinde, *Ethology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p.248.

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In a series of famous studies of the Amazonian Yanomamö people, starting in 1964,[7] Napoleon Chagnon came to see in the endless cycle of violence between the Yanomamö villages a demonstrable link between war and reproductive success – a warrior who had killed a man had significantly more children than one who had not killed – and in this in turn he saw an image of the Hobbesian war that was the ancestral state of human beings.[8] Chagnon's interpretation, like Chagnon himself, is highly controversial. But the truth Chagnon saw in the Yanomamö example is spelled out incomparably more brutally in the words attributed to Genghis Khan, when he was discussing with his commanders what might be the greatest pleasure of human life. When they replied, a little implausibly, "falconry", he corrected them: "Man's greatest happiness is to chase and defeat his enemy, seize all his possessions, leave his wives weeping and wailing, ride his stallion and use the bodies of his women as a blanket and mattress at night."[9] And of course the Khan was speaking from experience. Both his wisdom and his example demonstrate that the intimate connection in pre-civilized humans between murderous male-on-male competition and reproductive success has not been lost in modern times: the man responsible, together with his family, for perhaps 40 million deaths – proportionately, therefore, to the world's population, the greatest mass-murderer in history – was also the man whose Y chromosome is now borne by about 8% of the population of Central Asia.[10]

Before we leave the Mongol example, however, we must note one important respect in which it is *not* characteristic of the modern, or at any rate not of the twentieth-century world. For all the difference of scale, the Mongol mode of warfare itself has more in common with the practices of the Yanomamö than with those that culminated in the great confrontation of 1914–18. Mongol warfare was essentially what both anthropologists and military theorists call "raiding" – murderous and unexpected excursions against unequal and preferably unarmed foes for the immediate purpose of getting either reputation or revenge or, most often, booty, whether goods or women.[11] It was absolutely not what Clausewitz called the extension of politics by other means – not least because there were no politics for it to extend. Like the violence of the Yanomamö, it was war for its own sake, war as a way of life.

[7] Especially N. Chagnon, *Yanomamö: The Fierce People* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, 1968).

[8] Keegan, *History of Warfare*, pp.94–8. The Hobbesian connection is stressed by Harris, 'A Cultural Materialist Theory', e.g. p.114.

[9] Keegan, *History of Warfare*, p.189, wording adapted.

[10] Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature* (London: Penguin, 2011), p.237.

[11] Keegan, *History of Warfare*, p.97; Pinker, *Better Angels*, pp.44–46, 53.

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To understand the significance of the concept of "raiding", we have to return to a stage before the civilization process began, to our primate cousins and specifically to chimpanzees, our nearest relatives.[12] Chimpanzees, far from being benign old ladies dressed in hats and passing each other cups of tea, as in the old TV ads, or painting in acrylics, as in more recent edifying programmes on neuroscience, are powerful and aggressive carnivores. They show collective violence against their own kind in two contexts. First, in what is known as "raiding", a group from one community will surprise a lone forager from another community, probably near the outer boundary of their territory. If it is a male he will be torn apart, if a female she will be raped, if she is carrying a baby it will be eaten. (Chimpanzees, I should add, are not exclusively cannibals – they also enjoy eating alive smaller monkeys of other species.) While it has been known for the males of one community to be entirely wiped out by another in the course of "raiding", there is a second form of hostile interaction with other chimpanzee communities, which does not end in bloodshed. In what could be called a "battle" two more or less equally matched groups meet up with each other, shout, throw objects, and make sudden charges until one or the other group is cowed and retreats, yielding territory. It is, therefore, strictly true to say that chimpanzees do not go to war as ants and human beings do, in fights to the death between two large groups. And indeed a similar pattern to that of the chimpanzees can be seen among the Yanomamö,[13] whose own fierce way of life is perhaps not properly described as warfare. They too practise surprise attacks on individuals or on sleeping villages who are speared through their hut walls or when they emerge unarmed in the morning to urinate or fetch water, or who have been invited to a feast in a pretence of reconciliation. This blood-feuding, usually for the sake of women or revenge, has such a high casualty rate that the sex ratio which, thanks to the practice of female infanticide, shows a preponderance of male over female children in a proportion of 138: 100, declines over the years so that among those who are "old", that is over the age of 40, the women outnumber the men.[14]Yet this truly violent and permanent but secret and deceitful bloodletting is distinct from the public and highly ritualized display of violence, both individual and collective, for which the Yanomamö are famous. In these chest-punching and side-slapping duels, in axe, club and spear fights, in fearsome war dances fired by hallucinogenic drugs, an attitude of hostility, a readiness for killing, may be expressed, but the outcome is rarely fatal and combat is subject to rules intended to reduce the risk of serious injury. For the Yanomamö, as for the chimpanzees,

[12] Pinker, *Better Angels*, pp.44–48.
[13] Keegan, *History of Warfare*, p.96.
[14] Chagnon, *Yanomamö*, p.75.

