Total War and Historical Change
Europe 1914–1955

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What do we mean by social change? Some historians conceive the answer in quite broad terms, in terms, indeed, of shifting patterns of dominance, of changing structures of power, of groups and classes overthrowing or replacing or reaching accommodations with each other, of, perhaps, a bourgeois class replacing a landed class and then, say, of the bourgeois class skilfully fending off the claims of a ‘rising’ working class. The Introduction to the Open University course ‘Total War and Social Change: Europe 1914–1955’, in conjunction with which this Reader has been designed, suggests a different approach which, rather than dealing with broad shifts in power relationships, tries to get at the detail of social change by defining ten overlapping areas: social geography (including basic population statistics, distribution of urban and rural populations, etc.); economic and technological change; social structure (including questions of ‘class’ etc.); national cohesion (questions of ethnic composition, etc.); social reform and welfare policies; material conditions; customs and behaviour; the role and status of women; high and popular culture; institutions and values.¹

What do we mean by total war? How is total war distinguished from other kinds of war? It is common practice to refer to both ‘the Great War’ of 1914–18 and the ‘Second World War’ of 1939–45 as total wars, and to see the former as the first total war in history. Questions then arise about how true the second generalization is, and about how far there were critical differences between these two wars. What is the relationship, if any, between the Great War and the revolutions which broke out in various countries towards the end of it? Between that war and the rise of Fascism and of Nazism? What are the differences, and what are the links, between total war, other international wars, revolutions, civil war and ‘internal war’ and genocide?

How do wars come about? As total wars, did the two major wars of the twentieth century have essentially similar origins? Were they perhaps just
two instalments of one massive conflict? Or were the assumptions and conditions obtaining in 1914 very different from those of 1939? Can we make a distinction between long-term 'structural', 'ideological' and 'institutional' forces making for war, and more immediate political and military decisions? What are the possibilities, if any, of a negotiated peace during the course of a total war?

In the popular mind, the two world wars loom large: to many in the 1920s, the world of 1914 and before seemed very remote; people in the 1940s, too, had the feeling of having lived through cataclysmic change. What exactly is the relationship, if any, between these wars and social change? To give a rigorous answer it is not good enough simply to list changes that took place during or after the wars. It is first of all vital to identify the other forces which, entirely independently of war, were making for social change. And, if we are to get an accurate assessment of the effects of war, we have to be absolutely clear what the various European countries were like in 1914, and again in 1939, before each war. Whether the wars did have significant consequences within any, or all, of the ten areas of social change already identified, and, if so, how much, is a matter for careful exploration. So too is the question, if the wars did have social consequences, why exactly was this so? Can it be possible that wars (which, after all, are in their very nature immensely destructive and negative) touch off processes which do actually bring about social change? Social change apart, obviously the wars have had important geopolitical consequences: the First World War, for example, greatly reduced the power of Russia in Europe; the Second World War greatly increased it. All over Europe, at the end of each war, boundaries were redrawn.

In effect, these opening paragraphs have identified four themes (each containing further sub-themes): the nature of social change and the form it takes in different countries; the nature of total war, other kinds of war, war's relationship to revolution, civil war and genocide; the causes of war; the consequences of war. In this Introduction we shall be attempting to indicate the ways in which each of the essays which follow contributes to one or more of these themes. But there is something else. Right at the start it was suggested that there are two rather different ways of looking at the question of social change. Now, it is the case that historians often do bring different approaches to bear on the sorts of issue with which this book is concerned. One hallowed way (it goes back to the late nineteenth century) of defining the way approaches differ is to say that some historians adopt a nomothetic approach (one which, rather in the manner of the natural sciences, seeks to advance and refine theory and tends to make use of broad explanatory categories), while others prefer the idiographic approach (one which stresses the uniqueness of historical events and developments and tends to stress precise detail). The division is not a hard-and-fast one; most historians recognize that their subject does differ significantly from any of the natural sciences, while, at the same time, most of those who avoid general theories do recognize the need for generalization and the exploration of structural interrelationships: many historians, it could be said, incorporate elements from both approaches.
Thus, a simpler and less rigid way of identifying differences of approach might be to speak, on the one hand, of historians who are 'more-theoretical', and, on the other, of historians who are 'less-theoretical'. Still another way would be to distinguish between historians who are strongly influenced by the ideas of Karl Marx, or the ideas of Max Weber, or perhaps by elements from both, and historians who, while probably recognizing the important intellectual contributions made by both Marx and Weber, do not give any special weighting to their theories about social change or structures of power, preferring to follow where their primary sources lead them. (Thus this latter approach might also be described as 'source-based', save that most Marxist historians would claim, very reasonably, that they too place great emphasis on the primary sources; as a further alternative to 'less-theoretical' or 'source-based', there is the label 'liberal humanist', usually used by critics of this approach.) This elaborate discussion has been necessary because although differences of approach are widely recognized to exist, there is no agreement on how they are best defined, nomothetic and idiographic being at best very crude labels. Yet it can be absolutely crucial to know what kind of approach a particular historian is following, since the approach may very well determine the assumptions attaching to such terms as 'class conflict' or 'corporatism', or, for example, influence what conclusions are presented about the significance, or otherwise, of war. A historian who gives greatest weight to long-term structural change may well play down such short-term influences as those brought about by a particular war. However one defines the differences, there can be no denying that the distinguished authors of the essays that make up this book do differ in their approaches to historical study. 'Know your historian' is always good advice to any student of history. Thus for the purposes of this Introduction we have a fifth theme, the 'historiographical' one, the question of the different approaches followed by the different authors. In following up this theme, we hope to bring out particular points of originality or utility in the essays which might otherwise be missed, and, as relevant, to indicate where issue may be taken with their authors. It is also very important that you note carefully the original date of publication of each chapter (for example when Charles Maier, writing in 1975, refers to 'the last quarter century's stability', first check whether it would be more appropriate now to say 'the last half century's stability').

