

Part 3—Introducing “Arts and Letters, War and Peace”—2023

A fascination with combat is an obvious and persistent characteristic of the human condition. The reasons for this have for millennia provoked sometimes virulent religious as well as scholarly debates. Some on the one hand assert that human beings are born with personalities *tabula rasa* that are socialized to competitive violence as a result of the dire economic conditions into which most humans historically have been born. And, that such impulses can be unlearned by fairer economic distributions systems combined with proper socialization methods aimed at assuaging and dissipating entirely the impulse to violence toward those who would otherwise be their competitors.

In contrast, others assert that humans by dint of biological evolution are genetically—and irrevocably—inclined to be predatory and violent by nature, and that the best that can be hoped for in achieving something like peaceful community stability is imposing social constraints through rigidly enforced laws linked to the proselytizing of cooperative attitudes backed by coercive punishments. Still others have asserted that human beings are born innately “good” but fall into the temptation to violence due to the influence of malevolent spiritual forces, and that the only solution is penitent submission to the type of religious conversion that inculcates pacific attitudes.

Irrespective of the purported evidence for any of these explanations and their asserted solutions, it remains the case that a mesmerizing fascination with violence continues to be a common trait of human social intercourse manifest in many ways and places in the modern world that dominates a good part of human cultural expression. Whether in the writing of endless murder mysteries, television series chronicling the exploits of diverse detectives, gang violence in popular music, or recounting of criminal activity in general, the appetite for violence in cultural expression appears insatiable.

Moreover, the grandest celebration of interest in human violence appears reserved for the enduring fascination with mythologized violence related to war. Whether in the light-minded treatment of war in countless superhero movies and other unserious cartoonish products of fiction or the vast examination of war in sober treatments of historical war events in film, video, books, journals, poetry, websites, and music—not to mention almost daily news accounts and documentaries about ongoing large-scale conflicts today—memorialization of the details of war permeates our culture with resonating effects.

To provide greater insight into this phenomenon, we express deep gratitude to Dr. Robert E. Williams Jr., professor of political science at Pepperdine University, for allowing us to print in this edition a slightly revised version of a paper he presented at Westmont College in 2013 that provides broader treatment of the significance and influence of cultural expressions related to war on our society. The full paper can be found online at <https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/48363902/what-poets-and-painters-can-teach-us-about-international-politics>.