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Humanism and Neo-Stoicism

No state . . . can support itself without an army.

Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Art of War*, trans. Ellis Farnsworth
(Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965; rpr.
New York: Da Capo, 1990), bk. 1, p. 30

*Rash princes, until such times as they have been well beaten in the wars, will
always have little regard for peace.*

Antonio Guevara, Bishop of Guadix, *The Diall of Princes*, trans.
Thomas North (London: John Waylande, 1557; rpr. Amsterdam:
Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1968), fo. 174v

The Humanist response to the perpetual problems of war and peace divided into the polarities of a martial ethos and an irenic or peace-loving culture. These opposing cultures were linked to an obsession with fame or reputation, honor, and the military legacy of ancient Greece and Rome on the one hand, and on the other, a concern with human dignity, freedom, and a stricter application of Christian morality. Machiavelli and his followers advocated the martial ethos; Erasmus was the most widely read of those who fostered an irenic culture. The latter was also the author of *The Education of a Christian Prince* (1516), which was intended as a manual for the Emperor Charles V. In this work, Erasmus maintained that “A good prince should never go to war unless, after trying all other means, he cannot possibly avoid it. If we were of this mind, there would hardly be a war.”¹ Another school of thought, which combined an admiration for Machiavelli’s analytical approach to political theory with an Erasmian sensitivity to ethical practice, was called

Neo-Stoicism. Michel de Montaigne and Justus Lipsius, the founding fathers of this modern adaptation of the Stoicism of ancient Greece and Rome, while expressing a longing for peace, accepted the reality of war, but sought to impose ethical restraints on how it was declared, waged, and concluded.

The Renaissance and the study of war and peace

Christian humanist, Neo-Stoic, and Protestant thinkers all recognized that discord was a basic part of human existence. Their knowledge of human history, largely derived from the ancients, suggested that war and peace had tended to run in cycles since the dawn of recorded history, but war was the main theme of history. Certainly, many of the earlier Italian humanists saw war as a test of character and an opportunity to win fame and honor. From a theological perspective, war was viewed as a punishment for man's sins. From a more secular and analytical point of view, war arose from man's disposition to violence, just as he was subject to plagues, famines, and other natural disasters that were attributable to forces beyond his control. Some commentators were cynical enough to argue that foreign wars helped to avoid civil wars, kept the population down, and purged the body politic of some of the more undesirable social elements. The Christian humanists launched a general attack on the glorification of war and attempted to demonstrate that human nature could be cured of its supposed disposition to war and violence. Indeed, some Christian humanists went so far as to suggest that communities could be constructed in which it was possible to imagine a world without war. The problem with building utopias, however, was that war-making and the Renaissance state were so bound together that it would be difficult to abolish the one without dismantling the other.²

Many humanists who studied the past tended to idealize Rome during the *Pax Romana* as a kind of golden age following an earlier heroic age that had been characterized by strife. Thus, the myth of a golden age came into existence among early sixteenth-century humanists, who lacked a critical historical understanding of the Roman world. Hence, Erasmus thought that the *Pax Romana* was indeed a time when peace prevailed. Perhaps he did not understand that the Roman peace was not only preceded by strife, but also was

established by wars of conquest and a total and crushing victory.³ Antonio de Guevara believed in the poetic truth of the Golden Age as described by Hesiod and Virgil, and he equated it with the Garden of Eden as described in the Old Testament.⁴ The more that humanists debated the concept of a “golden age,” the more diverse their interpretations and understandings became. One interpretation, derived from Ovid, was that of a primitive pastoral society characterized by “primeval innocence.” This might have been a good refuge for poets, but had a limited application to the modern age. Another, a vision of an idealized future, derived from Virgil, had hoped for an age of gold when peace would be restored to the world by a new Augustus, or perhaps, a child sent from heaven. Christian writers, understandably, interpreted the latter to be the redemptive mission of Christ; courtly poets of the Renaissance shamelessly exploited the secular concept of a golden age to compose panegyrics to describe the alleged virtues of their royal patrons.⁵

A good example of this is provided by the courtly propaganda surrounding Elizabeth I of England. Elizabeth is frequently compared by poets, artists, and theologians to Astraea, patroness of the golden age, that is, the age and empire of Augustus when universal peace supposedly reigned. In Christian times, Astraea was identified with Mary, the Virgin Mother of Christ, and the return of the golden age brought the advent of Christianity. The poets and theologians who were the advocates of an Elizabethan golden age seized on the concept of empire—a sovereignty that united the powers of church and state to effect a reformation leading to pure religion, unity, and justice, when the virgin queen would become the patroness of peace.⁶ What the queen’s subjects actually got was an intolerant, persecuting regime and foreign wars.

The Machiavellians and the martial ethos

Myth-making, however, would carry a Renaissance monarch only so far, and there were those—both inside and outside the sphere of government in England—who sought to remind Elizabeth of the realities of exercising power in a world torn by religious and dynastic warfare. Peter Whitehorne, who translated Machiavelli’s *The Art of War* into English in 1560, told the queen in a dedicatory epistle that the preservation of peace and the uninterrupted

administration of justice depended on the perpetual exercise of arms and preparation for war: "It is impossible for any realm or dominion long to continue in quietness and safeguard where the defence of the sword is not always in readiness..."⁷ Machiavelli's treatise went on to emphasize the intimate relationship between the art of politics and the art of war. Military power was the basic foundation of a civil society in which subjects gave their primary loyalty to their rulers rather than to kinship groups or feudal lords. Machiavelli insisted that the foundations of every state were "good laws and good arms." The latter was the more important: good laws would follow if the state were well armed and defended. "Good arms" meant that a state should depend on a popularly based citizen army and must avoid employing mercenary forces. Machiavelli was consistently emphatic in arguing that a citizen army, or civic militia, would always promote unity and social and political stability.⁸ Machiavelli also viewed a well ordered militia as having an important political function. It would serve as a school of citizenship, promote respect for the laws, and inculcate a common sense of identity. This would erect an obstacle to attempts by ambitious noblemen to seize power, provided that the commanders and officers did not come from the same district in which the members of the militia resided. For these reasons, civic militias were more compatible with republics than monarchies. Machiavelli addressed his writings to the rulers of all states, but he personally preferred a republic with a broad base of popular participation in which the people were subjected to military training and discipline, and which, like Rome, pursued a policy of expansion. It would seem that Machiavelli assigned a higher priority to political stability in a commonwealth than to military success. And, although political stability was highly desirable, Machiavelli believed that popular participation was necessary even if it did lead to a certain amount of popular turbulence.⁹

Like Polybius and Livy, Machiavelli recognized that all human societies are constantly "in a state of flux" and cannot remain the same; a commonwealth that is devoted to preserving tranquility must soon decay. Thus, there was a danger in remaining too long at peace. The only way to avoid idleness, effeminacy, factionalism, and sedition among its citizens was to follow the example of the Roman Republic and employ the militia to pursue a policy of imperial expansion.¹⁰ Machiavelli's advice to princes who wished to remain on their thrones and to those who aspired to become rulers was to devote

themselves exclusively to studying warfare and exercising arms: "A prince . . . should have no other object or thought, nor acquire skill in anything except war, its organization and discipline. The art of war is all that is required of a ruler. . . ."¹¹ Rulers cannot expect their subjects to submit to them and obey them unless they are armed. "A prince who does not understand warfare as well as the other misfortunes which it invites, cannot be respected by his soldiers or place any trust in them." In preparing for war in peacetime, he should read the histories of great soldiers, hunt regularly, and keep his soldiers well trained and organized. By reading the histories of great men, especially the famous military commanders of antiquity, princes could acquire examples of how they should conduct themselves.¹² Machiavelli records that Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, and all great military leaders always marched on foot at the head of their armies and carried their own weapons into battle. Thus, if and when they were killed in battle, they died with their *virtù* intact, and could not be accused of "softness or effeminacy."¹³

