Is War Natural?

n.b.) Various theories assume it is natural & not all in readings for this session:

(1) Sociobiology – will do that next session

(2) “Realism” in International Relations theory (Machiavelli, Hobbes, Morgenthau, Waltz):

   - domestic/international split
   - anarchy in the international sphere
   - the strong prey on the weak unless they protect themselves

   dominant view in IR today, though debate with:

   (a) institutionalists – how far can UN etc go?

   (Ruggie e.g.)

   (b) culturalists like Tilly:

   war evolved with state power

   Bard Schmookler & anthropological version of Tilly: war is not natural, but warlike societies defeat peaceful ones or force mimicry

(3) Feminists: war is offshoot of patriarchy

   Pseudo-anthropological literature on lost matriarchy
Women seen as intrinsically cooperative

They see Freud, IR theory as patriarchal thinking

Marilyn French, Beyond Power

1) **Freud**

1932 context of Nazism in which writing to Einstein

later writing (Civilization & Its Discontents) more pessimistic!

War “seems to be quite a natural thing, to have a good biological basis and to be scarcely avoidable.”

Shared animal/human nature

War & violence = same, instinctual – no difference between the impulse and the institution

Hydraulic language to describe human nature (pressures etc)

Instinct = dual: eros & death instinct, intertwined

(recognizes with William James & Chris Hedges that war not all about destruction)

but power of dark side in love with destruction

Violence also has had functionality – though that might be ending (war → exterminism?)

Elitist: elite who “subordinate their instinctual life to the dictatorship of reason.”
2) **Margaret Mead**

Who she was, writing 1940

Ambiguity: service to national security state, supported US in Vietnam, yet revered progressive

Like Freud, sense that answer lies with “primitives” (in history or culture):

> There we see essential human nature – problematic assumption!

Breaks connection of violence to war; war = institution, invention with rules

> One (impulse to violence) universal, other (war as institution) not

**Crucial move**

Nothing to do with whether a people are aggressive and violent (so much for peace education!)

Highlights fact that war = highly rule-bound, not instinctual purging

Clincher: societies with no word for, or experience of war

Relocates universalism from instinct to make war to cultural processes within it: dehumanization of enemy, purification for killing.
3) **William James**

Harvard psychology professor, writing 1906.

Instinctual argument about “innate pugnacity.”

“our ancestors have bred pugnacity into our bone and marrow.”

Evolution central to his argument, as to Freud’s, but hope “war may be a transitory phenomenon in social evolution”

“pure loot and mastery seem no longer avowable motives.”

Stresses positive, erotic qualities of war, not death instinct.

Excitement, nobility, manhood, being part of something bigger.

But war increasingly irrational.

Functionalism: find function of war, substitute more rational alternative.

4) **Chris Hedges**

NY Times war reporter.

I read as mixture of Freud and James: sees addiction to destruction, but also heroism, nobility, war as place one can be most alive.
Pessimistic sense wars becoming more & more destructive

They’re addictive

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2 p.24
3 p.66, James
4 James, Moral Equivalent of war, p.67
5 p.66