The first essay in this volume, 'Total War', is by a military historian. However, Ian Beckett's concerns are not those of the traditional military historian; battles, campaigns and generalship are replaced here by a broad introduction to current debates among historians about the nature of 'total war' and its effect on social change. This puts the focus of the essay directly on the second and the fourth of our themes. Beckett begins by charting the way in which the study of war had changed over the previous thirty years; before the 1960s war was generally conceived as having a negative or retarding impact on social development. It might be noted as illustrative of this point how many history courses, and how many history books, used peace treaties as their opening paragraphs and wars as their full stops. But increasingly from
the 1960s, war, in Beckett’s words, has been perceived ‘as a determinant of major social change’. It is flattering to see the prominence given to the History Department of the Open University here, and particularly to one of the editors of this book, but perhaps we should not be too bashful and seek to hide our lights under a bushel.2 Of course there is a difference between accepting that war can produce major social change and agreeing with each and every analysis of the kind of social change brought about by war; controversy and debate are central to the practice of history. Having described the way in which historical thinking has focused on war, Beckett goes on, in the meat of his essay, to discuss some of the new areas of research and some of the current controversies. He suggests that, while the scale and impact of twentieth-century total wars are new, yet these wars are, in many respects, a natural progression from earlier conflicts. What is central to the new studies of war and society is the insistence that war, however appalling, cannot be considered purely in terms of disaster. Beckett notes some of the research which indicates that, in some places, war led to increased living standards and decreases in infant and maternal mortality. The demands of twentieth-century wartime economies have produced changes within the labour forces of the combatant states: often more women have been employed; trade unions have increased their bargaining powers; but, at the same time, skilled labour has found itself diluted. All of these are issues which are touched on again in some of the essays that follow in this volume. Finally, Beckett provides a word of warning about some of the shibboleths which have emerged from the two world wars: the ‘war generation’ and the ‘people’s war’ are both evocative terms utilized by politicians and adopted, at times rather uncritically, by historians, but what do they really mean when analysed?

The second reading in the volume is extracted from Professor Arno Mayer’s challenging monograph The Persistence of the Old Regime, a work conceived as ‘a Marxist history from the top down . . . with the focus on the upper rather than the lower classes’.3 The extracts included here touch on almost all of our themes, but primarily we have included them for the way that they address the nature of social change in Europe before the First World War, and thus lay the bases for an assessment of the effects of the war. Mayer believes that the two world wars of 1914–18 and 1939–45 are best understood as ‘The Thirty Years’ War of the general crisis of the twentieth century’ (p. 42); it was only as a result of these wars that the old order reconstituted itself in 1918. This is asserted rather than discussed in relation to the evidence, and a later chapter in this collection offers a very different interpretation. Central to the argument of this book is Mayer’s insistence that historians have concentrated too much on the modernizing elements within European society before 1914 and have consistently ignored the strength of the pre-industrial, pre-bourgeois order which constitutes his ‘old regime’. While considerable historical research has concentrated on tracing industrialization in nineteenth-century Europe and on charting the growth of an industrial and financial bourgeoisie, Mayer points out that the European economies of 1914 were grounded in petty commerce, consumer manufacture and, above all, in labour-intensive
agriculture. Moreover it was landownership which provided most of the wealth, and landowners, drawn predominantly from old-regime families, who dominated society and the organs of government. Far from challenging the cohesive and self-confident old regimes, the rising bourgeoisies were divided among themselves and the most successful individuals among them generally sought to emulate their social superiors or to worm their way into their ranks. Of course there were national differences: France had abolished her monarchy; and Britain was exceptional in not having the largest proportion of her labour force engaged in the agricultural sector of the economy. There were also regional differences, with varieties of constitutional monarchy in Britain and Italy contrasting with the rigid, absolutist monarchies of eastern and central Europe. Yet the underlying structures, Mayer insists, were the same; even in the realms of art, the avant-garde and various modernist movements 'were effectively bridled and isolated' by the cultural establishments which both leaned on and propped up the old regime.

Mayer's work falls within the nomothetic approach which we outlined above, and he believes that 'no comprehensive historical vision is possible without recourse to organizing generalizations and principles'. The inclusion of these extracts thus relates as much to the fifth as to the first of our themes, while the concluding pages address directly the causes of war – our third theme. It is a pity that Mayer chose to eschew footnotes and references in the book, yet to employ so many apparent quotations; nevertheless, he writes with considerable rhetorical power and he deploys formidable knowledge in describing both Europe on the eve of the First World War and the forces operating within it both for and against social change. Yet even the most brilliant works of history, however good at setting a scene and persuasive in argument, need to be approached with caution. The view that Mayer puts forward about the persistence of the old regime has already been proposed by others, though generally within the context of a single national experience and without his authoritative and comparative sweep of the whole continent including Britain – and as a Scot and an Englishman we feel duty bound to criticize his use of 'England' in place of 'Britain'. The principal problem with the book is that, writing a 'Marxist history', Mayer understands classes as essentially factors of production, and while this is a perfectly respectable stance both within, and outside of, a Marxian tradition, it leads him to persist in describing aristocracy and bourgeoisie as inherently separate classes, even when discussing the interpenetration between them, as for example on p. 44 and especially on p. 45. It also leads him, from time to time, to address what the European bourgeoisies ought to have done in fulfilling some predestined historical role, and, at one point he writes of their impairing 'their own class formation and class consciousness', and again on p. 46 where he implies that the leaders of the class should have done something other than line up with the nobility. Similarly, towards the end of the extracts, he seems to be addressing culture as something linked directly to class, a view which is challenged in the third chapter here.

The third essay, 'The Birth of the Modern: 1885–1914' by G. D. Josipovici,
may seem an eccentric choice in at least two respects. First, with regard to
the period covered: while, as the title makes clear, the essay delves far back
into the nineteenth century, it terminates in 1914 and thus does not even
touch upon either of the two world wars. Second, since it is exclusively con-
cerned with trends in high art (in particular, poetry, music and painting), it
may seem very remote from the central concerns of the student of history.
There is possibly a third oddity in that the essay is reprinted from a collection
entitled French Literature and its Background. Let us take these three points
in reverse order. First of all, although Josipovici was providing background for
a book on French literature, in fact he covers the whole of Europe. The arts
are international: even if one were to be so parochial as to wish to study only
British high culture, one would still have to discuss the Europe-wide antecedents of modernism. This is exactly what Josipovici does. On the
second point, the riposte is simple: if we are to have a full understanding of
the development of Europe in the twentieth century, we must have a grasp of
the main lines of cultural change. There are various ways in which one evalu-
ates a society, or a continent: by its political institutions, by its economic
achievements, for instance; but not least is the evaluation of its products in
the realms of high art. If we are to assess the significance of the two world
wars, we must make an assessment of their effects on culture. This takes us
back to the first point. If we are to assess the influences of war, we must, as
has already been said, have a clear understanding of the base-line. In the text-
books you will find all kinds of sweeping statements about war poets, war
novelists, Nielsen’s ‘Inextinguishable’ Symphony, Elgar’s Cello Concerto,
Britten’s ‘War Requiem’, German Expressionism as it developed immediately
after the First World War, and so on; but we cannot pin down the influences
of war (if any) until we know how the arts were developing in the period
before the war. In a nutshell, modernism, the key movement in the arts in the
twentieth century, was not initiated by the First World War. This, with rigour
and clarity, is explained by Josipovici. That is why his contribution is so
important to the study of war, peace and social change. It is, let this be ad-
mitted frankly, only a preliminary to the studies with which we are con-
cerned: but angels get the preliminaries sorted out first, while fools rush in
regardless.