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the "battles" are public rituals which determine dominance, status and pride, but it is the secret raids that kill. Similarly, the enormous casualty figures associated with the Mongol invasions are a consequence not of singularly bloody battles won by superior tactics and equipment, but of the practice of slaughtering the unarmed, often by treachery – in 1258 Genghis Khan's grandson Hülegü promised the inhabitants of Baghdad that they would be spared if they surrendered and, when they did, he executed 800,000 of them in cold blood. When the Mongols engaged in conventional thirteenth-century warfare, as at Ain Jalut two years later, they could be defeated by superior generalship, and the Persian city of Gurganj, which refused to be intimidated by terror, was in 1220 able to resist a siege for six months.[15]

There is, therefore, an important distinction to be made between the raid and the battle – the raid representing the primordial need to kill for the sake of food and reproductive superiority, the battle representing a clash of more or less equal forces prevented from becoming finally destructive to both parties by elements of publicity, ritual, and even rules: a shared recognition of belonging to the same species that is not present when one side butchers the other as if they were sheep or cattle.[16]

If, however, we are to see the human institution of war as a stage in the process of civilization that might one day become obsolete, we need to take this distinction in connection with some other extremely important factors that moderate the starkness of the initial picture. Firstly, we need to consider the women who, in Keegan's words, do not fight. Even before what I have called the outset of the civilizing process, there are elements at work that mean a human male's reproductive success is not necessarily best guaranteed by achieving a maximum number of impregnations. The offspring have to survive, and to survive to reproduce themselves, and human infants require an exceptionally long period of care before they can even feed themselves, let alone reach sexual maturity. During the early stages in particular the mother will need help in finding nourishment both for herself and for her child. So she will want to select a mate who will do more than give her a child and disappear. Humans are unique, Potts and Short tell us, in using infertile sexual intercourse to build a lasting bond between male and female individuals – not even the two

[15] Pinker, *Better Angels*, p.236; Keegan, *History of Warfare*, pp.205, 209, 211.

[16] The particular bloodthirstiness of pastoralists is better attributed, as by Keegan, to their familiarity with the process of slaughtering their own flocks (*History of Warfare*, p.213) than, as by Gellner, to their need to protect their flocks from predators (Ernest Gellner, 'An Anthropological View of War and Violence', in: Hinde (ed.), *The Institution of War*, 62–79, 63).

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species of chimpanzee do that.[17] Thus are men launched, however reluctantly, on the path to monogamy, to civilization. Secondly, humans are unique in their invention of the infinitely complex system of communication that is language; indeed it is probably with language that we can say the civilizing process begins. The special significance of language is that, as the storehouse of collective experience, it makes possible a form of evolution that is not dependent either on sexual selection or on modifications of the genome – cultural evolution in fact. Sir Peter Medawar wrote: "In human beings, exogenetic heredity – the transfer of information through non-genetic channels – has become more important for our biological success than anything programmed in DNA."[18] Exogenetic heredity is the post Darwinian name for what used to be called "culture". Thirdly, however, and as significant as language for the possibility of the development of culture is a change in the function of violence, which, like language and infertile sexual love, is unique to human beings. We might call it the retorsion of inter-male violence upon itself: violence used to control violence, to concentrate it within the group in a single point of power – the chief, the king, the state. It is the centralization of the power of death. Among the Yanomamö the chief of a village will usually be the fiercest of the fierce men, probably the one with the most children, and the one who uses his bow to threaten the participants in a club fight when they are going beyond what the rules allow.[19] A pupil of Napoleon Chagnon's, Laura Betzig, has conducted a fascinating study of the rulers of 112 societies around the world, demonstrating a close correlation between the rulers' arbitrary power of ordering death – what she calls "despotism" – and the number if not always of their children at least of their wives.[20] The focus of polygyny, in other words, becomes the focus of political power. The King of Morocco, with his 888 children from 500 concubines, makes the point well: we do not have to enquire how Moulay Ismail came by his sobriquet "the Bloodthirsty". In the despot with his harem of thousands – quite literally in some cases – we see something far more telling than a caricature to the point of absurdity of the Darwinian male, the Yanomamö "fierce man" as Chagnon envisaged him, committed to murder by the imperatives of reproductive competition. We see, rather, the transformation of the male compulsion to kill into the foundation at least of order, if not of justice, and of at least internal peace – the monopoly of force, as Weber put it, over a

