

The Romance of War

University Of Wisconsin
Department of Political Science &
Integrated Liberal Studies
Fall 2007

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Course: PS 506/ILS371
Location: 242 Education
Time: 5:30 – 8 pm
Office Hours: R 1:00-2:00

This course investigates the philosophy and psychology of war and violence. While many studies of war and the causes of war look to states and institutions, here we turn our attention to what might be called the “romance of war.” Simply put, despite their horrible costs, both human and economic, war and battle seem to have an enduring appeal that defies its rational implications. Our task here is to probe the depths of the human experience with war and violence so as to better understand its appeal.

We will thus begin with a study of courage and honor in the context of the ancient construction of the good warrior. From this understanding of the warrior ethos as the construct of the good man, we will turn our attention to actual experiences of men in battle. With these investigations we will discuss and dispute the competing claims that man is either naturally drawn to war or naturally repulsed by it. Finally, we will consider several counterarguments to the claim that man is by nature a warrior or naturally drawn to war by an innate lust for destruction. Specifically, we ask whether there is a contradictory element to the experience of war and battle—an element that appeals to something fundamental in human beings yet at the same time causes humans to overlook the inhumanity of war.

Required Texts:

- Bacevich, Andrew J. *The New American Militarism: How Americans are Seduced by War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005)
- Bowden, Mark. *Black Hawk Down: A Story of Modern War* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1999).
- Ehrenreich, Barbara. *Blood Rites: Origins and History of the Passions of War* (New York, N.Y.: Metropolitan Books, Holt and Company, 1997).
- Gelvin, Michael. *War and Existence: A Philosophical Inquiry* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994).
- Gray, J. Glenn. *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle* (Harper, 1959).
- Grossman, Dave. *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996).
- Hanson, Victor Davis. *The Soul of Battle: From Ancient Times to the Present Day, How Three Great Liberators Vanquished Tyranny* (New York, N.Y.: The Free Press, 1999).

Hedges, Chris. *War is a Force that Gives us Meaning* (Anchor Books, 2003)
 O'Brien, Tim. *If I Die in a Combat Zone*
 Pressfield, Stephen. *Gates of Fire: An Epic Novel of the Battle of Thermopylae* (Bantam Books, 1999).
 Plutarch. *Plutarch on Sparta*, transl. Richard J.A. Talbert (Penguin Books, 1988).

Readings on Reserve:

Holmes, Richard. "Mysterious Fraternity" in *Acts of War: The Behavior of Men in Battle* (Simon and Schuster, 1990).
 Huizinga, Johan. "Play and War" in *Homo Ludens: a Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Beacon, 1955)
 James, William. "The Moral Equivalent of War" in *Writings, 1902-1910* (Library of America, 1987).
 Caputo, John. "Spirit and Danger" in *Ethics And Danger*, Arleen B. Dallery, ed. (SUNY Press, 1992).

Further Readings:

Gabriel, Richard. *No More Heroes: Madness and Psychiatry in War* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1990).
 Gray, J. Glenn. *On Understanding Violence Philosophically & Other Essays* (Harper Torchbooks, 1970).
 Hanson, Victor Davis. *The Western Way of War: Infantry Battle in Classical Greece* (Knopf, 1989).
 Homer. *The Iliad*
 Howard, Michael. *War and the Liberal Conscience* (Rutgers University Press, 1978).
 Keegan, John. *The Face of Battle: A Study of Agincourt, Waterloo, and the Somme* (Penguin, 1983)
 MacDonald, Sharon, ed.. *Images of Women in Peace and War: Cross-cultural and Historical Perspectives* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1988).
 Shay, Jonathan. *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (Simon and Schuster, 1995).
 Tritle, Lawrence. *From Melos to My Lai: War and Survival* (Routledge, 2000).

Students are strongly encouraged to purchase these particular translations and editions. This is a text-based course and full participation requires that we navigate and explore these texts together—that we be on the same page, so to speak.

Requirements:

Participation: 10%
 Presentations: 10%
 Speech/Poem 10%
 Papers (4): 70%

Grading Schema:

94 % +	A	68-72	D
88-93	A/B	Else = F	
83 -87	B		
78-82	B/C		
73-77	C		

Participation:

The course will proceed as a seminar. This means its effectiveness depends on two things: reading and participation. The grading schema is therefore designed to encourage both. The participation is based on attendance, preparedness, and participation in discussion. Carefully reading the assigned material before each class will go far in ensuring a good participation grade.

Presentations:

Students will be responsible for four presentations in groups. On the students' assigned day for presentation they will serve as our resident hermeneuts. That is, on the day of the presentation, the students will become our experts on the text. The task is not to talk for the whole class, but rather to facilitate the discussion, to present what is perceived to be the major themes and statements in the text, and to be the experts guiding us in our interpretation and discussion of the text.

Speeches/Poems:

Near the end of the semester, each student will give an oral presentation of a speech or poem that s/he has memorized. The idea is to explore and experience what we might call "incendiary oratory" or discourse that, rightly or wrongly, romanticizes war and battle. The speeches, which we will discover and discuss through the course of the semester, should not be longer than about 5 minutes. Examples might be Patrick Henry's "Give me liberty or give me death" speech, Henry's "Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more" speech (Henry V, III.i), Churchill's "Finest Hour" speech, MacArthur's "Duty, Honor, Country" speech, etc..

Papers:

The first two papers (4-6pp) will each be due in class the week after the student's presentation. The topic is open, but the paper will focus on the themes discussed in the presentations. The term paper (10-15pp) will be due on the date of the final; topics will emerge during the semester as students discover issues of particular interest. All term paper topics should be approved in consultation with me. Late papers will be penalized a half letter grade per day.

Itinerary**Theme 1: The Warrior Ethos**

September 4 – Pressfield, *Gates of Fire* (Bks. 1-4).

September 11 – Pressfield, *Gates of Fire* (Bks 5-8) and *Plutarch on Sparta*, pp. 109-163.

September 18 – Movies: Patton and Fight Club. Please arrange to view these films sometime during the previous week and be prepared to discuss. We will try to have the scripts on electronic reserve.

September 25 – Hansen, *The Soul of Battle* (Parts I and III)

October 1 – Ehrenreich, *Bloodrites* (pp. TBA)

Theme 2: The Ontology of War

October 8 – Gelvin, *War and Existence* (Parts I & II)

October 15 – Gelvin, *War and Existence* (Parts III & IV)

October 23 – Gray, *The Warriors* (Chapter 1-3)

October 30 – Gray, *The Warriors* (Chapters 4-6, Conclusion)

November 6 – Hedges, *War is a Force that Gives us Meaning*, pp. 1-42, 157-185; Holmes, “Mysterious Fraternity” in *Acts of War*, pp. 31-73 (electronic reserves); Caputo, “Spirit and Danger” in Dallery, *Ethics And Danger* (electronic reserves).

Theme 3: Man the Warrior?

November 13 – Bowden, *Blackhawk Down*

November 20 – Grossman, *On Killing*, pp. xxiii-66, 249-332

November 27 – O’Brien, *If I Die in a Combat Zone*. Speeches/Poems

December 4 – Bacevich, *The New American Militarism*; plus speeches/Poems

December 11 – James, “The Moral Equivalent of War” (electronic reserve); Huizinga, “War and Play” (electronic reserve).