The central sentence with regard to our concerns (in this case, the fourth
theme, the consequences of war) occurs on the second page of Josipovici’s
chapter (p. 57):


Although the First World War effectively marks the break between the
world of the nineteenth century and our own – both in the minds of
those who lived through it and of those of us who read about it in the
history books – the modern revolution in the arts did not take place
during the war or immediately after it, but a decade or so before it.

But that is not the end of it. Historical writing should be a dialogue between
reader and historian. Josipovici makes his case most efficiently. Unlike many
writers, he sets up a clear question (in his second sentence, devoting the rest of the essay to answering it):

What are the specific features of the [modern] movement, and how are we to account for its emergence?

We as readers may well feel bound to accept Josipovici’s account, but while it would be difficult to argue that the modern movement in the arts was created by the First World War, that does not mean that, within the framework set by modernism, it is not possible to tease out specific developments affected by the war. To do this, of course, we would have to turn both to primary sources (artistic works and contextual documents relating to them) and to secondary authorities dealing with the effects of the war. Many such secondary authorities have indeed suggested that the First World War was so catastrophic, so disillusioning for humanitarian liberals believing in the inevitability of human progress, that it had a ‘scorching’ effect on intellectuals and artists; the American literary critic Paul Fussel has stressed how the tragic irony of the First World War entered into literary consciousness. All this needs further study far beyond the scope of this collection; but – and this is the point – any such study needs to be conceived within an analysis of modernism such as that provided by Josipovici.

Josipovici’s analysis, readers will surely not be surprised to learn, is far from uncontroversial. Josipovici does not fall into the nomothetic, more theoretical, or, to look the matter in the eye, the Marxist tradition. What he does do is exemplify certain methodological points which readers, whatever tradition they favour, should grasp to their bosoms. Ponder over Josipovici’s second paragraph: he fully admits that there is no specific thing called ‘modernity’, yet through setting up a ‘frame of reference’ it is possible to identify something important which quite appropriately can be called ‘modernism’, even if it is something as much reacted against as accepted (third paragraph), even if individual exponents of modernism loathed, or ignored, or never knew, each other (p. 63). When Josipovici speaks of being wary ‘of too facile an identification of art with the culture and society out of which it springs’, the implicit criticism is of certain Marxist writers: he emphasizes the unchanging forms of art – very important again if we are to make a genuine assessment of the influences of war on the arts.

The importance of Chapter 3 in this collection, then, is that it provides a basic understanding of the nature of modernism in the arts against which one can assess the influences of the two world wars, and also that it offers some general reflections on the relationship between the arts and society, helpful also for this particular endeavour. It is in the context of these two points that, first, some comments on Josipovici’s text will be made; the discussion will be concluded with some further general points on the relationship between total war and the arts. Essentially what Josipovici is arguing is that modernism is both a development of Romanticism, and a reaction against certain aspects of latter-day, or decadent, Romanticism. Thus, of course, he has to say quite a deal about Romanticism, and particularly its later forms. To develop
his arguments about late Romanticism he, very properly, quotes in the original French from some key primary sources: you may not find the translations we have inserted particularly clear, but, read on – the confused expression of these utterances is exactly the point Josipovici is about to make. As a reaction against Romanticism (p. 64), and indeed a reaction against four centuries of western artistic tradition (p. 65) modernism stresses the limitations of the arts. In summary:

1. Art is simply itself, not a key to the universe – brush-strokes on a canvas, notes played in certain combinations, etc. (p. 63).
2. Art is 'a pair of spectacles' helping us to see things in a different way from the lazy, unthinking, habitual way in which we see them – it 'makes the spectator work' (p. 65).
3. Art no longer claims to be 'magical', but simply represents itself as a 'game' with its own rules (p. 66).
4. While art is recognized as being supremely important, it is recognized that it is helpless to change the world – this is all part of a 'modest' retreat from the exaggerated claims for art made by the Romantics (p. 68).

Furthermore:

5. Modern art breaks with a long tradition in which art had simply attempted imitation (or, to use a posh word, mimesis – a most important point taken up by Paul Fussel in his study of literature and the First World War). Thus there tends to be a break with the anecdotal tradition.

Some of the later Romantics believed that music somehow had a freedom which language did not have. Josipovici makes a valuable point on p. 61 when he remarks that 'music is nearly as conventional as speech': when discussing the relationship between society, wars, revolutions, etc. and the arts, it is always important to consider the particular 'languages' of the different arts. Josipovici brings out the long-term significance of modernism (which extends far beyond the chronological framework of our own studies) when he says it is 'first and foremost a rethinking of the whole field of aesthetics as it had been seen in the West since the time of Plato and Aristotle' (p. 69). If that seems a little removed from the concerns of the student of history, consider what Josipovici says on p. 62 where he speaks of 'the connection between decadent Romanticism and the rise of totalitarianism'. Josipovici is referring to Stalin's Russia, Hitler's Germany, and Mussolini's Italy. He is pointing to another element; certainly it is true that the 'totalitarian' regimes were very hostile to modernism. One cannot refrain from commenting that Josipovici is grossly unfair to Wagner: however it remains a legitimate question whether there is a link between Romantic mysticism, the exploration of ancient folk legends, central to many of the operas of Wagner, and the mystique of Hitler's Nazi philosophy.

On p. 62 there is a highly quotable, though fictional, phrase which captures the essence of the decadent, and rather arrogant Romanticism of some elements in upper-crust society at the end of the nineteenth century – 'as for
living [as distinct from experiencing art], our servants can do that for us'. Could such an attitude persist after the First World War? After the Second World War? On p. 70 Josipovici refers to the pessimism of the twentieth-century artist (however much he may hark back to the wit of the eighteenth century). A major question which Josipovici doesn’t go into is whether, in so far as artists show a sensitivity to horror, violence, and evil, this is a reaction to general developments in the twentieth century, rather than just to war: a question that has to be asked is whether artists respond directly to the evil of war, or whether they simply see war as part of a wider evil characteristic of the twentieth century as a whole. Perhaps the greatest literary parable of German history in the twentieth century is Günther Grass’s *The Tin Drum* (1959). Is the Second World War central, or is it simply a facet of the whole nightmare of twentieth-century German history? If one is to analyse the relationship between war, peace, and social change, that is the sort of issue one must pin down. Although, as noted, the dates appended to Josipovici’s title confine the essay to the period before the First World War, he does in fact refer to later writers: Joyce and Proust, whose great works straddled the First World War, Virginia Woolf, whose main works came in the aftermath of the First World War, Robbe-Grillet, one of the pioneers of the ‘new novel’ of the 1950s and 1960s, Picasso, at work all through the horrors of the twentieth century, and Francis Bacon, whose international successes as a British artist came only after the Second World War. (Can it be, perhaps, that while wars do not affect artistic styles, they may help to make ‘modern’ styles acceptable to a wider audience? Is it true that the Second World War – the ‘people’s war’ – brought a reaction away from modernism towards realism?) Josipovici also refers on his first page to Stravinsky, and on his last to the Russian Ballet: reminders again that modernism in music had hit Paris some years before the First World War broke out. At the end of the essay, Josipovici identifies Paris as a uniquely important cultural centre, different, it would seem, from London, or Berlin, or Vienna, or Rome (a later essay mentions the significance of Leningrad). Occupied Paris in the Second World War was the setting for the very close interpenetration between war and culture represented in the poems of Louis Aragon and the short novel by ‘Vercors’, *Le Silence de la mer* [‘The Silence of the Sea’]. Cultural studies, indeed, keep bringing us back to historical ‘reality’ as more conventionally understood.