[17] Potts and Short, *Ever since Adam*, p.35.
[18] Quoted Potts and Short, *Ever since Adam*, p.189.
[19] Keegan, *History of Warfare*, p.119.
[20] Laura L. Betzig, *Despotism and Differential Reproduction: a Darwinian view of history* (New York: Aldine, 1986).

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defined territory.[21] Ismail the Bloodthirsty was not a Genghis Khan who could organize an army and their collection of booty and the mass execution of civilians but who left no lasting political legacy: Ismail was an effective ruler of a considerable state which he freed from internal wars and he built himself an entire new capital city. Its walls may have been decorated with the heads of 10,000 enemies, but Meknes became known as the Versailles of Morocco. The state-building power of the male capacity to kill for the sake of polygyny, once it is retorted on itself, is particularly clear in the case of Inca Peru where, in Betzig's words, "reproductive rights [. . .] precisely paralleled political power by law". The King had over seven hundred wives and concubines, princes were rewarded with fifty, leaders of vassal nations with thirty; governors of provinces were given twenty and so on down to the ordinary labourer, who was allowed one, if he could find her after all the more powerful males had divided up the pool. All these rights were maintained by severe and capital punishments for any adulterous infraction.[22]

History

The development of the state, with its centralized power of compulsion through its monopoly of the power of death, does not however take place in isolation from the other factors determining human well-being – factors of more importance to the female half of the population than competition between men, such specifically as the supply of food and shelter for them and their offspring while these are in need of care. Thanks to exogenetic heredity, the passing on of acquired knowledge, human societies have enormously improved their original sources of nourishment and enabled themselves to expand into ever less promising territory – the naked hunter-gatherers have learned to become skilled agriculturalists or hide- and wool-clad pastoralists. Furthermore the multiplication of goods, and so of ever more sophisticated wants has encouraged the growth of one of humanity's oldest non-warlike practices: exchange. Even the Yanomamö trade with each other, with one village specializing in the production, say, of hammocks and another of mats. Unlike hunter-gatherers, however, agriculturalists create and maintain surpluses of food, and eventually other products, and traders too come to have their stores. Storehouses, especially if their contents are in transportable form, as they need to be for trade, are an attractive target for those who have

[21] Max Weber, *Wissenschaft als Beruf 1917/1919. Politik als Beruf 1919* (Max Weber Gesamtausgabe I. 17) (Tübingen: Mohr, 1992), pp.158–159.

[22] Betzig, *Despotism*, p.77.

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not yet learned to settle,[23] who are willing to hunt and gather from men as well as from nature, and who have long practised the art of the raid which humans share with their primate cousins. So it is not perhaps surprising that the oldest evidence of a state with military capacity is of a defensive nature: the massive stone walls of the city of Jericho dating from around 9,000 BC. But the earliest signs of true modern warfare are to be found at the beginning of the third millennium BC in the irrigated plains of Sumer.

In Sumer and Akkad, the combination of multiple city-state-building and trade between the states they built brought to birth the twin and permanent features of international relations as we know them now: empire and war. In the endless disputes between individual cities in the first half of the third millennium BC the armed forces are likely to have been militias, citizens under arms. But from about 2400 BC, first with Lugal-Anne-Mundu of Adab and later with Sargon of Akkad, wars of conquest are recorded leading to the integration of many states into larger political units stretching, it was claimed, from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf. Lugal-Anne-Mundu boasted of himself that he "brought peace to (literally: made to lie in the pastures) the people of all the lands".[24] Like Sargon's, his was a war for seeking not merely plunder but peace – a war that retorted violence on the violent, substituting the rule of law for the rule of feud and a power that could best be exercised in allowing the arts of peace to prosper over a large area and a varied population. It required long-distance campaigning over long periods of time and can only have been achieved by a new kind of armed force: not a militia at all, but an army in the modern sense, a body of professional soldiers backed by the already formidable Sumerian bureaucracy. Elsewhere in the ancient world or in its later pre-Columbian American equivalents, warfare retained its bifurcated character: either raids on a clearly inferior adversary intended to kill, preferably by surprise or treachery, or collective confrontations of a highly ritualized kind, in which deaths were few, whatever may have been the subsequent fate of the unfortunate captives. For secluded societies like ancient Egypt or Aztec Mexico, faced with no comparable power on their natural boundaries, war was virtually a religious exercise with little competitive pressure to innovate either in technology or organization. But in Mesopotamia, and later in ancient Greece, the multiplication of more or less equally powerful cities competing with one another for hegemony led to a fearsome invention: the fusion of the collective confrontation of two large bodies of males with the murderous intent of the raid. Thus was the modern battle born, in which large-scale,

[23] Gellner, "An Anthropological View", p.62–63.

