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Hans Joas and Wolfgang Knöbl, *War in Social Thought: Hobbes to the Present*. Trans. Alex Skinner. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2013. Pp. ix, 325. ISBN 978-0-691-15084-0.

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Hans Joas and Wolfgang Knöbl (hereafter, J&K), both eminent German sociologists, invite us to reconsider the telos of peace that has defined social theory and the discipline of sociology in the modern era. They argue that war has been an engine of modernization that has gone largely unrecognized in social thought. Joas (Univ. of Chicago and Freiburg Inst. for Advanced Studies) has previously published on war and modernity and has collaborated with Knöbl (Univ. of Göttingen) on a general introduction to social theory.¹ *War in Social Thought* first appeared in Germany in 2008 under the more argumentative title *Kriegsverdrängung: Ein Problem in der Geschichte der Sozialtheorie* (War suppression: a problem in the history of social theory). The authors intend to demonstrate that social theorists and sociologists since at least the seventeenth century have suppressed the subject of war. Some major figures of western liberalism and the Enlightenment tradition considered war as informative context or background, but only based on optimistic views about inevitable progress toward peace. J&K highlight a dynamic noted by Sigmund Freud: we shut out frightening and threatening experiences. But, whatever caused the suppression of war, they argue that the resulting social theories have led to flawed assumptions about modernity and a mythology of peace. They warn of the myopia of any master narrative that minimizes the complexities of history and civilization.

J&K recognize that sociologists and political philosophers since World War II have not seen war as a central feature of their time: they are more likely to study the criminal and deviant behavior of individuals than organized violence perpetrated by groups or states. J&K assert that Western liberalism's engrained faith in a better future leaves little room for a dispassionate analysis of war, which has been treated as a relic from a distant past, the realm of aristocrats and despots.² This interpretation, current in both Marxist and liberal theories of the nineteenth century, has prevailed throughout the modern age. Unfortunately, the dominant schools of social thought, by discounting the dark side of modernity, obscure the true character of the nation-state. J&K, believing that war has been a—maybe *the*—engine of political, social, and cultural modernization, warn of the dangers of an incomplete representation of past and present.

Why start with Thomas Hobbes? J&K observe that historians of social thought tend to move rapidly from Thucydides to the nineteenth century, treating early modern thinkers as “immature precursors” (10). This misses what the authors consider the birth of modern realist and neo-institutional thought about international relations and the interconnections of commerce, the rule of law, republicanism, and peace. However, in selecting Hobbes as the starting point, they espouse the questionable view that he broke radically with prevailing natural law theory; hence, they slight the question of why a teleology of peace emerged in the first place.

After their initial historical discussion, J&K postulate that four “highly disparate theoretical standpoints” had crystallized by 1800 (63): realist power politics, as expressed by Hobbes; utilitarian liberalism, anticipated by Montesquieu and then developed by Jeremy Bentham; republican universalism, inchoate in Jean-Jacques Rousseau and explicit in Immanuel Kant; peace and stability based on virtue, essential to Scottish Enlighten-

1. Hans Joas, *War and Modernity: Studies in the History of Violence in the Twentieth Century*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Polity, 2003); Hans Joas and Wolfgang Knöbl, *Social Theory: Twenty Introductory Lectures*, trans. Alex Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge U Pr, 2009). Among Knöbl's previous works see especially *Polizei und Herrschaft im Modernisierungsprozess: Staatsbildung und innere Sicherheit in Preussen, England und Amerika 1700–1914* (NY: Campus, 1998).

2. See, e.g., John Mueller, *Retreat from Doomsday: The Obsolescence of Major War* (NY: Basic Books, 1989).

ment philosophers. Within this framework, they reveal how liberal and progressive optimism and faith in commerce and social progress yielded simplistic theories of peace and modernization in the West.

J&K perceptively evaluate both the dominant narrative and dissenting voices. After a detailed introduction, chapters 2–4 sketch the history of social thought from the seventeenth century to World War I, stressing Hobbes’s proto-realist ideas, Montesquieu’s faith in institutions, and Kant’s belief in republicanism and the rule of law. There follows an analysis of the progressive optimism of the long nineteenth century, specifically the utilitarian thought of Bentham, William James, and John Stuart Mill (emphasis on peace through free trade), as well as the birth of sociology as a discipline in the works of Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer, who distinguished pre-modern belligerence from modern, industrial, and peaceful societies. J&K further consider the link between Marxism and the dominant liberal narrative, but also acknowledge the more bellicose undertones in the works of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and William Graham Sumner. The suppression of war in social thought was far from absolute, leaving a critical question unanswered—why did scholarly, political, and general audiences find the liberal, progressive, optimistic schools of thought so persuasive?

Chapter 4 concerns the impact of the First World War, that brief interlude when war had, perforce, to bulk large in social thought. Principals in sociological debates ranged from Max Weber, Werner Sombart, and Otto Hintze in Germany to Emile Durkheim in France and Thorstein Veblen in the United States; influential as well was the economics driven thought of V.I. Lenin and the Austrian-American political scientist Joseph Schumpeter. By 1916–17, most sociologists had veered from strong nationalism toward a more leftist interpretation of the war, but the moment proved fleeting and the suppression of war in social thought persisted throughout the twentieth century. A notable exception was Emil Lederer, a Bohemian-born German economist who fled to New York and helped form the New School for Social Research after the Nazi seizure of power. Lederer’s conclusions about the need to protect the individual’s rights from an intrusive warfare state gained little traction during the interwar period—he serves as an emblem of the suppressed thinker.