The origins and immediate causes of the First World War have long exercised a fascination for historians, both those who relish the detailed scrutiny of diplomatic and military decision-making, and those who, like Arno Mayer, focus on long-term structural trends. German guilt was written into the Treaty of Versailles, and was raised again after the Second World War most notably in the work of the German scholar Fritz Fischer. Fischer’s book, *Griff nach der Weltmacht*, translated into English as *Germany’s Aims in the First World War*, created a storm in Germany, arguing that the Wilhelmine Empire, a new nation with a burgeoning economy, was prepared to risk war in order to establish herself as a world power on a level with much older established powers like Britain and France. In the pursuit of this aim the Kaiser and his advisers
encouraged Austria-Hungary to take a strong line against Serbia, fully conscious that this could lead to war. Indeed, according to Fischer, rather than seeking to alleviate the tensions, the government in Berlin impeded last-minute attempts at mediation. The fourth essay in this collection, by Samuel R. Williamson Jr., adopts a different, broader perspective. Williamson is conscious of the ‘bombastic behaviour’ of much of German foreign policy under Wilhelm II from the closing years of the nineteenth century, and of the German army’s ‘simple, dangerous and exceptionally mechanical’ war plans. But he is far more liberal in the way that he apportions blame. Williamson chronicles a succession of incidents and diplomatic decisions throughout the July crisis of 1914 stressing how, at almost any moment, a different decision or another response might have brought a different outcome. The system of alliances which, like German bombast, has been credited with increasing anxieties and tensions in the decade before the war, restricted the decisions that governments could take. Yet the alliances could show themselves to be feeble, and the crisis of 1914 was not especially different from those that had preceded it, except in its outcome. A final point emerges almost tangentially from Williamson’s account: the outbreak of war in 1914 has tended to overshadow subsequent perceptions of that summer, yet there were issues other than the assassination of a Habsburg Archduke which seemed closer to home and which created anxiety or excited fascination – the British, for example, looked anxiously towards trouble brewing in Ireland, while the French were preoccupied with the scandal surrounding Madame Caillaux’s trial for murder.

Chapter 5, ‘Italian Peasant Women and the First World War’ by Anna Bravo, fits firmly into our fourth theme, the consequences of war. Indeed, the argument over whether or not twentieth-century wars have, or have not, resulted in improvements in the conditions and status of women is one of the most intense in the whole area of war and society studies. With regard to our fifth, historiographical, theme, Bravo’s essay is also important as an example of the feminist influence on historical writing (in her very first paragraph she announces a general theme, ‘the relationship between women’s conditions and external historical moments – between women’s history and “great” history’) and, also very important, as an example of a very effective use of ‘oral history’. If you turn to the notes, you will see that apart from the very few references to secondary sources, this essay is entirely based on the oral accounts of women interviewed by the author and her collaborator; the account given in note 1 should be read carefully. At first sight it seems almost astonishing that this method could be employed for events as remote as the First World War and, of course, from the dates of birth given in the notes we can see that the women interviewed were very old. It is a fact encountered in research of this type that elderly women tend to be much more coherent in recounting their memories than men of similar age. Certainly the quotations cited in the text seem very clear and offer convincing testimony to the value of the oral approach. The fundamental consideration is that for this particular sort of topic – dealing with the poor, who leave few written sources – very little other evidence exists.
In general (though, of course, the complete picture is more complex and nuanced than that) feminist writers have tended to contest the thesis that wars bring opportunities and gains for women: overall, understandably enough, feminist writers have been concerned to stress the continuing subjugation of women, to argue that the main trend in wartime was the further exploitation of women in the interest of the war effort, that hard manual work for women was nothing new, and that even if there were some changes during the war, these were always short-lived. Where women have made gains, these are usually attributed by feminists to the activities of politically conscious women's movements (the suffragettes, for instance) or to longer-term economic and technological changes which were in any case drawing women into new forms of employment. As is often the case with carefully argued and well-documented pieces of historical writing, Anna Bravo's essay does not point conclusively in one direction or the other. She speaks boldly in the opening paragraphs of 'the transformation of women's social conditions in the countryside during the First World War' and of the war appearing 'as a moment of primary importance', and she certainly demonstrates conclusively that women did take on new tasks and new responsibilities. With regard to long-term effects she seems to be indicating that while many changes were temporary, some were permanent, while there were perhaps also losses. Bravo speaks of a growth in 'self-realization' and here fixes on a point which other writers, both feminist and non-feminist, have agreed to be important, the change in 'mentalities', the way in which women gained in self-confidence because of their war experience. The answer Bravo seems to be giving is that outside of their community, in dealing with state officials in particular, the role of women did expand permanently, but that within the community they were 'forced back into traditional peasant silence'. Read the article very carefully, try to let the evidence of the women themselves speak directly to you, and decide which side of this equation presented by Bravo carries the greater weight. You will need, of course, to set this study within the wider context where, for instance, Italian women, unlike those in many other European countries, did not gain the vote at the end of the war. You might wish to ask how far the forces of traditional Catholicism served in Italy to hold back progress which women elsewhere were beginning to make.

Chapter 6, 'Demobilization and Labour' from Germany After the First World War, unlike Chapters 3, 4 and 5, is not a self-standing, self-contained essay, but like Chapter 2 has been extracted from a substantial book, Richard Bessel's celebrated study, based on massive original research, Germany After the First World War, published in 1993. We have printed about half of his Chapter 5, 'Demobilization and Labour'. The main focus of the chapter is on the relatively successful way in which demobilization, in all the circumstances, was carried out. Clearly we are here concerned with the fourth theme, the consequences of war; and, much more indirectly, the second theme, the relationship of war to revolution and, within that, the nature of the revolution as it actually took place in Germany. The overall conclusion is that the consequences of the war were very severe for the German people, the
negative effects far outweighing any positive ones. Bessel brings out very well that for both male workers, and some female ones, there were some direct positive effects of the war; but then when we take into account the great hyper-inflation and industrial depression and unemployment (which we have to account as, at the very least, indirect consequences of the war) these gains were swept away. Bessel sets out for you very clearly seven reasons for the relative success of demobilization, and these points, which you should note very carefully, form a kind of framework for much of the rest of the chapter.