[24] S.N. Kramer, *The Sumerians. Their history, culture, and character* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p.51.

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organized hand-to-hand and face-to-face combat by men with an intent to kill – avoided equally by the Yanomamö, the Aztecs and the ancient Egyptians – became the norm. According to John Keegan, whose analysis I am here largely following, the extreme development of this new channel for male competition is to be seen in the Greek use of the phalanx of spearmen, highly disciplined, cohesive and destructive of life. To the Greeks also Keegan attributes the invention of the military context in which alone the phalanx can be effective: the decisive pitched battle which determines once and for all which side is the stronger, it being the task of the strategist to manoeuvre the opposing forces so that such a decisive battle becomes possible, and on the most favourable terms. In other words, in so far as there is anything good in Clausewitz – and in Keegan's view there isn't much – Keegan thinks he got it from the Greeks.[25]

There is, of course, nothing particularly new about the idea that states make war, just as war makes states that, from Lugal-Anne-Mundu to Hitler, the agents in war have been collectivities not individuals: that is what is meant by saying that war is an institution like parliament or marriage, not an ineluctable fact of biological human nature. But the exclusively masculine character of war indicates that something about it is older and deeper than the state. What I have been trying to show so far is that this deeper inclination to murderous male-on-male violence in human societies is part of the material out of which states are formed, that in the state violence is turned against itself so that its people can live in peace as in a meadow, and therefore that it is not unreasonable to hope that, just as in the civilizing process polygyny has given way to monogamy, so the state's capacity for making war may itself be an instrument by which war is made unnecessary, perhaps even, in the end, obsolete. A large amount of evidence suggesting that some such process is indeed in train in human history has recently been marshalled by Steven Pinker in a fine – if perhaps showy – book *The Better Angels of our Nature*. The conceptual apparatus applied by Pinker to this evidence seems to me not quite up to the task, but that hardly matters. What does matter is the sheer weight of empirical and statistical fact he draws from many other writers to show a continuous decline in violence – in the deliberate infliction of premature death – over the course of recorded history. I shall single out three conclusions of Pinker's that are important for our argument so far. A fourth I shall mention later:

(1) Pinker compares the violent death rate in state and non-state societies. There are two ways you can do this. You can compare

[25] Keegan, *History of Warfare*, pp.114, 130–131, 133–135, 246–252, 267.

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the number of deaths in war with the overall death-rate. Or you can compare the number of deaths in war with the number of the population alive at the time.

Pinker first determines that 15% of deaths in prehistoric societies can probably be attributed to warfare, while a much higher average rate of 24.5% is found in 10 contemporary hunter-horticulturalist and other tribal societies (including the Yanomamö). But the rates for state societies are all very much lower: for pre-Columbian Mexico the figure is 5% and for the whole world in the twentieth century – here is the shock – the number who died in battle was 0.7%. Even if the number who died in war-caused famines and epidemics, genocides, and other man-made disasters is included we come to 180 million out of 6 billion deaths in the entire century, which is only 3%. States, in short, are much safer places than non-state societies, even when they go to war. The same result is found if you measure deaths by violence against the total living population. In non-state societies the average is 524 violent deaths per 100,000 inhabitants. In the whole of the twentieth-century again deaths from all atrocities amount to an average of 60 per 100,000. "Western Europe at the turn of the twenty-first-century", Pinker remarks, "is the safest place in human history" with a homicide rate of 1 in 100,000 (the rate in the US is ten times that).[26]

The conclusion seems obvious: the retorsion of male violence on itself, which is the foundation of the state, and the consequent replacement of permanent raiding by occasional organized warfare, is one of humanity's most successful and most beneficent inventions.

