

Deconstructing Arguments

DIRECTIONS: Read the article. Then, on the next page, deconstruct the author's argument.

Nobody thinks that war is a good thing, and yet many people have supported many wars, throughout history. Why? Because competition, and therefore conflict, is inherent in human nature.

War is often driven by politics, and politics are driven by values, and therein lies a problem that is at least as old as recorded western philosophy. Since the days of Aristotle people have been arguing about whether or not good and bad, right and wrong, are absolutes, or if they can never be more than relative within whatever context they are being considered. While it seems to be human nature to think that one's own beliefs have (or should have, or deserve to have) a universal application, the truth is that human beliefs vary widely, even within a common culture. One need look no further than at the United States during a presidential election year to see the extent to which people can be divided by values. And when you begin to look at differences in values across countries and cultures, the amount of variance is staggering. Take, for instance, World War II, which could be characterized as a war of values between those who believed in the supremacy of the Aryan race and those who believed in basic human rights for all, regardless of race. When people are already being killed as result of the application of a value system, how can refraining from war as the application of a value system be anything but complicit in the atrocity? Such extremes illustrate the occasional/ necessity of war.

But values aren't the only thing that bring human beings into conflict. Wars have been fought over land, and over power, for as long as there have been human beings, and some futurists predict that our next great wars will be fought over a scarcity of resources. Whenever there is something that is wanted by more than one human being, or by more than one group of human beings, conflict is inevitable. War is simply a large-scale conflict.

In short, war is not so much a choice as it a natural outgrowth of our natures. We like to think that because we have a "higher consciousness" than other animals that we ought to be able to think ourselves out of something like war, but the truth is that we are thinking ourselves into it, all the time, and that war is a consequence of our higher consciousness. The alternative is an every-man-for-himself mentality like you see in the animal kingdom. Except that even in the animal kingdom, the higher you go up the evolutionary scale, the less you see violent individualism, like, for example, with troupes of some primates; there you see . . . war.

1. What is the author's claim? _____

Name _____ **Evaluating Arguments**

2. List the reason and evidence the author uses to support the claim.

3. Is the argument convincing? Why or why not?

