



THE LONDON SCHOOL  
OF ECONOMICS AND  
POLITICAL SCIENCE

explore the latest social science book  
reviews by academics and experts

Home About Latest Books by Discipline Books by Region Bookshop Guides  
Upcoming Events Features

## Book Review: Waging War: A New Philosophical Introduction by Ian Clark



*The 2nd edition of **Waging War: A New Philosophical Introduction** offers a far-reaching engagement with both the practice of, and theorisations on, waging war today. **Ignas Kalpokas** finds that its author, **Ian Clark**, effectively questions many ostensibly self-evident assumptions regarding warfare, thereby avoiding the reiteration of familiar and simplistic conceptual categorisations and binaries.*

***Waging War: A New Philosophical Introduction. 2nd Edition.***  
**Ian Clark. Oxford University Press. 2015.**

War has been, arguably, one of the most persistent attributes of human history. Also, it is amongst those that have undergone the most significant change. It is only natural that such change in the conduct of war correlates with a corresponding change in how people think about war – the two aspects are inseparable and, as argued in this book, go hand in hand (as opposed to commonplace approaches, postulating the primacy of one or the other). And while traditionally the aforementioned change was gradual, except for some radical threshold events (one is tempted to see, for example, the introduction of the longbow or gunpowder amongst these), more recent developments have



### Recent

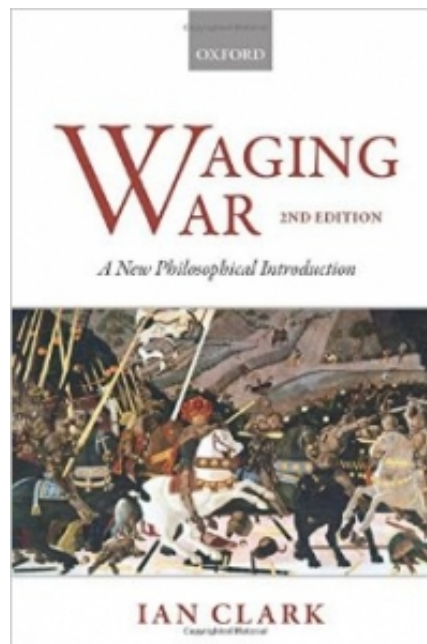


Book  
Review:  
A  
Historical  
Atlas of

been breathtaking. This is why the second edition of *Waging War: A New Philosophical Introduction*, published just over a quarter of a century after the first one, had to be rewritten rather than simply updated.

As Ian Clark himself admits, writing about war is always challenging, especially because any definition is unavoidably value-laden in itself. After all, war is not only about acts of killing and dying, but also ‘a diverse set of ideas drawing upon cultural, legal, and ethical assumptions’ (1). Consciousness of this inextricable connection between practice and traditions of thinking about such practice is one of the major contributions of *Waging War*: both aspects are truly intrinsic to the phenomenon analysed, although quite rarely viewed as such. Yet another narrative woven into the analysis is one of interaction between the practical and theoretical aspects of war, which has had a long and rather tumultuous history. On both accounts, the book mounts a challenge to some of the conventional thinking about war.

Moreover, demand for a deeper understanding of war, going beyond mere presentation of ‘facts’, is particularly high in times of change, when the need to make sense of what is happening is particularly pertinent. Hence, *Waging War* is also a timely book because both the practice of, and the thinking about, war today are anything but straightforward. The war on terror, campaigns such as those in Kosovo and Libya, drones and other technological innovations (it is somewhat strange that the author tends to ignore cyber threats) – all of these have spurred a debate about something substantially ‘new’ in the (notably Western) ways of war. It is becoming increasingly evident that ‘it is not merely the *ethics* that have become more complex, but how they are to map onto our very understanding of the conceptual category of war’ (4). This increased indeterminacy



Tibet by  
Karl E.  
Ryavec

October 30th, 2015



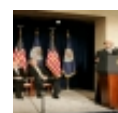
Book  
Review:  
Immigration  
Judges  
and U.S.  
Asylum  
Policy by  
Banks  
Miller,  
Linda  
Camp  
Keith and  
Jennifer  
S.  
Holmes

October 30th, 2015



Book  
Review:  
Immigration  
Detention  
The  
Migration  
of a  
Policy  
and its  
Human  
Impact  
edited by  
Amy  
Nethery  
and  
Stephanie  
J.  
Silverman

October 29th, 2015



Book  
Review:  
The  
Courage  
to Act: A  
Memoir  
of a  
Crisis  
and its  
Aftermath  
by Ben

makes the prospect of an interdisciplinary analysis even more appealing.



