

The Worth of War


Benjamin Ginsberg

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Although war is terrible and brutal, history shows that it has been a great driver of human progress. So argues political scientist Benjamin Ginsberg in this incisive, well-researched study of the benefits to civilization derived from armed conflict. Ginsberg makes a convincing case that war selects for and promotes certain features of societies that are generally held to represent progress. These include rationality, technological and economic development, and liberal forms of government. Contrary to common perceptions that war is the height of irrationality, Ginsberg persuasively demonstrates that in fact it is the ultimate test of rationality. He points out that those societies best able to assess threats from enemies rationally and objectively are usually the survivors of warfare. History also clearly reveals the technological benefits that result from war—ranging from the sundial to nuclear power. And in regard to economics, preparation for war often spurs on economic development; by the same token, nations with economic clout in peacetime usually have a huge advantage in times of war. Finally, war and the threat of war have encouraged governments to become more congenial to the needs and wants of their citizens because of the increasing reliance of governments on their citizens’ full cooperation in times of war. However deplorable the realities of war are, the many fascinating examples and astute analysis in this thought-provoking book will make readers reconsider the unmistakable connection between war and progress.

“A book that suggests that there are many benefits from war may seem abhorrent to most people, but Benjamin Ginsberg uses many interesting and convincing arguments to make his case. This volume, however, is much more than a treatise on the benefits of war. It gives a detailed discussion of technological advances, economic developments, and changes in government that have occurred in the past as a result of war. One of the most interesting chapters is the last, titled, ‘Beating Swords into Malign Plowshares.’ It gives a detailed account of government surveillance in the United States, starting with Herbert Hoover through the recent activities of the National Security Agency. This is material everyone should read. All in all, it is an excellent, well-researched volume that is highly thought-provoking.” —Barry Parker, author of *The Physics of War* “Surprising.... Unconventional.... certain to stir controversy....” —Publishers Weekly
About the Author Benjamin Ginsberg is the David Bernstein Professor of Political Science and Director of the Center for Advanced Governmental Studies at the Johns Hopkins University. He is the author of more than twenty books, including *The Value of Violence*; *How the Jews Defeated Hitler: Exploding the Myth of Jewish Passivity in the Face of Nazism*; *The Fall of the Faculty: The Rise of the All-Administrative University and Why it Matters*; *Do the Jews Have a Future in America?*; and *Political Science as Public Philosophy*, co-edited with Gwendolyn Mink.