We are going to pick out points made with regard to labour organization and conditions and then, in turn, look at social policy in regard to unemployment, changes in attitudes and values, the position of women, the position of white-collar workers, and then, finally, the general question of wages.

Trade union membership declined during the First World War, but then had reached double its pre-war level by the end of March 1919. Bessel twice mentions the crucial agreement concluded in November 1918 between Hugo Stinnes, leader of the employers, and Carl Legine, a Social Democrat deputy in the Reichstag and chairman of the General Commission of Trade Unions, which recognized the unions as collective bargaining partners. It also, we learn later, established the eight-hour working day, 'the most significant achievement of the labour movement in 1918', according to Bessel. The union bureaucracy greatly expanded and (more important) trade union leaders became active participants in various kinds of tribunals and in local and regional legislatures. Bessel explains the motivations of the employers as basically to curry favour with the government and to strengthen moderate labour leaders against the threat of revolution.

The government both instituted unemployment relief (to the cost of which the central government contributed one half, the state governments one third and the local councils one sixth) and directly intervened in relations between employers and employees to protect men's jobs. Bessel says of Employment Relief that, despite its later collapse under the heavy pressure of depression, 'it marked a major turning point'. Of government intervention to maintain employment he says: 'This marked a major new incursion of the state into the workings of the labour market'. With regard to changed attitudes and values, Bessel speaks of a 'relaxation of the old authoritarian system and the patterns of discipline and deference which it had sustained'. With regard to women workers the situation fluctuated greatly. Both at the end of the war, and later, there was great pressure for women in employment to give way to men. But in the period of full employment during 1920–21 there were jobs for women (as for young people and, above all, skilled workers). Bessel makes an important point, which echoes what happened in other countries, where women who had escaped from domestic service during the war were very reluctant to return to it: 'the wartime experience . . . had changed the ideas of many women about the sorts of work they were willing to accept'. While at least some opportunities had opened up for women, we learn that generally prospects for white-collar workers were not good in the years after the war. Finally, in looking at one of the best indicators of losses and gains, real wages,
it is salutary to note that even in the boom of 1919–20 wages rose to only within 10 per cent of pre-war levels (this contrasts very sharply with the British experience). Nonetheless the combination of the need for labour, and the fear of revolution, did work in favour of the workers, and Bessel borrows from the famous US expert Gerald Feldman the phrase ‘bribery through wage concessions’. In the end, though, we have to keep uppermost in our minds the concluding words from the extracts of the chapter which we have printed. By the end of March 1924, ‘the labour market was in retreat, real wages were substantially below pre-war levels, and unemployment was at dizzying heights’.

Like Arno Mayer, Professor Charles Maier (Chapter 7) believes that the social hierarchies of twentieth-century Europe have proved to be remarkably tenacious. But Maier is concerned with a ‘twentieth-century capitalist order’ which is very different from the old order based on landholding discussed by Mayer. Maier defines the conservatives who wrested security from disorder in the aftermath of the First World War as ‘bourgeois’, and, again in contrast to Mayer, he stresses how, during the nineteenth century, these bourgeois had achieved social rights and a close association with the old elite. European society in 1914 was, according to Maier, essentially bourgeois – and he gives a careful discussion of the relevance and meaning of the word. In the aftermath of the war this bourgeois society was not restored, as some had hoped, but recast in a mould which owed much to the pressures of war. Like Mayer, Maier deploys and advances a broad conceptual framework, but while Arno Mayer claims to be writing a form of Marxist history, Charles Maier’s angle of vision might best be labelled as Weberian. The focus of Maier’s Recasting Bourgeois Europe – a book based on enormous and highly original pioneering work in primary archives published, note carefully, in 1975 – is on France, Germany and Italy; the extracts we print, drawn from the introduction also contain a few references to Britain and the USA. For our purpose, the extracts included here are of particular relevance to the fourth theme, the consequences of war, yet Maier’s discussion also raises issues about the general pattern of social change and broad historical conceptualization, our first and fifth themes. Maier argues that the pressures of war in Europe led to an integration of organized labour into state-supervised bargaining systems and to an erosion of the distinction between the private and the public sectors, a process he describes as corporatism. The idea of corporatism has also been deployed by British historian Keith Middlemas with reference to the development of twentieth-century British society; according to Middlemas, as a result of the First World War ‘what had been merely interest groups [trade unions and employer associations] crossed the political threshold and became part of the extended state’. Maier’s new corporatism, similarly, did not come to an end with the war but continued to develop after it; as a consequence, he argues, during the 1920s, parliaments declined in power and authority and the nature of representative government altered. In the first half of the decade the prime object of Maier’s bourgeois forces was to keep the socialists out of power; at the same time they transformed the principles of class
division, making social consensus more possible. Nazism and Fascism, in Maier’s view, were the responses of extreme radicals of the right to the corporatist collaboration of industry and organized labour; but the forms of these responses differed in Germany and Italy as a result of their different social and economic structures. France escaped a similar fate partly because she had a less developed corporate structure and thus experienced a less serious challenge from the radical right.

Again, as with Arno Mayer’s book, we are confronted by a text written with tremendous force and erudition, but which contains certain basic assumptions that are not universally accepted. Most notably, the whole of Maier’s analysis is based on a Weberian conception of ‘emerging structures of power’, and he uses the word ‘corporatism’ explicitly in the Weberian style of an ‘ideal type’ against which events in France, Germany and Italy can be assessed, rather than as an actual description. Even though the word has been used by Feldman and Middlemas in similar contexts, this is not the only way to approach interrelationships between the state and interest groups such as trade unions and employers’ associations in the period of the First World War and its aftermath. Moreover, while Maier believes that corporatism was less advanced in France than in Germany and Italy, many historians would challenge the extent of ‘a decay of parliamentary influence’ in post-war France, and even more in post-war Britain. Might not Maier’s ‘relative backwardness in terms of corporate organization’ be another man’s effective pluralism? Might not the more empirical historian replace Maier’s notions of rescuing bourgeois Europe through recasting with the simple recognition that societies had to be reorganized for peace after five years of total war? Going back to 1914 was impossible; the empiricist, searching in vain for monolithic social classes, might argue that pragmatism and the various pressures on different governments and administrations meant simply that some wartime practices were kept and others discarded.