Machiavelli argued that it was necessary for a prince to enjoy a degree of popular support as much as the rulers of a democratic government. It was desirable that the people love their ruler, but in any case, they must fear him. In order to avoid the hatred and contempt of his subjects, the prince needed to enhance his reputation, because reputation was all important in politics. The prince must appear to be virtuous, religious, and clement—even if this required a certain degree of deception and manipulation of public opinion. One of the best ways to build a reputation was by performing great military deeds; another was by providing good laws. A state could not enjoy good laws without the means of enforcing obedience, which presupposed the existence of a military force. Religion was also necessary to sanction obedience and loyalty to the state, as the history of pre-Christian Rome demonstrated. Indeed, religion was a necessary function of the state for that very reason.¹⁴

Most aristocrats in late-fifteenth-century Florence believed that the principal instruments of politics were law, diplomacy, and force, but as a consequence of the helplessness of a divided Italy after it was overrun by the French in 1494, as well as a growing disenchantment with the rule of the Medicis, some of them began to view force as the best way to secure their liberties. Some Italian city-states and principalities had begun to rely for their defense on mercenaries, but humanists, such as Machiavelli and his friend and

close contemporary Francesco Guicciardini, instead advocated citizen armies because that was the way it had been done in the Roman Republic of antiquity. This incorporated the notion that, in a well governed commonwealth, military force should replace diplomatic negotiations in both external and domestic affairs. The Medicis, after their return to power, however, used this concept to overthrow the Florentine Republic and establish a despotism behind the facade of republican institutions. Guicciardini made the observation, based on the Medici despotism that lay behind this facade that "Every government is nothing but violence over subjects, sometimes moderated by a form of honesty." Guicciardini anticipated Machiavelli in providing a new vocabulary for discussing politics, and emphasized that the political power of all states had its origin in violence. Christian moral principles were, therefore, not relevant to a discussion of politics or its practice.¹⁵

Machiavelli argued that an armed citizenry organized as a civic militia need not pose a threat to the authority of the prince or to political stability, but a mercenary army certainly would. Mercenary soldiers of the Renaissance were notorious for fanning the flames of war in order to keep themselves in employment. So deeply ingrained were their martial inclinations that they could not imagine any other way of earning a living. For this reason, subjects who fought for the glory of the prince were to be preferred to mercenary soldiers who fought to satisfy the ambition of someone else. This insistence that mercenary soldiers were always dangerous was endlessly repeated by the disciples of Machiavelli, and made it difficult for rulers in later times to raise well disciplined standing armies of long-service professional soldiers.¹⁶ A prince who lacked an army of well trained soldiers had only himself to blame for not providing his subjects with the opportunity to exercise arms. Yet, it was better to go to war with inexperienced citizen soldiers than to hire experienced mercenaries. Indeed, a prince who wished to expand his territories should never alter his plans merely in order to avoid war, because postponing a war would always work to his disadvantage.¹⁷

The so-called "free companies" of mercenaries, or *routiers*, had become especially troublesome in the fourteenth century because of the abundant wars of that period. The lack of resources meant that the state armies of the period could not fight continuously, and when knights and soldiers of lesser rank found themselves without employment they devastated the countryside

and extorted tribute from towns. They were particularly troublesome in Italy where they were known as *condottieri*. The military term “company,” to modern readers, can mask the size of such bands. One, known as the “Great Company,” may have numbered as many as 10,000 men. Small wonder that many Italian communes in the wake of the Black Death lacked manpower and financial resources to field citizen armies to resist such adventurers, and chose to pay bribes or tribute to get rid of them. Even when mercenary companies disbanded, they contributed to crime in the countryside, but the soldiers discharged by the military forces of communes were hardly better.¹⁸

At the same time, Maurizio Arfaioi rejects a number of assumptions based on the writings of Guicciardini and Machiavelli; namely, that mercenary companies were inferior to native militias or foreign armies from transalpine Europe in fighting wars in Italy in the early sixteenth century. Actually, the mercenary bands that fought in the Italian wars of that period were experienced in the use of a number of recent military innovations, such as artillery, light cavalry, and highly disciplined infantry formations, and they also had a good knowledge and experience of permanent fortifications as well as field entrenchments. In fact, the wars of the Italian peninsula became “a bloody laboratory of experimentation.” The Italian mercenary bands learned much from the Swiss infantry in regard to how well disciplined companies of pikemen could defeat the heavy cavalry of feudal armies, but only after the use of militia units or bands composed of both militia soldiers and mercenaries had failed. After initially being at a disadvantage, the Italian infantry improved on the Swiss tactical organization composed of a large square of pikemen by integrating *arquebusiers*, or handgunners, into pike formations.¹⁹ While Machiavelli had many followers—especially with regard to the desirability of a civic militia in preference to a mercenary army—there were also those who were repelled by his rejection of both natural and divine law. One was Giovanni Botero, a sometime Jesuit priest who was urged to leave the Jesuit order after giving a sermon questioning the temporal authority of the pope. Botero’s approach to politics was not so different from that of Machiavelli, despite the fact that he was under the influence of the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas. Botero’s book, *The Reason of State* (1589), dealt with many of the same topics that Machiavelli had discussed—especially those relating to the question of when a prince was justified in going to war. Quite often, Botero’s explanations

concerning which occasions justified declaring war can only be described as expedient. As Professor Quentin Skinner has noted: "Botero is recognizably an inhabitant of Machiavelli's moral universe."²⁰

Like Machiavelli, Botero warns that peace can never be so certain that one can dispense with the military means to defend one's country.²¹ It is only with regard to wars of expansion that Botero parts company with Machiavelli. He states that the right of defensive war is absolute, but an offensive war can only be justified for purposes of defense. Botero, who had experience of the French Wars of Religion, was more sensitive to the issues of religious warfare than Machiavelli when he said that although warfare against infidels was always justified, war against heretical Christians must be a last resort.²² A foreign war, he thought, was a good remedy against popular rebellion and civil war because it keeps the people occupied and dissipates their feelings of hostility toward the aristocracy. The examples of ancient Greece and Rome furnished proof that this was a good policy.²³ Botero also warned that long wars can make warfare a habit because it teaches men that they can acquire what they want by the sword. The conclusion of foreign wars, once the habit of violence is acquired, can lead men who are used only to warfare to turn on their rulers. Botero was, like Machiavelli, an advocate of wide popular participation in government, and he recognized that the prince who employs his own subjects as soldiers did risk danger, but the use of foreign mercenaries could entail even more dangerous consequences because a prince's subjects should never be "beholden" to anyone for defending the state except himself.²⁴

Baldasare Castiglione, although he had been a soldier and thought that military experience was an important part of aristocratic life, believed that the aristocrat, or "courtier," should be known primarily as a man of letters, educated in the classics, who valued moral virtue. It was the duty of a ruler to provide his subjects with laws that would "enable them to live safe and dignified lives in peace and quiet." Castiglione conceded that many states had enjoyed prosperity during time of war, only to fall into decay with prolonged peace. This was because they had not learned how to take advantage of the leisure afforded by peace and to cultivate the necessary moral virtues to enjoy the same. Many rulers had promoted a martial culture that taught their subjects that

their principal aim must be to subjugate their neighbours, and in consequence they incite their people to become bellicose and aggressive. . . . But this was

never feasible, seeing that the process could go on forever, short of the conquest of the whole world, and was in conflict with reason as propounded by natural law, which requires us not to want for others what we should not wish for ourselves. Therefore, rulers should make their people warlike not for lust of conquest, but in order to insure the defence of themselves and their subjects. . . . It is outrageous and deplorable that in war, which is intrinsically evil, men should be valourous and wise, whereas in peace and quiet, which is good, they are so ignorant and inept that they do not know how to enjoy their blessings.²⁵

Antonio de Guevara thought that a prince "which keepeth his commonwealth in peace hath great wrong if he were not of all men beloved. What good can the commonwealth have where there is war and dissension. . . . What availeth a prince to banish all vices . . . otherwise he keepeth it in war."²⁶ Castiglione's appreciation of the pursuit of more peaceful pastimes was further explored by the adherents of Christian humanism.