(2) Looking next at the history of states, Pinker again comes to some encouraging and perhaps unexpected conclusions. Firstly, their internal history. Not only are states much safer places than non-states. They have been getting safer over the centuries. At the beginning of the fourteenth century the average homicide rate in Western Europe was 40 per 100,000. By the mid seventeenth century – one of the bloodiest periods in European history – the rate had descended to 10 per 100,000 and in the twentieth-century as we know it bottomed out at 0.001%. The same trend is visible, secondly, in the history of interstate violence, of war. Pinker draws attention to what he calls "the long peace" after 1953: "as of May 15 1984, the major powers of the world had remained at peace with one another for the longest stretch of time since the Roman Empire" whereas

[26] Pinker, *Better Angels*, pp.57–67, 62.

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until 1945 "European states had started around two new armed conflicts *a year* since 1400".[27]

(3) So much for the raw facts. Now can we give a reason for this indubitable decline in human bellicosity and might it give us hope for the future? As far as the decline in internal violence is concerned, Pinker relies on the Hobbesian principle of Leviathan – what I have called the retorsion of violence upon itself, though Pinker does not in this context notice its peculiarly masculine origin. As the central power of the state has grown, so it has succeeded in suppressing all forms of violence except its own. And what Pinker has to say about warfare, external violence of state on state, is of the first importance, perhaps especially because in this matter he relies very largely on Bruce Russett, the Yale Professor of Political Science, who advised the US Catholic Bishops Conference in writing their pastoral letter *The Challenge of Peace* in 1983. Russett and his collaborator, John R Oneal, have for many years been running a research project endeavouring to discover whether there is any empirical evidence for a somewhat stylized formulation of Kant's arguments for the possibility of perpetual peace. In the Russett view – which cuts out some of Kant's transcendental subtleties, though this I think does not disable the project – Kant defines three necessary conditions for a general peace among nations:

1 the states concerned must be "republican" that is, in modern terms, democratic;
2 they must, by means of trade, be economically interdependent;
3 they must be linked politically to one another by treaties, a condition which Russett and Oneal equate with membership of international organisations.

Russett and Oneal have built a database "of information on relations between virtually all countries in the world in each year over the period from 1885 to 1992", assigning a measure to each country for its level of democracy, degree of economic interaction with every other country, and membership of intergovernmental organisations. They conclude: "militarized disputes between strongly democratic states are quite rare, and disputes between strongly authoritarian states are moderately common. Conflicts are most likely [...] where one state is very democratic and the other is very

[27] Pinker, *Better Angels*, pp.77, 302.

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authoritarian [. . .] Economic interdependence has about the same effect as does democracy [that is, an increase in interdependency by one standard unit decreases the likelihood of conflict by around 45%.] . . . .” The effect of IGOs is weakest, but even there the impact of a standard unit increase is to cut the risk of militarized dispute by “nearly one quarter”.[28]

In short, the statistical evidence for over a century to 1992 is that Kant was right. Democracy, trade, and supranational bodies are good for peace. States may be founded on their capacity for war, for organizing their men to do battle, but by increasing internal equality, encouraging economic activity, and engaging in international cooperation they have the potential to develop to a point where the need for that founding condition withers away and with it, presumably, the state itself. Kant himself would describe such a prospect, like perpetual peace, as an “ideal”, that is to say, as something which in reality is unattainable but to move towards, which is the only way of giving moral meaning to human lives. And that I believe is the context in which to look back on the start of the First World War, a context which, as Pinker has shown, is given plausibility by the history of conflict and peace throughout the twentieth-century, especially when that history is seen in the light of the centuries that preceded.

World War I

At first sight the century after the end of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, from 1815 to 1914, presents something of a paradox for anyone who thinks of him or herself as a Kantian of the Pinker stripe. On the one hand we see a steady spread of democracy, in the sense of the suffrage: reformed and extended in Britain, introduced in Germany and Italy, alongside parliamentary institutions that increasingly, and in France eventually completely, displace authoritarian monarchy. At the same time, but especially in the second half of the century, we see a growth in international trade which after 1870 at the latest can be called fully global. Two at least, therefore, of the Kantian preconditions for general peace seem to be going in the right direction. On the other hand, as John Keegan emphasizes, the nineteenth century saw the remilitarization of a Europe that after the defeat of Napoleon had been a continent disarmed. The armies had gone and “large-scale conscription”, Keegan writes, “had effectively been abolished everywhere, the arms industry had collapsed, generals were pensioners, veterans begged in the streets”. But “on the

[28] Bruce Russett, “Not All the Nations Furiously Rage Together”, in: Robert E. Sullivan (ed.), *Higher Learning and Catholic Traditions* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), pp.61–85, 67–68, 79.