In the eighth essay Norman Rich begins with a devastating attack on A. J. P. Taylor’s The Origins of the Second World War, first published in 1961. This was the same year as Fischer’s Griff nach der Weltmacht, and Taylor’s book created something of a similar furore. Taylor insisted that the war was not brought about by megalomania on Hitler’s part; Hitler was an opportunist politician simply following the traditional line of foreign policy pursued by German statesmen, and in 1939 he miscalculated the response of the British and French to his Polish adventure. The work of Fischer and Taylor suggests a continuity in German expansionist foreign policy within Europe, and they have both been criticized for this. But Taylor’s book was largely a reworking of well-known sources rather than a study based on the kind of detailed archival research undertaken by Fischer, and while Taylor had, in an earlier book, traced a pattern in a united Germany that was dangerous for European peace he did not detail any precise links between Hitler, Bismarck, Kaiser Wilhelm and his advisers in The Origins. Rich is especially critical of Taylor’s description of Hitler as both a typical German politician in his foreign policy and an opportunist. While it is wrong to think that Hitler had a
blueprint and a precise timetable for his actions, and while it is right to emphasize the accidental and improvised nature of the execution of Nazi foreign policy, neither of these mean that Hitler had no policies and no intentions. In the second half of the essay, Rich provides a concise survey of the main interpretations and debates over Hitler's foreign policy, ranging from those who argue over the extent to which this policy was rooted in the German historical experience, to those who debate the role of domestic problems in formulating Nazi policy abroad - the latter has been especially popular with Marxist historians who have seen the causes of war as fundamentally economic even if the economic aspects enter the picture in a mediated form. In conclusion Rich draws on the work of the German historian Eberhard Jäckel, to portray Hitler as a man who had a very precise list of objectives and priorities in foreign affairs; but Rich parts company with Jäckel where the latter implies that Hitler was continuing a long-standing tendency in German history, on the grounds that this effectively denies the significance of both individuals and accidents.

Richard Overy's essay, 'Hitler's War and the German Economy: A Reinterpretation' (Chapter 9), focuses on Nazi preparations for war from an economic perspective; and perhaps it should be stressed at the outset that this is, of course, very different from seeing the fundamental cause of the war as economic. Ian Beckett stresses that control of the economy 'lies at the heart of the concept of total war' and he notes the controversy over when, and the extent to which, the economy of Nazi Germany was organized for war. The essay by Overy is his first reappraisal of the notion of the Blitzkrieg economy developed by economic historians who have suggested that, until 1942, Germany was organized only for Blitzkrieg wars, having built up armaments in breadth rather than in depth. Like most historians challenging an orthodoxy Overy does tend to make his target appear rather less substantial than it was: Alan Milward's original research in this area was both pioneering and persuasive; moreover it should be noted that Mark Roseman's essay later in this volume largely accepts the Blitzkrieg thesis. Overy confronts the thesis with a detailed analysis of German economic life between 1936 and 1942. Along with the other critics of Taylor, Overy considers that Hitler was planning a large-scale war of conquest, and while the Führer may have had only a weak grasp of the facts of economic life, nevertheless both he and his subordinates were contemplating a war which would last a long while and which would require a massive economic effort directed by the state - from the beginning they were thinking in terms of 'total war', and they had a model in the experience of the First World War. Overy shows that Germany was spending enormous sums on armaments before 1941, that the workforce employed on military projects increased from 20 per cent of the total in 1939 to 60 per cent in 1941, and that as early as 1937-8 a large state-owned and state-operated industrial structure was being built up. There were problems in all of this: Goering was incapable of the task of supervising the organization for war, and civilian and military economic leaders disliked having to work under him, and went out of their way to avoid his jurisdiction; much of
the expenditure had to be used for rebuilding the military infrastructure; there was conservatism among both workers and employers militating against necessary changes; and the German military insisted on the highest quality of equipment when something cheaper, quicker and easier to produce would probably have served. But perhaps most significantly, the economic preparations for war were out of step with the events of foreign policy: Hitler was planning his big war for some time in the 1940s; he did not expect that his adventure in Poland would be the cause of war against Britain and France.

War, whether it be ‘limited’ or ‘total’, involves killing people. Indeed, one social historian has recently gone so far as to write a long, well-received book specifically designed to put the killing back into the history of war and to emphasize that, even the soldiers caught up in the slaughter of the Western Front between 1914 and 1918 should not be considered always simply as victims. During the Second World War there was, in the Holocaust, an example of killing on an unprecedented scale with industrial means deployed for genocidal ends and with victims who were not in any way soldiers on the other side. Christopher Browning’s ‘One Day in Jósefów’ (Chapter 10) describes the mass murder of around 1500 Jews – women, children and elderly - by the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 on 13 July 1942. This was not the mechanized or industrial killing of the Auschwitz crematoria, but close range, often very clumsy and messy killing with rifles. How could such ordinary, generally middle-aged men, from one of the least Nazified cities in Germany, cold-bloodedly shoot so many defenceless people? What happened to the men who either refused the ‘duty’, or who became so revolted after the first shots that they were unable to continue? Browning’s chapter is based on the judicial investigations carried out in post-war Germany, some twenty years after the events described. His account and conclusions are chilling, and suggest how men, especially perhaps men in uniform, will yield to human weakness when under orders, and when they feel the need to stand by their comrades and/or conform with their peer group.

The title of Chapter 11, ‘The Effects of World War II on French Society and Politics’ by Stanley Hoffmann, firmly places it in the fourth theme. In fact, since the article both discusses the nature of French society as it had developed by the 1930s, what Hoffmann calls the ‘Republican synthesis’, and looks in detail at developments between 1934 and 1940, it also belongs to our first theme of general social change. All in all, Hoffmann’s piece is a good example of the methodological principle which argues that you cannot properly assess the effects of a war on a particular society without first defining the nature of that society and the processes of change already at work in it, before the war. Many academics, including quite a proportion of those who deny any connection between war and social change, stress the influence of politics: at its simplest, a left-wing government will introduce social change, a conservative one will tend to resist it. Hoffmann’s paper, delivered as long ago as April 1960, was genuinely casting new light on events in France when, instead of making a rigid distinction between the right-wing Vichy regime installed in France by the Germans between 1940 and 1944, and the Liberation regime
which came into power in the final stages of the war, and to which, tra-
titionally, all the major social changes associated with the war were attrib-
uted, Hoffmann suggested some continuity as between the two regimes.
Thus, though this was not his deliberate intention, he was directing attention
away from guided political action, and focusing on war itself as a complex
experience which tends to bring about social change whatever the deliber-
ate intentions of politicians. Hoffmann (an American, like so many of our
authors) was a political scientist as well as a historian much interested in
developments in contemporary French politics, particularly at a time when
the Fifth Republic under De Gaulle had just come into existence (in this
reprint of his paper some of the detailed political material has been omitted).