Erasmianism and irenic culture

The European state system in the Renaissance was organized for wielding power and making war. Garrett Mattingly has suggested that Machiavelli, the Florentine humanist, who is almost universally viewed as a cynical realist and who adapted his political philosophy to this state of affairs, was actually something of a disillusioned idealist.²⁷ Erasmian humanism, on the other hand, criticized this political realism and glorification of martial culture by launching a direct attack on crusading, chivalric, and patriotic values. Erasmian humanists hoped to convert princes to more peaceful policies by showing them the usefulness of negotiation and arbitration as an alternative to war, yet Erasmus himself remained suspicious of the deviousness inherent in the diplomatic practice of the period. Treaties between rulers were supposed to prevent wars, but because they were often drawn up with the intent to dissimulate, they often led to wars. Erasmus thought that if rulers were men of good faith there would be no need for treaties. Still, negotiation offered an alternative to war. In order to inculcate more pacific values, Erasmus and his followers proposed to draw up a course of studies emphasizing Christian and

the best of classical ethics based on the New Testament and the works of Roman Stoic authors such as Cicero's *De officiis*. The Ciceronian or Neo-Roman variety of humanism provided the critical tools to question the dedication of the nobility to seeking honor and glory in war rather than pursuing "the arts of peace." It asserted that nobility should be based on virtue rather than lineage. The audience that the Erasmians aimed this curriculum at consisted of merchants whose trade might benefit from peace, and gentlemen who valued the pen more than the sword and who were likely to become magistrates, royal counselors, and servants, and who might help wean monarchs from their bellicose habits.²⁸

Aristotelianism had dominated the scholarship and philosophy of the medieval world—especially the universities—and was the basis of the scholastic philosophy that, under the guidance of Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas, had provided a rationalist approach to the truths of the Christian religion. From the beginning of the Italian Renaissance, humanist scholars, often working outside of the academic world, began promoting an alternative to scholastic Aristotelianism, which was called Ciceronianism, or more simply, Romanism. These humanists, such as Petrarch, preferred the moral values and rhetorical Latin style that they found in Cicero and Seneca. Later, Christian moralists such as Erasmus discovered a grave fault in Cicero—he had come to be admired by Machiavelli, who made effective use of Cicero's argument that the interests of one's own country were to be preferred above all other considerations.²⁹

Erasmus was an early and severe critic of the martial ethos that had prevailed in Christian society from late antiquity through the Middle Ages when the Church had often stood in need of armed protection. This position was at first emotional rather than intellectual because his pupil, Alexander, son of James IV of Scotland, was killed at the battle of Flodden in 1515. Erasmus called Mars "the stupidest of all gods." War did not confer glory in his opinion; it was irrational, and Erasmus came to detest all professional soldiers. Erasmus condemned war, not because it was incompatible with the Christian religion, but because it was an inhumane activity. The argument that war was unnatural and irrational became one of the foundations of modern pacifism.³⁰

The Christian humanists, such as Erasmus, Sir Thomas More, and John Colet, rejected the argument that war was an instrument of Divine Providence

to punish the sins of man; they insisted that wars occurred because of the actions of men, and sins were “learned in war.” Erasmus said that since more innocent than evil people were hurt by war, the divine use of war to punish sins would be unjust. Further, the Erasmians insisted that peace was possible in a society founded on reason and justice. For that reason, a good Christian prince should be too busy governing and dispensing justice to have time to hunt, make war, dance, or gamble.³¹ If Plato, a pagan, thought that civil war was the worst kind of calamity imaginable, how much more careful should Christians be about shedding Christian blood, said Erasmus, because war among Christians was a kind of civil war. Erasmus also thought that it would be very difficult to justify a war against the Turks unless provoked, because this was contrary to the means by which Christianity was first spread. Since one war tends to lead to another, a good Christian prince should be very circumspect about declaring war. If he does go to war, he should be careful to wage war with as little harm to his own subjects and as little shedding of Christian blood as possible, and to conclude the struggle as soon as possible.³² Although Erasmus was the leading exponent of peace in his time, it needs to be said that he had never taken the trouble to think through the complex subject of why states go to war with one another.³³

Erasmus was most insistent in his condemnation of the just-war doctrine. Princes deceive themselves when they declare that the wars that they are about to undertake are just wars. There was no point in discussing whether a war was just or not since rulers have always found the requisite arguments to assert that their cause was just. Moreover, the problem with allowing the prince to decide whether to wage war was that princes have difficulty distinguishing between their own ambitions and the interests of a commonwealth. Erasmus was also insistent that princes should not consult their lawyers and courtiers on this subject, but rather should listen to their subjects. He did concede that a good prince might be obliged to fight a war for a compelling reason, but it could not be called a just war unless he pursued and exhausted more peaceful solutions.³⁴ Erasmus thought that the true message of the New Testament enjoining Christians to be men of peace had been perverted by the Roman law doctrine of just war and by the rationalism of Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas. That message of peace had been further diluted by canon lawyers, theologians, and papal practice during late antiquity and the medieval period.³⁵

Erasmus singled out Pope Julius II as a particularly bad example of a pontiff, whose bellicose behavior made him indistinguishable from the worst of the Renaissance Italian princes. It was during Julius's pontificate (1503–13) that the papal states emerged as a sovereign entity as a consequence of his pursuit of war and diplomacy. Erasmus wrote a satirical dialogue in which he compared Pope Julius to Julius Caesar. Although perhaps not as corrupt as some of his predecessors, Julius was a very worldly pope whom Erasmus styled the "warrior-pope." Erasmus depicted Julius II entering cities he had conquered in the manner of Roman military triumphs such as those staged by Scipio Africanus or his alter ego, Julius Caesar.³⁶

Among the adages that Erasmus added to the 1515 edition of the *Adagiorum Chiliades* was *dulce bellum inexpertis*, that is, "war is sweet to those who have not tried it." It was a proverb with many variants and was found in the writings of classical authors from the Greek poet Pindar to the Roman military writer Vegetius. Erasmus lamented that despite the terrible destruction of war, it was entered on lightly:

If there is anything in mortal affairs which should be approached with hesitancy, or rather ought to be avoided in every possible way, guarded against and shunned, that thing is war; there is nothing more wicked, more disastrous, and more widely destructive, more deeply tenacious, more loathsome, in a word more unworthy of man, not to say of a Christian. Yet, strange to say, everywhere at the present time war is being entered upon lightly, for any kind of reason, and waged with cruelty and barbarousness, not only by the heathen but by Christians, not only for lay people, but by priests and bishops, not only by the young and inexperienced, but also by the old who know it well; not so much by the common people and the naturally fickle mob, but rather by princes, whose function should restrain with wisdom and reason the rash impulses of the foolish rabble. Nor are there lacking lawyers and theologians who add fuel to the fire of these misdeeds. . . . And the result of all this is, that war is now such an accepted thing that people are astonished to find anyone who does not like it.

The new 1515 edition of Erasmus's *Adages* seems to have been prompted by the youthful Henry VIII's wars against Scotland and France.³⁷

Until well into the early modern era, the distinction between the nobilities of the sword and the robe (or in the British Isles, between swordsmen and

gownsmen) persisted, and many young noblemen and gentlemen believed that a period of time spent in the army as an officer or a gentleman volunteer constituted an initiation into manhood and a validation of their honorable status.³⁸ Erasmus regarded time spent in military service as time wasted and thought that the effort expended was destructive. He made a particular point of attacking the writers of military memoirs and their accounts of battle as pure fiction because the “hallooing, hurly-burly, noise of guns, trumpets and drums, neighing of horses and shouting of men”:—what modern military historians call the “fog of battle”—produced such noise and confusion that it would have been impossible for any one person to know what was going on everywhere on the battlefield—never mind being able to repeat verbatim speeches made in different places by noble officers and commanders.³⁹