Image Credit: Marines with the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) during the early stages of Operation Enduring Freedom in 2001 (Wikipedia Public Domain)

The key themes of the book cover virtually all major aspects of waging war: where and how the boundaries of what war is and what it is not are drawn; the degrees of absoluteness of war, from 'just' to 'limited'; distinction between legitimate and unlawful targets; the role of (a)symmetry in today's war; and the impact of new weaponry. These are all questions unanswerable through practice alone, and yet, they are raised and informed by practice. And answering them is not merely an academic exercise or a matter of curiosity – all of these issues ultimately refer to life and death and are, therefore, immensely practical. Clark does a commendable job in questioning the seemingly self-evident assumptions underpinning our understanding of war and pinpointing their increasingly precarious nature or, on other occasions, uncovering substantial continuities where others see radical break with the past. As a result, one needs to approach this book with an open mind.

Still, the expansion of analysis so as to involve both the practical and the conceptual domains does not necessarily have to complicate the matter. Instead, many of the supposedly new challenges can be revealed to have already been pre-empted by earlier conceptual apparatuses, while 'what appear to be clashes of ethical principle turn out to be, on closer inspection, little more than closet disputes about the applicability of various prepacked

S.  
Bermanke

October 28th, 2015



Book  
Review:  
Bosnia  
and the  
Destructive  
of  
Cultural  
Heritage  
by Helen  
Walasek  
et al

October 27th, 2015





conceptual categories' (144). Indeed, theoretical discussions can often turn out to be petty squabbles between several closed perspectives and authors ready to pick up on the minutest detail. For the most part, *Waging War* avoids such squabbling by looking at a sufficiently broad picture, both geographically and historically (although, it must be admitted, such a panoramic view sometimes comes at the expense of clarity or inclusion of noteworthy cases and examples). That, in fact, is scholarship as it should be: unashamedly bold and far-reaching, proudly concerned with the fundamentals of the discipline, making sense where previously there was very little of it.

Ian Clark impresses with thorough knowledge of both the military and the philosophical-ethical dimensions of waging war and the ability to bring them together in a fashion that is both conceptual and immediately practical. As noted above, that is not a usual feature within the literature. Although not entirely accessible for the uninitiated and slightly over-complicated in style, this book is indispensable for anybody with an interest in the study of war, and provides a reflective account of war, which goes beyond simplistic divisions and categorisations. As such, *Waging War* is highly recommended.

---

Ignas Kalpokas is a PhD student in Politics at the University of Nottingham, working on a dissertation on Baruch Spinoza, Jacques Lacan, and Carl Schmitt. He holds his Masters degree in Social and Political Critical Theory and Bachelors degree in Politics from Vytautas Magnus University (Lithuania). He has also worked on various educational projects and initiatives. Ignas's research interests lie in the investigation of interrelated concepts of sovereignty, the state and the political as well as the formation and maintenance of (national) identities. In addition, his research also involves history, literature and international relations theory. His preferred theoretical framework is mostly Continental philosophy. [Read more reviews by Ignas Kalpokas.](#)

[Log In](#)

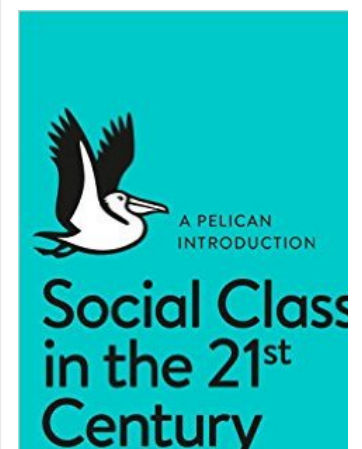
To use Facebook's social features you must switch from Facebook as LSE Review of Books Facebook as Rosie Dealer.

## Tweets



**LSE Review of Books**  
@LSEReviewBooks

Tomorrow at LSE! A fresh take on  
Social Class in the 21st Century  
[#LSEclass](#) [ow.ly/U2t5l](#)  
[pic.twitter.com/FIYNhmsP1J](#)



Tweet to @LSEReviewBooks

Funded by HEIF 5



Archives

Archives

Select Month



## Comments

---

---

[◀ Previous post](#)

[Next post ▶](#)

---

## Leave A Comment

---

Logged in as [Rose Deller](#). [Log out »](#)

Comment...

POST COMMENT

☐ Notify me of follow-up comments by email.

☐ Notify me of new posts by email.



Visit our sister  
blog: the LSE  
British Politics  
and Policy Blog



Visit our sister  
blog: the LSE USA  
Politics and Policy  
blog



Visit our sister  
blog: the LSE  
Impact of Social  
Sciences Blog



This work by [LSE Review of Books](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 2.0 UK: England & Wales](#).