The paper is not based on detailed historical research, though Hoffmann
was able to draw upon his own considerable expertise as well as on the
mainly secondary sources cited in the footnotes: his paper, as he says at the
beginning, consists of ‘a number of hypotheses’ which ‘need further study and
qualification’. The article, then, presents many generalizations, sometimes in
the form of quite striking metaphors. Yet it does not reflect the sociological
or nomothetic tradition in the way that, say, Maier does: Hoffmann explicitly
disavows attributing a ‘revolutionary tradition’ to the French workers, pre-
ferring what he calls the clumsy but more accurate expression, a ‘tradition of
non-cooperation’. Hoffmann makes few value judgements, and clearly does
not see the advance of the working class as something which ‘ought’ to
happen; he simply records, as he sees them, the consequences, often unin-
tended, of the actions of politicians of different persuasions.

In the first numbered section of the chapter (pp. 177–80) Hoffmann pro-
vides a very useful summary of what he terms the Republican synthesis. The
first paragraph contains a good brief explanation of the nature of class in
France (and one which could well also be applied to Britain at this time).
While one could at times challenge the way in which Hoffmann summarizes
quite complex material, he does give a persuasive view of how France, with
the working class effectively excluded from the mainstream of French life,
was both a contented and a ‘stalemate’ society (the main influence of the First
World War, he suggests, had been to foster complacency). The second section
discusses the ‘destruction of the Republican synthesis’ in the period 1934–40.
Now, almost certainly, Hoffmann makes too rigid a break at 1934; he also
underestimates the amount of economic progress which, recent research has
shown, was being made in France during both the 1920s and the 1930s. It
may be that he exaggerates the forces of change in the 1930s, and thus over-
all underestimates the significance of the Second World War; or it may be that
in underestimating developments throughout the inter-war period he actu-
ally ends up exaggerating the effects of the Second World War. These are
propositions that could be evaluated only in the light of a good deal of further
reading. Here what it is important to concentrate on is the way in which Hoff-
mann brings out how developments under Vichy (which many in the past
had considered purely regressive, and ‘corporatist’ – here is that concept
again, though Hoffmann only once refers to ‘Vichy corporatism’) formed the
basis for social advances under the Liberation. The interconnections are often complex, and it is worth spending time working carefully through Hoffmann’s arguments; one does, it could be maintained, get quite a strong impression of the various accidents and necessities of war being more important than the deliberate decisions of politicians. The general conclusion Hoffmann presents is of a France more dynamic and more united after the Second World War than it had been previously, though he does not really go into much detail. In assessing society at the end of the war, Hoffmann speaks of ‘both major innovations and a few sharp limits’; he spends some time going into these limits, particularly as he sees it, the continuing isolation of the French working class. That an independent French working class has continued to exist has been demonstrated in many social surveys; but arguably Hoffmann, perhaps because he happened to be writing in the aftermath of De Gaulle’s 1959 victory, exaggerates the isolation of the working class and its distance from the rest of French society. Two critical points that really do have to be made about post-war France are the granting, for the first time, of votes for women, and the development of advanced social insurance, medical and other welfare services.

In contrast to the sweeping hypotheses of Hoffmann’s article, Penny Summerfield in Chapter 12, ‘The “Levelling of Class”’, builds up a meticulous analysis from detailed statistical sources. Summerfield’s article, indeed, is a model example of the rigorous and relentless development of historical arguments, carefully considering at each stage the cases which have been put forward in support of there having been changes in the condition of the British working class brought about by the war, then with clarity and thoroughness exposing the weaknesses in these cases. This chapter, then, is firmly related to the fourth theme, the social consequences of war, and, with respect to the particular instance of the position of the working class in Britain, is very strongly arguing against the thesis that war helps to bring about social change. It may be noted that the phrase ‘levelling’ is an unsatisfactory one, often used in a vague way. Summerfield is certainly right that classes were not levelled, which would imply class distinctions being removed altogether (this did not happen anywhere, apart from the countries that fell under Russian Communist influence, and even what happened there is open to some debate). The debate with regard to class in Britain (and indeed in France, Italy and Germany) centres on whether or not, given that the basic framework of the class structure remained the same, there were significant changes in the relationships between classes and attitudes about class. Although Summerfield’s article is basically an empirical study without anything in the way of sociological theorizing, her basic definitions of class are essentially the economic ones derived from Marxism. As with most studies in that tradition, she is concerned solely with the relations between working class and middle class and does not consider the possibility of there being a significant distinction between a middle class on one side, and an upper class on the other. In fact, she finds herself in contention with the view of class which attempts to integrate the perceptions and images of class
which people hold with the realities of differing life-styles and of economic and political inequality, though she dismisses that view somewhat cursorily. Summerfield's article is also distinguished by the great attention she gives to both the earnings of women and the conditions under which they had to support their families during the war: this is a most important dimension which gives a tremendous sense of practical reality to the article, and is entirely in keeping with the fact that Summerfield is one of the pioneering feminist historians in Britain. Overall, it can be said of the article that it is a most effective antidote to those who have romanticized about the war having transformed the British class structure and transformed the position of the working class within it. But it is not by any means the last word on this subject.

Chapter 13 takes us back to our second theme, focusing on the nature of total war - in particular, the devastatingly brutal war launched by Hitler against the Soviet Union; there are also some references to the fourth theme, to the consequences of the war for Russia. The first section details the appalling toll of the war, ending by pointing at the immeasurable significance for the course of the war (and world history) of the eventually successful Soviet resistance. In the second section we learn of the severe impact of rearmament on the civilian economy and living standards, and of the poor quality of both soldiers and their weapons. In the third section we learn of some of the immediate (and largely temporary) transforming effects of the war: informal leadership took over and there were initiatives from below. It is hinted that, under the pressures of war, Stalin eventually learned to act less like a dictator, but in 1941 he remained in brutal control. In the following section we get details of the Soviet Union's 'fantastic' contribution to Allied munitions. Against that was the 'unprecedented expenditure of combat equipment'; then comes one of the key points in the article, vital in assessing the different nature of the different war fronts:

More than the British and the Americans, the Russians were faced with a war of national extermination. They carried on fighting under conditions in which soldiers of other nations might have given ground; and their losses were correspondingly heavy.

Note that, apart from the unrestrained brutality of the Germans towards the Russians, the Luftwaffe used the poor skills of Russian pilots as providing the opportunity for practice for their own inexperienced pilots. Stalin himself, we learn, was completely callous in sending untrained industrial workers to the front to be slaughtered. Equipment was also squandered.

In the fifth section, we are informed of the heavy damage to the economy caused by the acceleration of war production. Decline in industrial production and, in particular agricultural production, was also caused by the loss of territory to the Germans. Yet the civilian economy was absolutely crucial to the continued waging of war. This takes us into a section which gives us a clear sense of some of the main effects on the civilian population, 'mobilised to the maximum extent through universal liability to perform either military
or civilian service'. After a period of chaos, new centralized institutional controls were introduced, which were only operating properly at the end of 1942. Food rations, which depended on the function the individual was serving in the war, were extremely meagre, particularly when many of the new war workers had to be recruited from the countryside.