A protégé of Erasmus, the Catalan Juan Luis Vives, carried on Erasmus's denunciation of martial culture. As a child, Vives saw his father, grandmother, and great-grandfather all executed by the Spanish Inquisition as relapsed *conversos* (or crypto-Jews). His mother died soon after of the Plague, and her body was dug up and also burnt by the Inquisition. Vives left Spain never to return, receiving his education at the University of Paris. He spent the rest of his life in England and at Bruges in the Spanish Netherlands. Like Erasmus and Thomas More, Vives, in his *The Education of a Christian Woman*, directed his literary efforts toward condemning bellicosity as depicted in books of chivalry such as Thomas Mallory's *Morted' Arthur*, which these humanists wished to see banished from the lists of recommended reading for aristocratic men and women. Indeed, they wished to purge all works of history and romantic literature that praised despots and conquerors such as Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar. These works were hardly suitable for the education of Christian monarchs and their officials who were supposed to rule with justice. The education of a Christian prince should be aimed at ending the endless wars between Christians. True honor and glory could not be found in the senseless bloodshed of war. Vives also emphasized the idea that civility flourished best in an urban commonwealth in which civic participation in government and the rule of law were to be found.⁴⁰

Éméric Crucé, another disciple of Erasmus, a French monk and the author of *Nouveau Cynée* (1623), also rejected the concept of just war, and proposed an international congress to maintain peace, which would meet at Venice

and include representatives from Muslim as well as Christian countries.⁴¹ He thought that warriors had no place in civilized society because of their arrogance and brutality, which were the causes of all wars. Such men could never settle down to peaceful habits. Like Erasmus, he did not believe in the legal concept of just war. While Crucé did not think that martial men could be entirely banished, he did insist that free trade and the development of agriculture, commerce, and manufacturing could shift the social balance, encourage peaceful occupations, increase wealth, and draw men away from martial pursuits. Those who could not adapt themselves to living in a mercantile world could be recruited into professional armies and sent to the fringes of the civilized world to fight pirates and savages.⁴²

The Salamancan School and just-war theory

Not all humanists followed Erasmus in rejecting all forms of violence. Many clung to the just-war tradition, and while unable to follow the Erasmian peace ethic, they did seek to impose constraints on methods of warfare. Nor should we forget that Machiavelli's jettisoning of ethical standards from political and military discourse also derives from the Italian humanist tradition. Other humanist scholars cited classical authorities to perpetuate or revive a martial ethos for their princely or aristocratic patrons.⁴³

Because Erasmus had mounted a devastating attack on the ancient doctrine of just war, which had been upheld and defended by theologians and canon lawyers for a millennium, his writings caused alarm in those quarters. His *Querela pacis* (*The Complaint of Peace*), published in 1517 while he was living in England, was condemned and seized by the Sorbonne, the theological faculty of the University of Paris. Taken aback that his book was banned in France, Erasmus backed down to a degree in later life, and admitted that armed conflict was not totally prohibited to Christians. Rulers were allowed to wield the sword to protect the commonwealth, but not to pursue their personal ambitions by means of war.⁴⁴

However admirable these sentiments were, the Erasmian peace ethic lacked practical application. The pacifism of Erasmus and the Christian humanists was parochial because it built Utopias within a world that possessed Christian

values and was confined to Western Europe. It failed to anticipate European expansion into the East Indies and the New World, and it could not comprehend or deal with the nature of the early modern state that came into existence for the purpose of making war on a grander scale over a sustained period of time.⁴⁵ Also, many humanists rejected the Roman concept of kinship within human society, and preferred the more narrow Aristotelian belief that the *polis* was the ideal society. At the same time, not a few of them also accepted Aristotle's argument that barbarians and other lesser people were fit to be enslaved because of cultural and moral shortcomings. This was an argument that could be used to justify both the aggressive pursuit of war and the conquest of the native peoples of the New World.⁴⁶

Spain, during its so-called Golden Age, when it was the dominant European power and was in the process of acquiring a vast colonial empire, was hardly in the mood to listen to the Erasmians. Where Erasmus had said that it might be better to accept an unjust peace in preference to a just war, Francisco de Vitoria, a Dominican friar and a philosopher who had studied at the University of Paris and later taught at the University of Salamanca, rejected pacifism and cited St. Augustine to argue that in the earthly city peace is only momentary. Like other Spanish political theorists of the early sixteenth century, his outlook was shaped by the Spanish conquests in the New World. Unlike Erasmus, whose writings he took a part in condemning, Vitoria recognized the need to accommodate the sovereign state and the right of political society to defend itself. Moreover, Vitoria also insisted on the right of a state to wage offensive war, if after a lapse of time, it failed to obtain satisfaction or reparations from an enemy for injuries suffered. Thus, the ethical and legal doctrine of the just war was extended by philosophers such as Vitoria; this was done by reaching back to the Old Testament, rather than grounding their teachings on war solely on the New Testament as Erasmus had done. At the same time, Vitoria was not prepared to allow the prince to declare war without constraints; he rejected differences of religion, princely ambition, and conquest of empire as sufficient causes for waging war. The only morally acceptable reasons for going to war were self-defense, the restoration of peace, and the avenging of injuries. Vitoria also rejected the papal claim that the Indians of the New World might be conquered because they practice cannibalism. It was morally acceptable for any ruler to stop such practices, but

not to acquire territory.⁴⁷ The Italian Protestant, Alberico Gentili, also joined this controversy by arguing that it was just to make war on the Indians because they supposedly practiced sodomy with beasts, which was contrary to natural law. However, he rejected the argument that the conquest of the Indians was justified because they refused to accept the missionaries who came to preach the Gospel.⁴⁸

Vitoria laid down rules for waging war. Only the prince had “the authority to wage war,” but he should first strive to live in peace with his enemy and “above all to avoid all provocations and causes of war.” Assuming that his subjects did not object, the inability to maintain peaceful relations with a potential enemy was grounds for a legitimate war. War should be waged not to destroy the enemy, but to reestablish peace and security. Once victory had been achieved, the victorious prince must act as a judge and not as a prosecutor. “He must give satisfaction to the injured, but without causing the utter ruination of the guilty commonwealth.” However, Vitoria lays down a number of exceptions to this last rule. Sometimes, when fighting the infidel, it becomes necessary to kill all who can bear arms when that enemy refuses to surrender. This cannot be done in wars against fellow Christians because this would provoke endless warfare. Mindful that the Book of Joshua (6:21) records that Saul and the Israelites, by divine command, had killed the children and young women of Amalek, Vitoria rejects so broad a doctrine of holy war even when fighting the Turks. Even though it can be assumed that Turkish male children may grow up to fight Christians, they may not be slain for what they might do in the future. One must presume that all noncombatants are innocent, even though Deuteronomy (20:10–20) allows the killing of all adult males—whether combatants or noncombatants. Vitoria does allow that if it is necessary to besiege and storm a fortification in order to keep the war from spreading or to prevent the enemy from winning, no moral fault is incurred if innocent people die, but “care must be taken to insure that the evil effects of war do not outweigh the possible benefits sought by waging” the war in the first place. Vitoria also specifies the conditions that allow the killing of enemy combatants: The defenders of a city or fortress who have refused to surrender when called on to do so, may be put to the sword following victory, but only after taking “account of the scale of the injury inflicted by the enemy, [and] of our losses and their other crimes . . . without cruelty or inhumanity”; and when the enemy is an

infidel from whom one can never hope for peace; and when prisoners of war turn out to be “deserters and fugitives,” but not otherwise.⁴⁹

Another member of the Salamancan School was Diego de Saavedra Fajardo, a diplomat and a canon of Santiago. His *The Idea of a Politico-Christian Prince* called for the ruler to maintain his reputation by the display of moral virtue and political wisdom. To cultivate that reputation could be more difficult than building a state, and once lost, it could never be regained. Virtue helped to build the support of citizens and subjects, and was a major source of political power and the maintenance of authority. This had more to do with respect than public opinion, but the ruler could not ignore his subjects’ wishes either. While Saavedra did not approve of outright lying by a prince when conducting affairs of state, he believed that a prudent ruler might sometimes need to dissimulate when dealing with foreign princes, his own subjects, or even his own councilors. In this respect, Saavedra was not all that different from Machiavelli. And, like Machiavelli, Saavedra believed that religion, with its assurances of future rewards or punishments, helped to ensure obedience to the prince.⁵⁰

