LSE IDEAS public lecture

Each Age Gets the Bloodshed it Needs: 20,000 years of violence

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Hashtag for Twitter users: #LSEMorris
Each Age Gets the Bloodshed it Needs:
20,000 Years of Violence

Ian Morris
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2.7 pounds of magic: the modern human brain
1. Bad news: violence is an evolutionary adaptation

2. Good news: rates of violent death have declined by 90 percent across the last 20,000 years

3. Great news: we know why this has happened and how to make the trend continue
1. Bad news: violence is an evolutionary adaptation

2. Good news: rates of violent death have declined by 90 percent across the last 20,000 years
Aboriginal Australian group (late nineteenth century)
Yanomami club fight, Venezuela (1960s)
A massacre in the Soviet Union, 1942
1. Bad news: violence is an evolutionary adaptation
2. Good news: rates of violent death have declined by 90 percent across the last 20,000 years
3. Great news: we know why this has happened and how to make the trend continue
War! What is it Good For?

Profile Books, 2014
1. By fighting wars, people have created larger, more organized, internally pacified societies that have reduced the risks that their members will die violently.
Not saints: Assyrian king and his generals, 7th century BC
rates of violent death

Stone Age 20th century Early 21st century

percentage

Series1
Series2
Series3
1. By fighting wars, people have created larger, more organized, internally pacified societies that have reduced the risks that their members will die violently.

2. War is the worst way to create larger, safer societies, but is pretty much the only way humans have found.
COMMITTED TO IMPROVING THE STATE OF THE WORLD
Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes, 1651
1. By fighting wars, people have created larger, more organized, internally pacified societies that have reduced the risks that their members will die violently.

2. War is the worst way to create larger, safer societies, but is pretty much the only way humans have found.

3. Over the long run, the larger, safer societies created by war have made humanity richer.
The waste land: Romans burning a Dacian village, c. AD 160
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3. Over the long run, the larger, safer societies created by war have made humanity richer.

4. War has been good for something—so good, in fact, that it is now putting itself out of business.
Happy families: Jane Goodall and the Kasekela chimpanzees, Gombe Park (Tanzania), 1965
Red in tooth and claw: chimpanzees at war
Hoka-hoka: bonobo genito-genital manipulation (as primatologists call it)
The descent of man
The “lucky latitudes”: where the densest concentrations of domesticable plants and animals evolved at the end of the Ice Age.
Incorporation: the oldest known example, on the Narmer Palette (Egypt, c. 3100 BC)
The Glasgow School of Economics: Adam Smith, 1723-90
GDP (1990 international dollars, billions)
Fifty years ago—three years after the Berlin Wall was built, two years after the Cuban Missile Crisis
Look, no hands! For the first time ever, a robot (X-47B) fighter plane lands itself on and takes off again from the USS George H. W. Bush (May 13, 2013)
GDP (1990 international dollars, billions)

- Britain
- France
- Germany
- Japan
- USA

Date:
- 1820
- 1840
- 1860
- 1880
- 1900
- 1913
Will rates of violent death continue to decline across the next 100 years?

A. Yes
B. No
Is the European Union really an example of a bigger, safer, more prosperous society that has formed without war or the threat of war?

A. Yes
B. Maybe
C. No
Will the breakdown of the British globocop between the 1870s and 1910s prove to be a good analogy for the breakdown of the American globocop between the 2000s and 2040s?

A. Yes
B. In some ways
C. No
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