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eve of the First World War", he goes on, "almost every fit European male of military age had a soldier's identity card among his personal papers, telling him where to report for duty in the event of general mobilisation", the intervening century had seen "the creation of the strongest warrior society the world had ever known".[29]

Keegan blames this remilitarization, somewhat implausibly, on the malign subterranean influence of Clausewitz. It might be tempting to see it more generally as a consequence of the growth of an ideology of the nation-state, long thought to be one of the principal features of the nineteenth-century landscape. But I think it needs to be seen as complementary to the first arm of the paradox, the growth of democracy and economic interdependence, with which it seems to be in contradiction. It is not merely that the extension of the suffrage, of what the French Revolution called "active citizenship", by involving more citizens or rather more males, in the business of the state paves the way for the reintroduction of universal conscription. It is that the huge growth in international economic activity is inseparable from and to a great extent identical with, the founding of institutions much more characteristic of the nineteenth century than nation states – the great global empires. The main components of nineteenth-century Europe were not nation-states but federations like Germany, or conglomerates of a metropolitan homeland and colonial dependencies like France, or both at once like Britain – a metropolitan homeland federated out of four nations that are now, a hundred years later, drifting apart. And although in the nineteenth century the growth of the imperial conglomerates both drove and was driven by the growth in trade, it was also in the nature of empire that it had to grow the apparatus of war. As soon as trade, or any other form of economic or cultural interaction between members of different political units begins, a higher-order political – that is, non-market-based and so ultimately military – authority is called for to guarantee the conditions of the interaction: the security of communications, the enforceability of the agreements, the integrity of the common currency. The function of armies is to turn states into empires. That was as true when Lugal-Anne-Mundu was pacifying the city-states of Sumer as when Britain was pacifying the princes of India. And that higher-order, as it were, supranational, and ultimately military, authority is what is meant by the term "empire". So the third Kantian precondition for general peace could indeed also seem to be being met in the nineteenth-century: under the name of empires, supranational political bodies within which nations could live in peaceful economic interaction with one another were indeed coming into existence. But the first fatal weakness of the empires, which prevented

[29] Keegan, *History of Warfare*, p.22.

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them from operating in the long run as agents of Kantian peace, was that there was more than one of them. Kant envisaged an amphictyonic "league of nations" pledged not to wage war against each other: but he did not envisage several leagues, and certainly not leagues that themselves exercised the state power of violence and so were able to prepare for war (an issue, incidentally, that Hegel certainly understood). Eventually the forces that guaranteed *pax* within the empires were turned against each other: that moment had been long foreseen, but foreseeing it had only led to the hypertrophy of military preparedness noted by Keegan, far in excess of what was needed for internal peacekeeping.

There was, therefore, a second fatal weakness of the nineteenth-century empires and it is a major theme in a book by Christopher Clarke on the origins of the First World War that is a symphony of many themes.[30] Whereas the imperial dependencies were spread across the world and interacted with each other, politically and militarily, at a fairly low level of intensity, the metropolitan homelands, with the exception of the USA and Japan, were compressed together on a small continent where they had a long history of intensive, not to say explosive, interaction. Low-level conflict on the periphery, when transferred back to the centre, could quickly become critical: one gunboat in Agadir in 1911 nearly started the war three years early. Drawing on an important article by Paul Schroeder,[31] Clarke shows how two distinct power structures, one global and imperial, the other European and national, interlocked to constrain the actors in the crisis of July 1914 to a point where the war could be said to have been unavoidable. The two structures are described by Schroeder as two games played according to two different sets of rules. In the game of global imperialism win-win situations were possible: territories could be exchanged for mutual benefit since possession was often more virtual than real, the counters of exchange were options on future possibilities rather than current assets, the ancient Spanish, Portuguese, Ottoman and Chinese empires were all ready to be carved up, and much of Africa was still little known. There was still gold lying unclaimed in the hills. In Europe however a zero-sum game had to be played: every square inch was already assigned to an owner and one player's gain was necessarily another's loss. France could not regain Alsace and Lorraine unless Germany lost them, and Russia could not add Ruthenia to the Ukraine without dispossessing Austria-Hungary. In the final phase of the slide to war, Clarke stresses the European motivations of the actors, but he shows – perhaps more vividly than

[30] Christopher Clarke, *The Sleepwalkers. How Europe went to war in 1914* (London: Penguin, 2013).