A number of Portuguese Jesuits joined the friars of the Salamancan School in their desire to impose limits on offensive war. Luis Molina wrote that wars for the pursuit of glory and preemptive strikes were not morally permissible. Unlike Gentili, he said that wars cannot be just on both sides, and the aggression in defensive wars must be proportionate to the injury suffered. Warfare against “barbarians” living without lawfully recognized government, in places such as Brazil, was permissible only to protect “innocent victims of their aggression.”⁵¹

Utopianism

A genre of Christian Humanist literature that arose in protest against Machiavellian “reason of state” political theory and its glorification of the martial ethos was Utopianism. Thomas More was the modern inventor of Utopian schemes, which were widely imitated by later writers such as Sir Francis Bacon, in his *New Atlantis*, and Robert Burton.⁵² Most early modern schemes for Utopias offered models for small perfected communities within a larger imperfect world. They were often located on the periphery of the

European world away from the vortex of war. In some of these communities, there was an absence of gold so as not to arouse the envy of bellicose neighbors, yet in none of these ideal societies could their creators imagine a larger world completely purged of war.⁵³

The inhabitants of Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* were not entirely pacifist; they were prepared to fight in self-defense, although they preferred diplomacy or even paying tribute to actual warfare. However, unlike Machiavelli and the classical republicans who insisted on civic militias for military undertakings because they distrusted mercenary soldiers, the Utopians hired mercenaries to fight their wars of self-defense. They also mistrusted mercenaries, but they did not want the Utopians mixed up in the nasty and unprofitable business of war. Sir Thomas More, being a lawyer, was prepared to accept the just-war doctrine, dating back to St. Augustine and Roman law. Erasmus, by contrast, thought that war was so unchristian and destructive that he could not think of any circumstance that justified a declaration of war.⁵⁴

A striking feature of More's *Utopia* is that it was not conceived as a Christian commonwealth. Whereas Sir Francis Bacon imagined that the citizens of *New Atlantis* possessed both the Old and the New Testaments, More chose to withhold Christian revelation from the Utopians, and despite the fact that he dressed them in the garb of Franciscan friars and had them dwell in a community that looked suspiciously medieval, the Utopians lived in accordance with an ethical code that would have been familiar to Plato. The purpose of this was to show that if the Utopians possessed only the four cardinal virtues of classical pagan morality and could live in peace, how much more perfect would be a society possessing the three Christian virtues as well. Thus, More depicted the Utopians, having only reason to guide them, as living to a higher moral standard than the inhabitants of the war-torn Christian Europe of More's time who had the benefit of Divine Revelation.⁵⁵

It is perhaps misleading to think of the inhabitants of More's *Utopia* as living in a perfected society. Whereas the Utopians were highly moral and restrained in their domestic political behavior, their relations with other nations were sometimes devoid of moral restraint. They did not make treaties, they practiced deception, and when they went to war with other peoples, they hired foreign mercenaries to do their fighting. They also attempted to undermine the governments of their enemies by suborning treason and

procuring assassinations. The Utopians also dealt with the problem of surplus population by pursuing aggressive colonial expansion.⁵⁶

With respect to external relations, More's highly principled behavior as a royal servant to Henry VIII was in contrast to that of the Utopians. Most of the rulers of Europe in the early sixteenth century liked to attract humanist scholars to their courts for adornment if not enlightenment. The humanists, in turn, were flattered to be invited, and hoped to exert some influence on these would-be patrons. Christian humanists usually discovered that the princes and aristocracy were eager for a humanist education that would help them adapt to a rapidly changing world, provided it did not interfere with their predilection for hunting and making war. A problem that Sir Thomas More explored in his *Utopia* was whether a Christian humanist should involve himself in the political affairs of a prince if invited to become an adviser. The royal councilors had their own sycophantic culture and inner dynamic, and intellectuals would have to give up their independence of judgment. Erasmus understood that a Christian humanist could not give honest advice on the justness of war to a powerful prince who was determined to go to war.⁵⁷ More thought that Renaissance monarchs were preoccupied with "pursuits of war" in order to add to their kingdoms, rather than providing good government to the territories that they already possessed. His opposition to war was partly motivated by the heavy burden that taxation placed on ordinary people—especially the poorest segment of the population—and by the looting of soldiers. More also believed that the insatiable needs of war corrupt good laws and government.⁵⁸

Neo-Stoicism

At the time of More's death in 1535, it must have appeared that the chances of universal peace were fading. The more practical humanists turned their attention to the task of limiting the scope of war and imposing ethical constraints on how war was waged, employing the examples of Roman Stoicism. Just as classical Stoicism was generated by the conflicts and violence of the Hellenistic world, so also the revival of Stoicism, or Neo-Stoicism, had its origins in the 1570s in the reaction of humanist moral and political

philosophers against the spread of bloodshed resulting from the religious wars in France. Similar disasters plagued Germany, the Low Countries, and the British Isles. One of the earliest exponents of this Neo-Stoicism was Michel de Montaigne, who implicitly rejected the Huguenot theory of resistance to constituted authority and blamed it for the moral, political, and social disintegration that accompanied the French religious and civil wars. These extraordinary times explain his espousal of Neo-Stoicism: "In ordinary and peaceful times, a man prepares himself for common and moderate accidents; but in this confusion, wherein we have been for these thirty years, every Frenchman, be it in general or in particular, doth hourly see himself upon the point of his fortunes overthrown and downfall."⁵⁹ Montaigne withdrew from his judicial offices in the Parlement of Bordeaux and retired to his estate, employing his leisure for scholarship and the writing of his *Essays*. Montaigne's example of stoic endurance and tolerance encouraged Neo-Stoic disciples in France and other countries beset by civil and religious strife.⁶⁰

Montaigne was trained in the law and held offices associated with the nobility of the robe, but he considered himself to be a member of the sword nobility. Despite his peaceful inclination, he believed that the profession of arms was the only source of nobility. He disliked the law, but was vague about the details of his military service. His father had fought in the Italian wars, and kept a journal, which Montaigne read. Montaigne also made a special study of Roman soldiers, such as Scipio Africanus (the "Elder"), the conqueror of Carthage, and Lucullus, a patron of learning, and a friend of scholars and poets. Being surrounded by violence and civil war, it is not surprising that Montaigne's *Essays* are filled with references to and anecdotes about warfare both ancient and modern. As befitted a humanist, he showed a particular interest in the ethics of war.⁶¹

The theme that runs through Neo-Stoic philosophy is the acceptance of the vicissitudes of fortune, and the determination to remain constant and courageous in the face of the miseries that civil war brought. Justus Lipsius defined constancy as "a right and immoveable strength of mind, neither lifted up nor pressed down with external and casual accidents." It was characterized by patience and the acceptance of suffering without complaint and it was guided by "right reason." Although he was a steadfast Catholic, Montaigne incurred the official displeasure of the Catholic Church because of his frequent

citation of the goddess Fortuna; other Neo-Stoic thinkers such as Justus Lipsius and Guillaume de Vair, Bishop of Lisieux, invoke Divine Providence as a cause of the conjuncture of disasters associated with the civil conflict that Montaigne, in his humanist-classicist style, assigned to fortune. The constancy that Neo-Stoics advocated required faithfulness to established religion, which in France was Catholicism. Coupled with the maintenance of religious uniformity (although Montaigne was a man of tolerant views), Neo-Stoic thinkers insisted on loyalty and obedience to rulers by law established, whatever their imperfections, and an acceptance of ancient custom. Therefore, political and religious resistance could not be condoned.⁶² Late sixteenth-century Neo-Stoics thought that it was of supreme political importance to preserve the ruler's hold on the state in order to preserve political stability. The advancement of justice was of secondary importance, and unjust things might be done to preserve the state and maintain political order and civil peace.⁶³

Montaigne believed that the French civil wars were more cruel than anything to be found in the ancient world. They were worse than interstate conflicts because they obliged everyone to be a soldier and guard his own house. Montaigne seems to be referring to the fact that most of his neighbors were Protestants, and he felt besieged and had ever to be vigilant: "Civil wars are worse in this respect than other wars, that they make us all sentinels in our own houses." Indeed, Montaigne believed that the age in which he lived was so vicious that it was not sufficient to call it an age of iron. A new and more base metal was called for to describe his times.⁶⁴