Much special interest attaches to the seventh section on ‘National Feeling’. Many ethnic minorities welcomed the Germans, who, however, quickly alienated these potential allies. Harrison several times mentions the particularly appalling conditions suffered during the long siege of Leningrad: ‘but civic morale did not crack’. Another of the transforming effects of war is apparent in the way in which the regime softened pre-war policies in order to unify society. The concluding section makes it clear that while 1941 was certainly a key year, things in many ways then got worse for the Russians. What Harrison stresses is the ‘huge Soviet civilian sacrifice’. In 1943 there came more rational central organizations, and also massive resources from the USA. One cannot discuss the Second World War without giving detailed attention to the Russian front: Harrison gives us key insights into that most horribly destructive of war theatres.


Chapter 14 ‘World War II and Social Change in Germany’ by Mark Roseman, concludes this clutch of articles devoted to the controversial question of the social consequences of war. Roseman’s article is the only one to be reprinted here from the collection of papers delivered in January 1987 to the Open University Conference on ‘Total War and Social Change’. It is in many respects a perfect example of how to go about answering the question presented to the contributors to that conference: ‘What if any, social change is brought about by war?’ Roseman points out that most of the relevant historical writing concentrates on the Nazi period as a whole, rather than singling out the experience of war. In his pioneering study he points out, first, that great weight must be given to the transformations already carried out by the Nazis in the period (which he wittily defines as one of ‘total peace’) before the war, and to the fact that with German military defeat the shaping of German society was very much influenced by the nature and policies of the occupying powers - Roseman is dealing essentially with West Germany and the influence of the Americans. This actually takes us to one of the major debates within the whole question of the effects of war. Is it perhaps the case that rather than social change developing out of the war experience itself, its character is essentially determined by the geopolitical situation obtaining at the end of the war?

This is the position taken, in particular, by many latter-day Marxists who, conceiving of social change in the very broad manner indicated in the
opening sentences of this Introduction, see social structure and social life in one half of Europe as being dominated by Russian Communism, while that in the other half is dominated by Americanization. It may be, indeed, that Roseman’s article lends some support to this thesis. However, it is also of great significance for the painstaking way in which it does tease out a number of changes attributed to the war experience itself, of which the new self-confidence engendered in the working class is perhaps the most important.

Our collection ends with an essay specially written for us by Hew Strachan, Britain’s leading military historian today, co-founding editor of the journal War in History, and Professor of History at Glasgow university. Echoing the title of Chapter 1, Chapter 15 makes an excellent counterpart to it. However, it should be stated right away that this chapter is not related so closely to our themes as the other chapters: it, rather, serves the function of setting your studies in a much wider context, wider both in that it takes a world perspective (rather than the purely European one of our course) and in that it comes practically up to the end of the twentieth century (and also goes back into the nineteenth and even eighteenth centuries), while we end quite sharply in 1955. We would recommend that you read it fairly rapidly before embarking on your studies, and preferably immediately after reading Chapter 1. You will then, during the course, need to pay particular attention to what Strachan says about whether what we tend to call ‘total war’ might not better be described as ‘modern war’.

In the second paragraph, the German word Sonderweg means ‘special’ or ‘unique’, ‘route’ or ‘way’. Strachan is challenging the view that total war was a special invention of the Germans. In the second sentence of the third paragraph, Strachan, as a military historian, is making a perhaps slightly critical reference to a course such as our own which does feature the ‘cultural and political baggage’ of total war. Much of what follows is concerned with theories of war, of which the eighteenth-century writer Clausewitz is usually taken as the pioneer, and Strachan introduces Clausewitz’s concept of ‘absolute war’. Strachan, to repeat, is interested in ‘total war’ as a military concept – the emphasis is on the destruction of the enemy, military and civilian, while our emphasis is on the way in which total war involves civilians, and in the social changes this brings about.

The chapter begins direct engagement with our subject matter in the middle of p. 260: ‘As the twentieth century ended . . .’. The crucial distinction Strachan wants to make is between ‘total’ war, which, roughly, is absolute or all-out war conducted by whatever means are available, and ‘modern’ war, which is war using all the devices of industrialized technology. The suggestion, then, is that the two world wars of the twentieth century are better described as ‘modern’ wars rather than ‘total’ wars. There were, Strachan says, linking up to some extent with Beckett in Chapter 1, earlier total wars, though they were not necessarily modern wars. Strachan, further, suggests that the elements which give the First World War, and still more the Second World War, qualities of being total, are ideological: they are total to the extent to which they are wars of ideas.
Since this book is focused on what we call the two total wars, it is important that you should be aware of the latest ideas military historians have about the nature of total war. Really, it is a matter of whether you are fundamentally interested in the nature of warfare, including warfare right up to the present, or whether you are interested in the effects of war on society. Our book (and our Open University course) is concerned with a particular period in history, that running from 1914–55; it is not concerned with the way warfare has developed since 1955. It makes sense to refer to the two wars which dominated the period of our study as 'total wars', when the emphasis is on the impact on civilians. But it is important that you should have the wider perspective: that is why you have this very rich and challenging article by Hew Strachan.

This Introduction has simply sought to show where the essays which make up this book fit into the broad themes associated with the topic Total War and Historical Change. The essays themselves have been chosen for the major contributions they make on these themes, and for the variety of methodological approaches and broad 'philosophies' (Marxist, non-Marxist, feminist, etc.) they present. Our complex topic serves to raise some of the most important problems and debates in the study of twentieth-century European history. Together, the essays which follow offer no simple conclusions, save that of the outstanding importance of the subject itself. These essays must now be left to speak for themselves, the reader always bearing in mind that in reading the work of a historian it does pay to know just a little bit about the attitudes and approaches of that historian. Readers should also remember that the best historians often make important points which may actually fall outside the basic theses which they were intending to present in their writing.

Notes

1 See Arthur Marwick, 'Introducing the course', in A. Marwick and C. Emsley, Europe in 1914, Book 1 of Total War and Social Change, Milton Keynes, 2001.
2 Perhaps it should be noted here that Arthur Marwick does not speak of a 'model' or 'four dimensions of war' in The Deluge, London, 1965, as Beckett maintains. This was a later formulation used in Arthur Marwick, War and Social Change in the Twentieth Century, London, 1974, and in the Open University Course, A301, War and Society, Milton Keynes, 1973. The most up-to-date statements of Marwick's thinking are to be found in his Introductions to Total War and Social Change, London, 1988, and the new edition of his The Deluge: British Society and the First World War, London, 1991.
4 Ibid.
13 Indeed Overy has subsequently debated vigorously with one of the leading Marxist historians of Nazi Germany over the economic origins of the war. R. J. Overy and T. W. Mason, 'Debate', Past and Present, 1989.