[31] Paul W. Schroeder, "Embedded Counterfactuals and World War I as an Unavoidable War", available online at www.vlib.us/wwi/resources/archives/texts/t040829a/counter.html

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he realizes – how it was essentially imperial motives that set up the fateful alliances whose rigidity brought on the ultimate catastrophe.[32] It is of course a great relief to read a treatment of World War I which does not see it as the first of two wars between Britain and Germany. One of the more controversial consequences of Clarke's position is that the blame for the outbreak of war is not loaded principally, or even primarily, on Germany but is fairly equally divided between all participants, including Serbia. And also including Britain. Even Zara Steiner, who thinks a major part of the responsibility lies with Germany, acknowledges that "the Entente with France [which led Britain to enter the war] was not directed against Germany. It was the natural outcome of the need to reduce imperial tensions".[33] For Edward Grey the Empire was always the ultimate focus of foreign policy and, in his speech to the House of Commons justifying war, he alluded specifically to the threat Russia would pose to British imperial interests in India and China if she was victorious in a war against Germany in which Britain had not supported her. Indeed (if I may venture briefly into the counterfactual), since by 1914 it seemed likely that the Anglo-Russian Convention would lapse when it came up for renewal in 1915, it is conceivable that if the war had not broken out in 1914 – say if Gavrilo Princip had missed – there might by 1916 or 1917 have been a war in which Britain in alliance with Germany would have fought against Russia and France. I think Clarke's analysis and distribution of responsibility could be pressed a little further. The war of 1914 was not, of course, the fault of any one participant, nor was it in essence a European conflict; it was the breakdown of a global system of imperial order. Yes, Germany played a significant role in bringing about that breakdown. But Germany was not the only late arrival at the imperial feast, hungry to catch up on the other colonial powers, and suffering from what Schroeder, using a peculiarly apposite German word, calls *Torschlusspanik* – the panic of those rushing to get through the city gates before they close. From at least 1884, let us say, when the Washington Conference fixed a longitudinal grid that embraced the whole planet, every participant in that greatest of Great Games knew that the world was a limited whole in which the prizes of empire were limited too, and that sooner or later the global game would become a zero-sum game, like the game in Europe. The Great War happened because economically the human race was becoming one – the late nineteenth-century globalization was in some ways more extreme than that in the late twentieth century – but the political institutions that global economy needed were not available to protect and order it. Not even the most extensive

[32] Clarke, *Sleepwalkers*, pp.123, 130, 149, 158–159, 167.

[33] Zara S. Steiner and Keith Neilson, *Britain and the Origins of the First World War* (2nd ed.) (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p.32.

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empires, the British and the Russian, had a truly global reach, and there was no authority set over them to mediate between them when they fell out. When Grey suggested a four-power mediation to resolve the dispute between Austria and Serbia there was no possibility of setting up a body that was either disinterested enough to be acceptable to both parties or authoritative enough to impose a solution. There is of course a lesson here for the present. Even though it is possible to see that the disaster of 1914–18, and its equally disastrous aftermath in 1939–45, led eventually to the establishment of the EU and to Pinker's "long peace", it is obviously impossible to claim that in 1914 the world went to war in order to found the EU. But it *is* possible to say that it went to war because it had *not* founded the EU.

We now have a global array of supra-national and intergovernmental organisations that was unimaginable in 1914.[34] We also have a degree of economic interdependence that more than matches in most respects what was achieved in the late nineteenth century. And democracy in one form or another has become a norm to which even near-dictatorships pay the hypocritical homage that vice renders to virtue. The Kantian preconditions have established a remarkable hold. At this very juncture we are witnessing in Ukraine and may soon witness in the seas off China a testing, let us hope not to destruction, of the strength of the global network that can give us peace. Will the economic cost of recourse to violence bring a settlement in Ukraine and stem Mr Putin's apparent ambition to catch up on the bloodletting that we were so miraculously spared when the Soviet Empire, after a long delay, went the way of the British, French, German, Austro-Hungarian, Japanese and Ottoman Empires? Or will we see a withdrawal from the globalized economy by would-be autarkies, whether Mother Russia or Little England? The result of the present trials of strength may be an indication to us of how the rest of our twenty-first-century may develop, just as the events of 1914–18 foreshadowed much of the twentieth century. The 75 Years War, from 1914 to 1989, saw the obsolescence, not only of the nineteenth-century empires as a form of global political integration, but of the sovereign states, founded on their power to give each other battle, which had formed the metropolitan cores of those empires. The mega-battles of World War I were probably the supreme organizational acts of the state-form created by the re-direction of the male capacity for competitive violence. In their ultimate horrible absurdity they were matched only by the threat – thanks be to God unrealized – of mutually assured destruction during the nuclear stand-off of the Cold War. The suicidal logic of nuclear deterrence was in truth a *reductio ad absurdum* of the state's reliance on male violence, and the ever more

[34] Cp. Clarke, *Sleepwalkers*, p.456.

