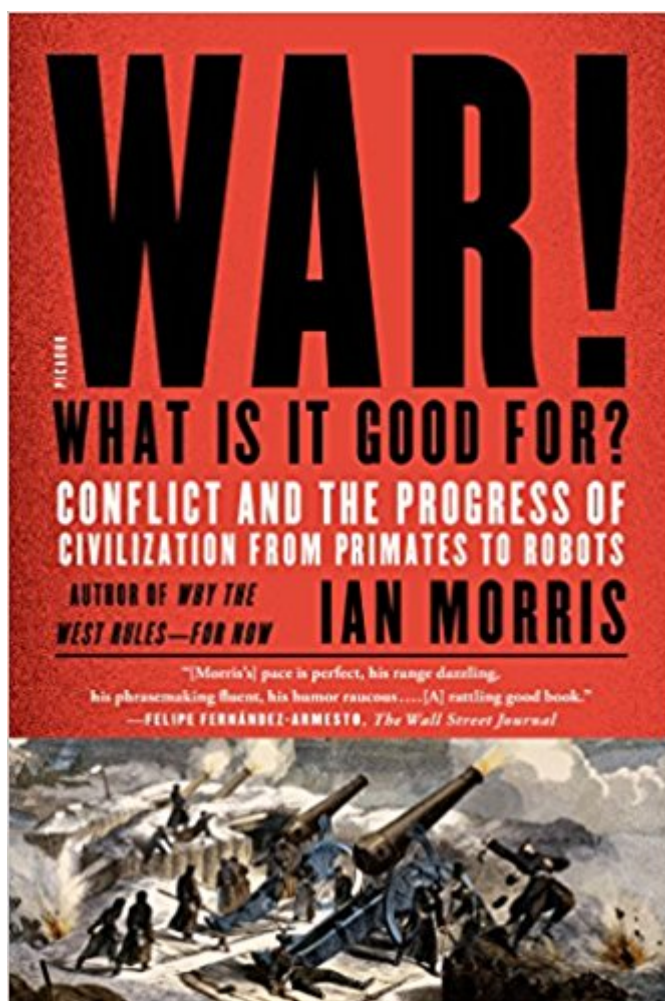


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War! What Is It Good For?: Conflict And The Progress Of Civilization From Primates To Robots



Synopsis

A POWERFUL AND PROVOCATIVE EXPLORATION OF HOW WAR HAS CHANGED OUT SOCIETY
"War! / What is it good for? / Absolutely nothing," says the famous song—but archaeology, history, and biology show that war in fact has been good for something. Surprising as it sounds, war has made humanity safer and richer. In *War! What Is It Good For?*, the renowned historian and archaeologist Ian Morris tells the gruesome, gripping story of fifteen thousand years of war, going beyond the battles and brutality to reveal what war has really done to and for the world. Stone Age people lived in small, feuding societies and stood a one-in-ten or even one-in-five chance of dying violently. In the twentieth century, by contrast—despite two world wars, Hiroshima, and the Holocaust—fewer than one person in a hundred died violently. The explanation: War, and war alone, has created bigger, more complex societies, ruled by governments that have stamped out internal violence. Strangely enough, killing has made the world safer, and the safety it has produced has allowed people to make the world richer too. War has been history's greatest paradox, but this searching study of fifteen thousand years of violence suggests that the next half century is going to be the most dangerous of all time. If we can survive it, the age-old dream of ending war may yet come to pass. But, Morris argues, only if we understand what war has been good for can we know where it will take us next.