The remaining three chapters consider contemporary history and sociological disputes. Though World War I should have put war and violence at the heart of social thought, faith in progress and peace quickly reasserted itself after 1918. Indeed, J&K conclude that twentieth- and twenty-first-century arguments about the path to peace and the obsolescence of war are little more than updated versions of older philosophical points. Again, there were exceptions: the German philosopher and political theorist Carl Schmitt figures prominently in the book, and Roger Caillois in France and the German émigré scholar Hans Speier in the United States also receive their due. During the Cold War, most sociologists were critical of power and the state: for example, the American sociologist C. Wright Mills decried the power of the military-industrial complex even before President Dwight Eisenhower’s famous farewell address, and social scientist Charles Tilly placed war at the center of state formation. Philosopher Raymond Aron in France, realizing that it would be impossible to rid the world of nuclear weapons, became a proponent of mutual deterrence. But modernization theory seemed to promise the best path toward peace, prosperity, and democratization. However, this proved to be illusory, and social theories and debates since the Cold War—over democratic peace theory, failed states, and the American empire—have remained reductionist and bound to lead to dead ends.

The book’s presentist agenda rests on the rejection of facile discussions of war, peace, and the nation-state. J&K maintain that no single explanation can clarify the intricacies of twenty-first-century international relations or the difficulties of promoting the growth and progress of states. They even doubt the value of taking the nation-state as a basic unit of analysis in an age when non-state actors and groups have eroded the state’s monopoly of violence. Rather than weigh single-cause explanations against each other, they endorse the German scholar Dieter Senghaas’s six essential conditions for peace within states. His “civilizational hexagon” includes “the establishment of a true monopoly of violence, the development of the rule of law, the binding together of citizens ..., the efficacy of democratic principles, the presence of social justice, and finally the existence of a constructive political culture of conflict resolution” (253). As for international relations, “individual states must be protected from violence in order to minimize the Hobbesian security

dilemma that is always present within the system of states. Second, freedom within states must be protected, despite the difficulty of reconciling this with the principle of nonintervention on the international level. Third, people must be protected from poverty and hunger and, fourth, from chauvinism and nationalism—in other words, cultural diversity must be protected” (254). These ten stipulations derive from discussions of war in social thought dating back to Hobbes himself. But Senghaas is less sanguine than his predecessors, conceding that peace may lie at the end of a rocky road or elude our grasp altogether.

It is not possible in such a crisp and concise volume to consider fully both the history of social thought and its general historical context. But a more interdisciplinary approach, taking fuller advantage of military history and studies of modernity could have added depth and nuance to the argument. For instance, in assessing Speier’s investigation of militarism in the 1930s, J&K only briefly mention the work of his influential contemporary Alfred Vagts,³ a distinct weak spot in their framing of the boundaries of social thought. Historians, especially military historians, get short shrift even when their work is directly relevant.⁴ In general, however, J&K draw on an impressive array of secondary scholarship as well as the seminal works of social and political philosophers. Even such forgotten writers as Benjamin Constant, who helped form the thought of Auguste Comte, are not neglected. Nor do the authors resort to oversimplified, shorthand analyses. Their discussion of Herbert Spencer is typical:

It is quite difficult to determine Spencer’s social theoretical position within the debate on war and peace because his later interpreters tended to immediately drag his evolutionary theory into the vehement disputes over Darwinism, Lamarckism, and Social Darwinism. Not only that, but his views changed markedly during his lengthy period of creativity.... A fair characterization of Spencer would be to call him a *moderate* evolutionist.... At many points of his work, Spencer argues as if, at each developmental stage, societies can move more toward a bellicose or industrial type—dependent on contingent circumstances. (90–92; emphasis original)

J&K suggest that Spencer, a Social Darwinist who distinguished sharply between militarized and industrial societies, was later misinterpreted in order to align his ideas with the dominant narrative.

War in Social Thought issues a provocative warning to those who engage in theoretical and political debates without taking account of the history of ideas. Indeed, Hans Joas and Wolfgang Knöbl demonstrate that seemingly new structural ideas about war and peace in fact have antecedents in the past and are discredited by the bloody history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Just as Cold War-era modernization theory evinced a naïve faith in democratization and economic growth, so too, current theories of democratic peace (deeply rooted in Kant’s thought), failed states, conflict arising from societal instability, and a universal American empire all miss the mark. Faith in progress alone cannot nourish realistic hopes for peace.

3. *A History of Militarism: Romance and Realities of a Profession* (1937; rev. ed. NY: Meridian, 1959).

4. E.g., Michael Howard, *The Invention of Peace: Reflections on War and International Order* (New Haven: Yale U Pr, 2001), and Azar Gat, *War in Human Civilization* (NY: Oxford U Pr, 2006).