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apparent erosion of national sovereignties since the end of the Cold War is one of the welcome signs that we may after all be putting 4,000 years of war-based statehood behind us and learning to live together in a more rational, or should I say, in a more feminine way.

The fourth of the conclusions drawn by Steven Pinker from his evidence for the decline of violence that I wish to single out is that the process of pacification is a process of feminization.[35] If, as I have argued, the process of civilization is the process by which male reproductive success is brought into equality with the reproductive success of females, so that polygyny gives way to monogamy and violent competition between males becomes unnecessary, then the measure of civilization will be the extent to which differences between the sexes have been ironed out, men have taken up behaviour and attitudes previously associated with women, and women have taken on roles previously reserved to men. The sexual dimorphism of our species will be minimized: men will remove their facial hair, women will take up body-building exercises, the dress and other bodily decorations of both sexes will become more similar. Men will become more maternal, women more independent, and homosexuality in both sexes will become simply a variant of the infertile sexual love that binds together the caring parental couple. These are all signs of a society that is sufficiently unthreatened and sufficiently self-sustaining to do without the recourse to organized male violence, even in its retorted and sublimated forms, that has held states together in the past. Plainly we are not there yet. But the admission of women in the armed forces to front-line combat roles is a contradiction of the original dimorphic logic of human reproduction which gave rise to warfare in the first place and so, let us hope, a sign of pacification. The context in which 2014 should remember 1914 is a context in which any future Flora Sandes need not be alone.

Is there, though, a specifically theological context for such an act of remembrance? I think there is, given that one of the most fateful consequences of the Great War was the thoughtless dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire and a violent disruption of the Islamic world, whose aftershocks disturb us still. While the state-based violence of formalized battle has become blessedly infrequent in the world at large since 1945, there has been a continuing prevalence of militia-style raiding, violence backed by little or no state organisation, exercised for preference against the unarmed, unconstrained by any laws of war, and often characterized by acts of pre-civilized barbarity. Often a theological justification is claimed for this violence, and the theology in question is often, though by no means exclusively, Islamic.

[35] Pinker, *Better Angels*, pp.827–832.

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John Keegan attributes the initial and phenomenal success of the Arab invasions after the death of the Prophet not to any technical military superiority but to the force of an idea – the ideology of Holy War – "O you who believe, fight the unbelievers who are near to you," says the Koran.[36] Jihad, however, was modelled on the warfare of raiders, not on battles between states constructed by the retorsion of violence on itself, and since the end of the Ottoman Empire there has been no Islamic model for such a state in the company of the great powers. In the modern world an Islamic State is unlikely to advance politically beyond the condition of a Yanomamö village or a Mongol horde, in which warfare is the way of life and organization is limited to the military realm and to the distribution of plunder. Theology will be of no more use in dealing with such a threat to world order than in dealing with Genghis Khan. But there is of course a pacific world-wide brotherhood of Islamic fellow-sharers in the faith of Abraham, and to these surely Christian theology can speak. In such a dialogue the Christian participants will need in humility to discern, in the supranational Islam their nations conspired to deprive of its political embodiment, a true revelation of God's plan for humanity. Conversely, the Muslim participants will need to distance themselves from culturally and historically determined survivals of pre-state competitive violence between males: polygyny, for example, the perpetuation of dimorphism by requiring men to grow beards and women to conceal even the hair they have, female infanticide or sexually selective abortion, genital mutilation to interfere with the bonding effect of sexual love, legal or political discrimination against women or homosexuals. Many of these obstacles to the process of feminization, and so of civilization, were prevalent in pre-1914 Christian Europe, and so share responsibility for the catastrophe we are commemorating and, in the century that has passed since then, some have been only partially removed. There will be no room for complacency on the Christian side in a dialogue with Islam. Perhaps we Christians should begin by putting our own house in order: encouraging infertile sexual love, requiring clergy, and even Archbishops of Canterbury emeritus, to shave off their beards and trim their eyebrows, and, of course, now that it has been ended in the army, ending the male monopoly on the priesthood.

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[36] Keegan, *History of Warfare*, p.193.

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