The cruelty of the French civil wars was intensified by the widespread aristocratic feuds of the period that increased bloodletting beyond what the political and religious disputes would otherwise have warranted. Stuart Carroll says that this endemic feuding had been inherited from the Burgundian-Armagnac wars of the fifteenth century, was made worse by the Italian fashion for dueling, and resulted in a homicide rate that exceeded anything in present-day society. These violent predilections reached their peak during another period of civil war in France—the *Frondes* in the 1650s. Aristocratic feuding replicated the civil wars on a smaller scale, because dueling in the Italian fashion, with rapiers rather than military swords, required the numerous seconds that Italian dueling protocol called for also to participate in duels rather than to merely witness the contest.⁶⁵ Montaigne's disciple, Guillaume du

Vair, offered the advice that armed noblemen should avoid those occasions and places where insults might be offered of a kind that a man of honor would be obliged to answer with violence.⁶⁶ The chivalric revival of the Renaissance intensified the egotism and martial ethos of the military aristocracy in early modern France. In aristocratic circles, it came to be believed that revenge acquired more legitimacy if it was performed in public. Moreover, judges were prepared to accept the argument that murder and mayhem committed while seeking revenge under the aristocratic code of honor constituted mitigating circumstances. Because the Valois kings of France had succeeded in suppressing most of the larger aristocratic vendettas, feuding, and dueling were largely confined to the lesser ranks of the French aristocracy. However, the religious wars turned these conflicts into blood feuds and thus intensified the enmity.⁶⁷

Montaigne's Neo-Stoic values reflected his desire to develop an ethical system that would urge men to restrain their passions and renounce revenge in order to curb the cruelty of war. Like many Frenchmen, he believed that the religious wars reflected a decline in ethical standards.⁶⁸ He insisted that when punishing an enemy or fighting a war, passion and anger could cloud one's judgment. Furthermore, when engaging an enemy in combat, there was no need to demonize him since he might be an honorable man with admirable virtues.

Philosophy wills that in chastising injuries received we keep anger out of it, not so that the vengeance may be less, but on the contrary so that it may be all the better dealt out and heavier; which purposes, so philosophy thinks, this impetuosity hinders. . . . He who bears himself more moderately toward winning and losing is always self-possessed. The less he becomes excited and impassioned about the game, the more advantageously and surely he plays it.⁶⁹

The distinction between robe and sword in sixteenth-century France has probably been exaggerated, as the career of Montaigne suggests. Montaigne always assumed that he belonged to the sword nobility, and saw no reason why one could not combine the careers of being a soldier and a scholar. He insisted that "the proper, the only, the essential form of nobility in France is the military profession." Judges sometimes interrupted their careers to seek military experience, and some of them pursued feuds and engaged in duels. Yet, despite

his condemnation of civil wars and wars of aggression, Montaigne continued to admire soldiers and the military life.

There is no occupation so pleasant as the military one, an occupation both noble in execution (for the strongest, most generous, and proudest of all virtues is valour) and noble in its cause: there is no more just and universal service than the protection of the peace and the greatness of your country. You enjoy the company of so many noble, young, active men, the regular sight of so many tragic spectacles, the freedom of that artless relationship, a manly and unceremonious way of life, the variety of a thousand diverse actions, the brave harmony of martial music which delights your ears and arouses your soul, the honour of this exercise, even its severity and hardship. . . . To fear the common risks that affect so great a throng, not to dare what so many kinds of souls dare, that is for a heart immeasurably weak and base. . . . Death is more abject, lingering and distressing in bed than battle. . . .⁷⁰

Montaigne was clearly ambivalent about warfare. He condemns wars undertaken for conquest and glory, such as the Spanish acquisition of a colonial empire in the New World, but at the same time, he condemns as cowardly and shameful the failure of the kings of Spain to lead those campaigns in person. He held Henry III of France in contempt for his failure to appear on the battlefield, but admired the warlike qualities of Henry of Navarre (later Henry IV), although he did not trust the latter's motives.⁷¹

Montaigne was a humanist with a strong moral sense, and was clearly influenced by Erasmian pacifism. He agreed that the king's primary duty was to dispense justice and condemned those princes who were driven by ambition to expand their territories. While he had a strong aversion to civil conflicts, he also could not condone the chauvinism of a monarch who sought to quell domestic factionalism or strife by undertaking foreign wars. However, Montaigne realized that the uncompromising pacifism of the early sixteenth-century Erasmians had failed to deter warfare, and thus, he accepted the ancient and pessimistic view of human nature that made war seem inevitable. Consequently, he believed that rulers had a duty to prepare their countries for defensive wars, and should be ready to lead their subjects personally in such endeavors.⁷²

Justus Lipsius, a Flemish classical scholar who changed his religion every time he moved his residence, was a disciple of Montaigne but also an admirer

of Machiavelli. Like Montaigne, he came down on the side of morality in political and military affairs. Drawing on the writings of both Seneca and Tacitus, Lipsius sought to devise a system of politics and ethics that was compatible with Christian morality.⁷³ Beginning in the 1570s, Tacitism became a model of humanistic discourse on politics and replaced the earlier Ciceronian humanism. Although Machiavelli had not acknowledged the influence of Tacitus, Justus Lipsius and Michel de Montaigne found that Tacitus's skeptical way of looking at politics suited the age of the civil wars that characterized France and the Netherlands. Tacitus was a classical writer to whom Lipsius and Montaigne could turn and who also provided the moral dimension that was lacking in Machiavelli. Lipsius and Montaigne are also noted for their fusion of secularized political analysis with Tacitean skepticism, which is one source of what we call Neo-Stoicism. But Lipsius retained a belief in Machiavellian "reason of state" and conceded that in an imperfect world where deception pervaded diplomatic relations, the prince must sometimes "play the fox" in order to protect himself and his realm.⁷⁴ Lipsius may have abhorred war, but he recognized that the prince needed military power to keep order at home and to defend the realm. That power needed to be guided by what he called "military prudence." Machiavelli was the only modern writer whom Lipsius recommended to his readers, and he placed him in his pantheon alongside Plato and Aristotle, but he did insist on a Neo-Stoic code of morality in military matters.⁷⁵

Lipsius inspired scholars throughout early modern Europe to study Roman political and military institutions in order to apply Roman practice to contemporaneous problems. Whereas Machiavelli thought that a state's military forces should rest on a citizen militia, Lipsius favored a standing army composed of long-service professional soldiers recruited from among the state's own citizens. The development of the fiscal resources of the early modern state had progressed far enough to make this possible by the end of the sixteenth century. Indeed, Lipsius made military force the foundation of the early modern absolutist state, and at the same time, argued that military questions could not be divorced from foreign and domestic affairs and fiscal resources. Because his prescriptions for military organization, methods of warfare, and the financial underpinnings of these activities were incorporated into a political theory, Gerhard Oestreich believed that Lipsius was the

“philosophical father of the early modern state.” Lipsius’s call for military reforms was taken up by Maurice of Nassau, stadholder of the United Provinces of the Netherlands and captain-general of the States’ Army, and his Nassau cousins, who turned the Dutch Army into an effective and disciplined force during the Eighty Years War (1568–1648), the Dutch war of independence. Lipsius’s distinctive contribution was to lay out a system of discipline derived from Roman models, and to provide an ethical system based on Roman Stoicism.⁷⁶ Unfortunately, one of the chief lessons that European rulers learned from their study of Roman political and military institutions was that imperial expansion led to greatness. Consequently, their imperial expansion helped to keep alive the fires of religious and dynastic warfare. Lipsius believed that the reason Europe was beset with so many wars and rebellions was because it was divided into small parcels ruled by competing dynasties. He pointed out that the same situation had prevailed on the Western European continent before it was incorporated into the Roman Empire. If Europe could achieve both political and religious unity once again, it could enjoy internal peace and put an end to the Turkish threat. To achieve such unity, of course, would have required a considerable degree of coercion on the part of a powerful state with plentiful resources of money and military power, such as the Roman Empire had possessed. This was a view of history that was consistent with the fashionable Tacitism then current in European intellectual circles. The kingdom of France had also maintained a standing army composed of mercenaries from the late medieval period, but because the kings of France wished to employ only experienced soldiers, they were always looking for pretexts for war to provide their soldiers with battle experience. They forgot the lesson to be learned from Rome, Carthage, and the other empires of the ancient world that mercenary soldiers often turn on their own masters.⁷⁷

