



War in Human Civilization

Azar Gat

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In this truly global study, major military historian Azar Gat sets out to unravel the "riddle of war" throughout human history, from the early hunter-gatherers right through to the unconventional terrorism of the twenty-first century. In the process, the book generates an astonishing wealth of original and fascinating insights on all major aspects of humankind's remarkable journey through the ages, engaging a wide range of disciplines.

War in Human Civilization Details

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Author : Azar Gat

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From Reader Review War in Human Civilization for online ebook

Maureen says

very dense, very well researched study of the history of human militarism.. especially interesting the collation of data regarding pre-historic use of violence as a tool for access to and distribution of resources. Author explicates well the key roles of pastoralism and sedentary agriculture in formalizing the rudiments of war-making The role of military action in state formation, and the state is a machine for war, is powerfully laid out. The sheer bulk of the data points to the historic necessity of strength as a precondition for peace on bearable terms

Stephen Gill says

An enlightening examination of war.

Marcus says

In a debate full of ideology and scholarly politics, this book manages to talk about war without the most common pitfalls and shortcomings. Maybe because it is project oriented (war) rather than part of an existent academic tradition, it manages to integrate a variety of insights from different areas of knowledge.

It has a kind of "Freakonomics effect", offering amazing insights.

Bob Adamcik says

You can read my review here:

<http://thesentienttraveler.com/war-in...>

Eric says

Azar Gat takes on one of the most fundamental questions regarding human history and nature: why do we fight? In trying to find an answer, Gat covers a broad range of disciplines (history, archaeology, psychology, sociology, genetics). He clearly demonstrates that war, contrary to being an aberration brought on by civilization, has been a part of humanity's existence since the beginning. Even though the weapons and the nature of war's destructiveness have changed, the underlying motivations have stayed the same.

Jeff says

A massive tome that cuts through all of human history, "combining biology, anthropology, archaeology,

military history.

Anjar Priandoyo says

I always have mixed feeling when giving a review for this kind of book. First I did read everything but not paying 100% attention, some part just skimming, so maybe only around 30% comprehension of this book. This book has an interesting idea, that war is the biggest force in human advancement transition, it provides detail evidence since the first Homo 2 million years ago to nuclear war and biological weapon. I am pretty sure will read this more than once and used it as a reference to understand the war in human culture. Maybe the only problem is this book is too big.

Dan says

I'm in the process of reading it so far, so I'll update this when it's done, but so far it's very good. Similar idea to Guns, Germs and Steel, conceptually at least. Obviously Gat's ideas are very different, but the analysis is similar.

Deepay says

Why war? The author collects and present a large body of evidence saying that war exists because it is adaptive, and has been so over a long period of time and in many regions of the world. The breadth of reference and the general thoroughness of writing are impressive. However, many behaviors are explained as being holdovers from a time when they were adaptive, and one must make one's own judgement about the strength of that argument.

Joseph Stieb says

In *War in Human Civilization*, Azar Gat tackles two major questions about war. First, what are the essential reasons why humans fight wars? Second, how have the motivations, practices, and lethality of war changed as human civilization has transformed over time? Although the book is a challenging read given its length and dense writing, Gat offers much illumination on these and other questions.

Gat received his Ph.D in history and he now teaches political science at Tel Aviv University. *War in Human Civilization* reflects his interdisciplinary career by employing ideas and methods from a variety of science and social science disciplines. Gat needs this expansive toolkit because his essential questions cross disciplinary lines and many of his topics cannot be accessed with only the standard methods of history and political science.

The book moves chronologically through different stages of humanity's natural and cultural evolution. Gat begins with hunter-gatherers and proceeds to the development of tribes, agriculture, chieftainships, states, and ultimately modern forms of politics, economics, and warfare. The examination of hunter-gatherers is especially crucial in establishing his thesis. He grants great significance to hunter-gatherer warfare because *Homo sapiens* has spent the vast majority of its existence in this mode and the evolutionary mechanisms we developed in this state of nature still deeply influence our behavior today. Employing insights from archaeology, animal behavior, and modern observations of hunter-gatherers, Gat shows that hunter-gatherers

used violence to steal women, kill male competitors and their offspring, and access crucial resources and territory.

During his discussion of hunter-gatherer warfare, Gat presents his thesis: the essential reason why humans fight wars is to obtain and/or protect access to food and sex, what he calls an evolutionary motivational complex. Gat believes that violence is “innate, but optional,” meaning that human beings have evolved mechanisms to facilitate the use of violence but that violence is not an inevitable product of our evolutionary heritage (36). Rather, violence is one of many tactics humans can employ to satisfy the evolutionary complex, and humans will deploy more or less violence depending upon a variety of factors.

This last point leads us to Gat’s second major objective: to explain how changes in human civilization have transformed warfare throughout recorded history even though the essential motivation for violence has not changed. Gat shows how key developments in human cultural evolution, such as agriculture, states, and industrial production, transformed the ways those societies fought. For example, he shows how the development of gunpowder, ocean navigation, and the printing press in the 15th century triggered a tangle of interconnected developments that heralded the start of modernity: centralized state authority, infantry centered armies, urbanism, the “commercial-financial revolution,” and nationalism (480).

Gat maintains that throughout the cultural evolution of warfare violence has remained instrumental to human goals rather than an end in itself. He posits that human beings will be more or less violent based on the utility of violence in achieving basic evolutionary goals in different civilizational conditions. In this vein, he concludes that the frequency and relative lethality of wars has declined in the past few centuries not just because of democratization and shifting values, but because the incentives for using war have lessened under modern civilizational conditions. These conditions include nuclear weapons, global trade, and reduced tie between force and wealth procurement in the industrialized world.

Gat’s book is highly successful in addressing the questions of why humans fight wars and how war has evolved. One of his greatest strengths is his ability to break down false dichotomies that have obscured debates about the motivations behind human violence. The most important of these is the debate between social constructionist and biological frameworks. Gat shows that social constructs over which people may fight are derivative of and subordinate to the central objectives of the evolutionary complex. Humans pursue wealth or political power, for instance, ultimately because they consciously or unconsciously want to secure access to food and reproduction. Achieving wealth or power are means to those ends. Political authority, ideologies, and wealth may be constructed differently in different societies with deeply important consequences for scholars, but these constructs rest on a “deep core of innate human propensities and predispositions, which represent evolution-shaped basic needs” (422). Future debates on the riddles of war will be far more productive if they follow Gat’s lead in synthesizing “nature and nurture” rather than putting them in a false rivalry.

Jani-Petri says

Very clear, well written, and thoughtful book on the use of violence through out human history.

Victoria Ferauge says

Brilliant book. Clear arguments supporting all his points that are comprehensible (even enjoyable) to the general reader. Not entirely convinced of the kin/culture tie but it certainly gave me a lot to think about.
