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Robert L. O'Connell. *Ride of the Second Horseman: The Birth and Death of War.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997. viii + 305 pp. $38.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-19-511920-6; $30.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-506460-5.

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In *Ride of the Second Horseman: The Birth and Death of War*, Robert L. O'Connell offers an explanation for the genesis of what he sees as imminent demise of organized warfare between humans that is at once intriguing, provocative, and unconvincing. And it is for all these reasons, not least the latter, that *Ride of the Second Horseman* would be a worthwhile addition to a variety of social science courses, ranging from those focusing on war, to those addressing the history of human social and cultural development.

In brief, O'Connell claims that the shift to domesticated farming, away from nomadic pastoralism, led to a clash between these two subsistence patterns. The nomads, facing erratic and geographically indeterminate food supplies, swooped down on the sedentary agriculturalists and made war on them in order to steal their predictably steady food stocks. O'Connell's argument draws widely on history, anthropology, biology, psychology, and a little informed conjecture to weave a rich, if sometimes speculative, narrative. (There is, for instance, a fascinating chapter on the war behavior of ants.) This cross-fertilization of ideas makes O'Connell's arguments intriguing.

This wider embrace of theoretical and empirical work that crosses over and goes well beyond the boundaries of conventional social science disciplines also makes the work more provocative. For instance, while O'Connell himself acknowledges that he draws on the aforementioned disciplines, he does not cite political science, one sub-discipline of which focuses extensively, if not primarily, on the study of war. Indeed, O'Connell's arguments could not be forced into the bed of contemporary international relations theory by Procrustes himself. Yet, if he is "right," his argument presents a real challenge to those international relations scholars who are willing to confront the fact that "politics" cannot not be neatly divided into "international" and "everything else," where "international" means relations between modern states (in the last five hundred years). Is not the study of war between units other than modern states just as relevant as inter-state war? The answer, of course, is yes. In an age when drug smugglers can raise private militias, religious fervor generates a willingness to kill, sub-state ethnic groups organize into armies, and doyens of organized crime subvert state authority, gaining clearer insight into the social, psychological, biological sources of conflict will be increasingly important.

The problem with O'Connell's argument, however, is that it remains unconvincing. While the title and jacket promise an explanation of the eradication of war, O'Connell spends the bulk of his time on historical studies of the initial outbreaks of warfare around the world, and focuses scant energy on the question of war's "death." We are offered only a concluding chapter that vaguely hints at the latter. O'Connell begins this chapter by recounting the early 1980s Cold War episode in which the Kremlin, in the throes of confusion during party secretary Yuri Andropov's dying days, was convinced that World War III was about to be launched by the West. But, the crisis passed, "thoroughly predictab[ly]," without incident. After all, in the "mid-1990s, it makes sense that even desperately misled men should have abstained from responding to their fears when the probable outcome was suicide on a global scale" (p. 225).

While this does indeed make sense, it remains unclear that this is so because of anything O'Connell has said. About the most that is available from O'Connell is the vague and abstract point that stabilization in subsistence patterns, especially as reflected in the industrial revolution, changes demographic realities so fundamentally that "profound implications" would follow for all four horsemen of the apocalypse. The clearest, but underelaborated, connection to warfare is that the importance of territorial acquisition and possession declines when industrialization, extensive farming, and trade are widely practiced. Unfortunately, asserting the predictability of the non-violent outcome of a specific Cold War episode based on this general claim is something of a stretch.

But these inadequacies do not make the book unworthy of inclusion in course readings. To the contrary, these weaknesses mark some of the book's interesting uses for the classroom. For one, the underelaboration of the argument could make for useful discussion about ideas that strengthen the theoretical concepts. While the case about the initiation of war seems persuasive enough, students who read the book could be asked to develop clearer and stronger logic connecting that argument to claims about whether war has exhausted itself.

Any such supplemental arguments would also have to account for some empirical inconsistencies as well. If, as O'Connell's argument presumably implies, the standardization of large-scale sedentary agriculture makes warfare less necessary, then we need an explanation for why so much warfare has occurred between the industrialized countries (that have overcome their subsistence problems) in the hundred or so years ending in 1945.

The process of considering the book's weaknesses, and their remedies, could be directed toward the elaboration of competing or alternative theoretical explanations (highlighting not only the explanations themselves, but also the more "scholarly" process of searching for them.) For instance, the declining importance of territory might reasonably be ascribed to the changes in economic conditions hinted at by O'Connell, but for completely different reasons. As modern bureaucratic states seek to establish and maintain themselves both domestically and internationally, and economic gains for their populations become a greater source of domestic political stability (which is preferred by the state), trade and economic growth will become more important than territory and colonial control (which is often a net economic drain on the state). Materialism, in other words, is best achieved through stability, not war.

In short, *Ride of the Second Horseman* would be a useful text to initiate discussion of an explanation of war that could then be spun out into a) other competing explanations and b) an explanation of the process of inquiry, logic, and theory construction and verification.

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