Lipsius spent much of his career at the University of Leiden, where his writings were thought to provide a suitable basis for the education of the young Maurice of Nassau, so that he might follow in the footsteps of his father William I (“the Silent”), Prince of Orange, as the military leader of the Dutch war of independence from Spain. Lipsius subsequently returned to Catholicism and the Spanish Netherlands, spending his last years at the University of Louvain. However, he never abandoned his Tacitean belief that courts of princes were corrupt, and war was sometimes preferable to peace

when living under rulers such as the Spanish Habsburgs. The lesson could also be learned from reading Lipsius that honor was something to be acquired on the battlefield, not at court—especially a court that had become effeminated like the English court of King James VI and I. King James hated violence, but for the Stoic, violence was part of the human condition and could not be avoided.⁷⁸

Lipsius hoped for a negotiated peace in the Low Countries war, rather than a victory by either side. He disapproved of the policy followed by Alexander Farnese, Prince of Parma, the Spanish military commander, in his attempt to settle the war by conquest and the imposition of religious uniformity. Lipsius had accepted a teaching post at the University of Leiden because William I had declared himself in favor of a degree of religious toleration; Lipsius moved back to Louvain and became a Catholic once again when he perceived that the Spanish government had abandoned Parma's policy of conquest and was open to negotiations. As Lipsius surmised, the Spanish agreed to the Twelve Years' Truce in 1609. Although Lipsius's views on the need for religious uniformity altered according to the circumstances, he remained consistent in arguing that the public observance of religion must always be subordinate to politics. At the same time, he believed that the private observance of religion was a matter of individual choice. These views remind us of why Lipsius was always considered to be a Machiavellian.⁷⁹

Lipsius did adhere to the traditional Roman and medieval criteria for a just war—especially those laid down by St. Thomas Aquinas. Only the prince had the authority to make war, and the only just cause for taking up arms was defense against invasion, but this also included going to the aid of a neighbor or ally who was threatened by tyranny. An enemy's territories might also be invaded to avenge injuries suffered or to recover something wrongfully taken by that enemy, but only after the enemy had been warned and given the opportunity to make restitution. Lipsius also quotes St. Augustine to say that preemptive war may be undertaken against barbarians who are uncivilized heathens—especially if they have previously invaded Christian territory. "Wise men make war that they may have peace. . . ."⁸⁰

One should not enter upon war lightly, Lipsius advised princes, because it was easier to begin a war than to extricate one's kingdom once the war had begun. Moreover, the outcome of a war was always unpredictable, and the

wake of war would leave behind much death and destruction, visited on princes as well as peasants. For this reason, the prince had a Christian obligation to seek good counsel before undertaking a war, and to banish from his court warmongers—those who “are the furies and firebrands of war” and cannot live in peace. Lipsius paraphrased Erasmus: “War is sweet to them that have not had experience thereof.” But then, he cites Caesar Augustus to the effect that while a prince should be peaceful and renounce ambition, he should maintain sufficient military resources to defend his kingdoms.⁸¹

Arguing from the precepts of Homer, Lipsius saw the perfect prince as “a good governor and a worthy warrior,” who was distinguished by courage, military virtue, industry, and military prudence, which meant that he was conversant with the ways of making war and the laws and customs governing the same, and always observed those laws and customs. The prudent prince understood that “all wars are unlawful which are grounded upon no other cause than ambition and covetousness.” Whereas early sixteenth-century Christian humanists had criticized the martial ethos, Lipsius collaborated in the creation of the absolutist states of the seventeenth century, which were certainly not compatible with the values of the Erasmians.⁸² While Lipsius may have longed for peace, and cautioned princes—especially those of smaller states—to avoid war if at all possible by seeking to negotiate a settlement of differences, he spent more time discussing the practical aspects of waging war, such as organization, discipline, strategy, and tactics than he did examining war as a phenomenon. However, he did try to impose a moral dimension on the practical aspects of warfare by discussing the concepts of just war, constraints on war, and how to conclude a war in a manner consistent with justice. In this way, he indirectly contributed to the development of international law in the seventeenth century.⁸³

In his advice to rulers and commanders, observing what he took to be the example of the Roman Republic, Lipsius urged that wars be concluded by an honest peace in which the victors displayed leniency, moderation, and modesty. The losing side should also understand that they had been defeated, but unnecessary destruction of resources, plunder, and spoil were to be avoided. At the same time, he counsels the defeated prince and his subjects to consider well their loss, to accept it, and not to harbor revenge. They should endure their losses with dignity and courage, and be consoled by the knowledge that

reversals of fortune in war and peace often occur. They should learn from their mistakes, and should be prepared to defend themselves more effectively the next time.⁸⁴

In order to find constancy and peace in the midst of war and turmoil, Lipsius insisted that one must abandon belief in chance and fortune and trust to Divine Providence. This was at the heart of Neo-Stoicism.⁸⁵ Thus, unlike the Roman Stoic thinkers such as Seneca, Lipsius also rejected the role of fate, fortune, or destiny, although he sometimes uses the word in a figurative sense, and insisted on the doctrine of Divine Providence in historical causation. In this respect, he differed from Montaigne. However, he was also determined to preserve a role for human free will.⁸⁶ In England, Neo-Stoicism was found in both Protestant and Catholic circles, and derived not only from the influence of Lipsius, but also from the writings, translated into English, of Montaigne, Charron, and Du Vair. Neo-Stoicism, when coupled with the sharp edge of Tacitean inquiry into politics, was particularly influential among the followers of Sir Philip Sidney, Robert Devereux, second Earl of Essex, and in the household of Henry, Prince of Wales.⁸⁷ James VI and I disparaged Neo-Stoic values because he thought that they led men down the path to war, seeking only honor. Yet, he did pay tribute to the constancy and the *invicti animi* (i.e., “the unconquerable spirit”) of the Neo-Stoics.⁸⁸

A perhaps understandable reaction of Neo-Stoic thinkers such as Montaigne to the pervasive warfare of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was to emulate the Stoics of the age of Epicurus and to withdraw from active participation in worldly affairs—to cultivate their gardens in both a figurative and literal sense. The Lipsian method of seeking valid modes of political and moral behavior in an age of perpetual warfare was to employ the tools of scholarship to look for examples from the ancient wisdom of the classical past. As such, it shared much with the broader movement of Erasmian humanism, but Lipsian Neo-Stoicism was intended for those who pursued an active life despite the chaos around them. The Lipsian emphasis on constancy and prudence owed much to the Stoic influence of Seneca, who urged moderation in all things and avoidance of basing one’s thought and behavior on passion. Seneca had taught that the good of the commonwealth must be preferred to what the individual wanted for himself. This was in perfect accord with man’s rational faculties and his sociable inclinations.⁸⁹