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review This erudite yet compulsively readable history of war (and actually much more) by

archaeologist-historian Morris (Why the West Rules—For Now, 2010) takes the provocative position that, over time, the value of war, despite its horrors, has been to make humanity both safer and richer. He covers a vast span, from primitive (Morris enlists anthropological studies of chimpanzees and early “protohumans” to explain aggression) and ancient civilizations to the “American Empire.” War’s impact in terms of lives lost (as a percentage of national population) has lessened, Morris demonstrates, and its long-term effects have been, as he puts it, “productive.” The thesis is elegantly advanced (there is something to marvel over or even chuckle about on almost every page). Morris is as comfortable referencing Edwin Starr, who sang the song from which the title derives, as he is Thomas Hobbes. Only large centralized states, Hobbes’s Leviathans, forged by war, can secure stability. Simply put, “War made the state, and the state made peace.” Throughout this rare mixture of scholarship, stunning insight, and wit, Morris cites the widely divergent opinions of past philosophers and scholars, and, though he makes his case convincingly, future (and, oh yes, the future is projected) students, readers, and critics of this book are likely to continue the fascinating argument Morris raises here. War! What Is it Good For? appeals to (indeed, may broaden) the large audience that has made Jared Diamond’s Guns, Germs, and Steel (1997), much quoted in it, a modern classic and should join it on personal and library bookshelves.

--Mark Levine --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

“A disturbing, transformative text that veers toward essential reading.”
Kirkus Reviews (starred review) “An exuberant and wonderfully entertaining tour de force.”
David Crane, The Spectator (London) “Ian Morris has established himself as a leader in making big history interesting and understandable.”
Jared Diamond, author of Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies and Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed

This book has strongly influenced my world view. Beside its treatment of war and conflict, it is also an excellent history book that cuts through history along the axis of war. Its content is too loaded to be a page turner, but the topic sticks. I found it is logically built up, and although perhaps controversial, it does systematically address all obvious questions. The only part where I found the author wanders off is over-optimistic (at least in my view) description of drones and their capabilities, in Chapter 7. This almost, but not quite, sounds like an advertorial for the US defense industry. It just doesn’t fit the otherwise neutral and objective message of the book.

Excellent read! Thought provoking and strips away the prejudices we have about warfare and looks objectively at it from a historical and institutional perspective. We all know it's "bad", but Morris tells us why it remains a persistent part of the human experience and he backs up his claims with solid evidence. He also cites many other excellent sources. A great read for anyone interested in the history of human violence.

A paradox explained, argued and defended in clear terms - war is not all that bad, considering the alternatives. Modern societies all around the globe are indeed indebted to the sequences of war throughout the long centuries of human existence. Do we really appreciate what we have now compared to past times? This book is a must-read to anyone who is willing to set his own prejudices aside - at least going through the pages of Dr. Morris' new book - in order to comprehend the intricacies involved when discussing even seemingly easy issues such as war and peace.

It is an entertaining examination of the progress of 10,000 years of civilization similar to Robert Kaplans' "Revenge of Geography" and Jared Diamond's "Guns, Germs and Steel," but with a specific focus on how social Darwinism (through war) has created effective governments. Any description I provide sounds hopelessly simplistic. The prose is concise (American-like), the philosophy entertaining (like Paul Johnson) and the logic and justifications compelling.

Casting his eyes over the past 5,000 years, the author presents a hypothesis that most wars actually advance the cause of civilization. It's a persuasive and intriguing analysis, even though I have my doubts as to whether he's correct. This is a provocative view of human history that I have not seen before and it made me re-think some of my assumptions. Very well written in a conversational style and easy to read, despite the heavy subject matter.

It's hard to try to look at something objectively and read this book with an open mind when your whole life you've been told that war is bad and there's no good that could possibly ever come of it. But regardless of that, Morris does an amazing job at presenting this...outlandish view of war. His argument is put together well, it's clear and easy to understand. I won't necessarily say that I agree with the ideas presented in this book but they are worthy of some consideration.

You wouldn't think a book thick enough to be a doorstop would be a thrilling, engaging read. But

every time I get a chance to pick it up - no matter how distracted or busy my mind is - within a minute I am sucked back in to the fascinating theories and anecdotes presented. Really a great read, even for those who don't agree with the central premise or consider themselves academics.

Fascinating....however the last two chapters predicting outcomes from the Arab Spring was a bust. .

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