Secular explanations of war and peace

The main thrust of Renaissance political thought was to offer secular and rational explanations for the causes of war and peace. There were those in Elizabethan England who did not believe that war was sent as a punishment for sin, but rather could be explained in secular terms, and this view appears to have enjoyed popular support as well. For example, George Gascoigne thought that the main cause of war was “princes’ pride,” which was part of the natural cycle of “war, ruin, poverty, peace, riches, envy, malice and war.” War was part of a self-regulating political system—an explanation that appears to originate with Livy.⁹⁰ Thomas Fenne, on the other hand, rejected this cyclical explanation of war and peace, and insisted that war was caused by the actions of men, and could be prevented by human wisdom.⁹¹ Edmund Spenser was well acquainted with a wide variety of views on war and peace from the classical authors to the Christian Humanists. From St. Augustine, he had learned that wars and conflict sprang from evil and were widespread, and that perfect peace could never be achieved in this life. Yet Spenser continued to believe that peace must be strived for, and he employs combat as a metaphor for moral struggle.⁹² The characters in Shakespeare’s plays sometimes utter antiwar sentiments. This may reflect Shakespeare’s awareness that chivalric culture was in decline, and this posed the danger that such restraints on warfare as granting quarter or the humane treatment of prisoners of war might give way to more barbaric methods.⁹³ In depicting Richard III as a villain, Shakespeare draws on the Senecan concept of Nemesis (personified as the Greek goddess of retribution) and depicts that king as an extremely vengeful person who possessed none of the Stoic virtues. This enhanced Richard’s evil qualities as a villain totally liberated from moral restraint, and thus, empowered his schemes to do evil.⁹⁴ Thomas Nashe thought that the theater could teach important moral lessons to those persons who were inclined to violence and disorder:

There is a certain waste of people for whom there is no use but war. . . . If the affairs of state cannot exhale these corrupt excrements, it is very expedient that they have some light toys to busy their heads withal, cast before them as bones to gnaw upon. . . . [Plays] show the ill success of treason, the fall of hasty climbers, the wretched end of usurpers, the misery of civil dissension, and how just God is evermore in punishing murder.⁹⁵

Wars were begun, said the cleric and scholar Robert Burton, “to make sport for princes, without any just cause”; they arise from vanity, ambition, and the desire for revenge—which were “goodly causes all for plunging the world into an orgy of war and slaughter.” The courtiers and councilors who urge such wars will always be safe at home while soldiers endure the wounds and privations of battle. Burton then reflects on the misguided motives that led men to volunteer to be soldiers, and the ways in which military commanders appeal to their sense of honor and ambition for glory through displays of military dress, martial music, ceremony, and spectacle. He particularly regretted the losses suffered by their wives, families and friends.⁹⁶ Burton expressed his hatred of warfare, and thought that offensive wars were seldom justified. The only just reason for going to war was *ad populi salutem*, that is, “for the safety of the people.” Diplomacy was to be preferred to armed conflict: “Fair means shall first be tried. Peaceful pressure accomplishes more than violence. . . . For strategy can inflict greater blows on the enemy than uncalculating force.”⁹⁷

Much as Burton hated war, he had to admit that a civil society “lies under the protection of warlike virtues, because whensoever there is any suspicion of tumult, all our arts cease.” Indeed, “fighting men are more useful to the state than husbandmen.” Burton concedes the need for standing armies and a “prepared navy”; the necessity of providing for the sinews of war should be recognized by dedicating a portion of the revenues of the commonwealth for supporting such standing forces, anticipating the inevitable costs of war, as well as subsidizing “chaste sports” and exercises that prepare men’s bodies for the physical exertions and hardships of war.⁹⁸

Burton was a Utopian and severely criticized contemporaneous warfare, but he was, like other Neo-Stoics, far from being a pacifist. He believed in just wars—especially those directed against non-Christians who had invaded Christian territories—and he insisted on the necessity of always being prepared for war. Yet, it must be said that he also believed in moderation and restraint in warfare. He praised the Stoic principle that a wise and prudent man will avoid all manner of passions and disturbing thoughts, and subdue them by self-discipline and well guided reading so as to avoid violent actions.⁹⁹

Throughout the Renaissance, there were widely differing views concerning whether war was a natural part of the human condition. The study of history,

whether of the ancient world or the contemporary world of the Renaissance, certainly suggested that war was the main theme of historical writing. It was also the favorite theme of poets and dramatists. Thus, the study of history offered little help in trying to imagine a world in which peace reigned. Some humanists looked to the concept of a golden age for help in constructing a vision of a world without war, or at least a model society on a smaller scale from which violent conflict had been banished. But the humanists of the Renaissance could not agree on whether a golden age had ever existed, where it might have existed, or when. The poets of the ancient world had not been in agreement on this question, and the writers and political propagandists of the Renaissance only confused matters further by inventing panegyrics concerning new golden ages in order to flatter their princely patrons.

Machiavelli and Guicciardini would have none of this myth-making, and they urged princes and their advisors to confront the harsh realities of the European world of the Renaissance, and told them they had no chance to compete, or even survive, unless they constantly prepared for war and saw to it that their subjects did likewise. If a state remained constantly in a posture of military preparedness, and its citizens maintained the exercise of arms, good government would inevitably follow. Although popular participation in the government and defense of the state might occasion some turbulence, Machiavelli and his classical republican followers did not see this as a serious threat to political stability. Depending on an army of mercenaries presented a far greater threat to political stability and liberty.

Machiavelli's thoroughly secular analysis of politics and the art of war brought a new clarity to the study of these subjects, and was widely admired even by those who were troubled by his indifference to both divine and natural law. All humanists, even those of the Erasmian persuasion, were ultimately prepared to admit that all political societies had the right to defend themselves from their enemies, but they were not prepared to accept the disposition of Machiavelli and the classical republicans to expansionism and empire-building.

The Erasmians launched an attack on the political realism and the glorification of martial values that characterized the Machiavellians, and hoped to devise an educational program that would wean the aristocratic classes from such values. Although Erasmus had good reason to distrust the diplomatic practices of the Renaissance, he did very much wish to induce princes to try

negotiation and arbitration to settle differences before resorting to war. To accomplish these ends, the Erasmian humanists had hoped to draw up a whole new curriculum of studies aimed at those aristocrats who were likely to enter the service of rulers that incorporated the best of classical learning and Christian ethics. Such Christian humanist principles hopefully might influence princes to abandon their bad habits and pursuits of war, hunting, gambling, and the like for the more regal duties of governing their kingdoms and dispensing justice. The Erasmian program of reforms meant abandoning much intellectual and cultural baggage from the past: This included the Roman concept of just war, the Augustinian doctrine that wars were sent to punish men for their sins, the belief that war provided a means for validating honor, acquiring glory, and demonstrating prowess and manliness. Ultimately, Erasmian pacifism failed because it lacked a practical program for implementing reforms, it alarmed many theologians sufficiently to cause Erasmus's works to be condemned, while governments of the period simply ignored what he had to say. The rulers of the early modern period remained devoted to war and imperial expansion.

A more practical variety of humanism was Neo-Stoicism, a revival of Roman Stoicism associated with Michel de Montaigne and Justus Lipsius. A former soldier and a lawyer, Montaigne withdrew from high public office, condemned the Huguenot political theories of resistance that he blamed for the outbreak of the French religious and civil wars, and retired to his estate to write about the virtues of tolerance and constancy in troublesome times. He was particularly attentive to the problems of the ethics of warfare. Montaigne's Neo-Stoic philosophy, like that of the Flemish humanist Justus Lipsius, required acceptance of the constituted authority of church and state. Although Montaigne could never condone offensive wars or rebellion against the prince or church, and condemned acts of passion or revenge and feuding, he continued to admire the military life and thought kings must display the appropriate military virtues and appear on the battlefield to lead their armies in person.

Justus Lipsius had a widespread following among military men because he succeeded in combining Machiavelli's political realism concerning the needs of the Renaissance state in a dangerous world with a determination to apply Christian morality to political and military problems. Lipsius urged on his readers a close study of Roman political and military institutions in order to

adapt ancient practice to the contemporaneous questions of how to raise, organize, finance, and discipline standing armies led by a professional officer corps. Lipsius spent much of his academic career in the Dutch Republic where he provided inspiration for Maurice of Nassau's reforms of the Dutch army. Lipsius adhered to the traditional Roman definition of what constitutes a just war, and not trusting the corruption and sycophancy of court life, he wished to see warmongers banished from the prince's council. War must be a last resort after first attempting diplomacy.

Lipsian Neo-Stoicism had adherents among both Protestants and Catholics in mainland Europe and the British Isles. Its values were sufficient to make men perceive war as an evil that was destructive of all the civilized arts. Neo-Stoic values taught men to restrain their passions and thirst for revenge, and thus, furnished a moral underpinning for limitations on the ferocity of warfare. But it did not give them the moral vision to imagine a world without war.