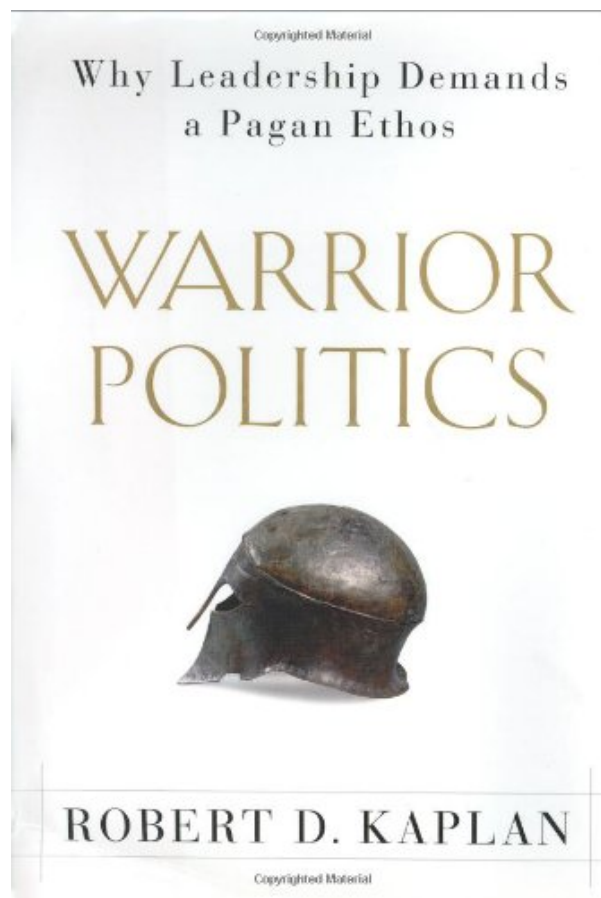


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# WARRIOR POLITICS



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(Jan.)Forecast: Kaplan's credentials, combined with his call for a strong and unambiguous foreign policy, should draw attention. Blurbs from Henry Kissinger and former Secretary of Defense William J. Perry will help.

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Aiming to advise foreign policymakers confronting global capitalism in a politically fragmenting world, Balkan Ghosts author Kaplan surveys the literature of leadership from Herodotus to Gen. George Marshall.

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- Sales Rank: #371861 in Books
- Brand: Random House
- Published on: 2001-12
- Released on: 2001-12-26
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.43" h x .74" w x 5.56" l,
- Binding: Hardcover
- 224 pages

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Not my cup of tea, but I don't regret buying it ...

By B. Alcat

"Warrior politics" is a very well-written book, quite short, and not boring at all. Kaplan believes that our modern world is merely a continuation of the ancient world in many things, and thus capable of taking advantage of lessons already taught by important philosophers and statesmen. There is a quotation at the beginning of this book, near to the title, that somehow sums up Kaplan's idea: "Anyone wishing to see what it is to be must consider what has been: all the things of this world in every era have their counterparts in ancient times" (Machiavelli).

The author delves in an engaging way into the works of Thucydides, Livy, Machiavelli, Hobbes and

Churchill, among others. He draws "lessons" from their works, and tries to apply them to the events that were happening in the world more or less at the time this book was first published (2002).

Do you want an example?. Well, for instance Kaplan reminds the reader that Machiavelli said that a policy is virtuous only if it is effective, and he also tells us about the distinction that author made between private virtue and pagan virtue. According to Machiavelli, pagan virtue (pragmatic and merciless, but not amoral) was the kind of virtue that should prevail in matters of the State. After this "theoretic" travel, Kaplan applies the lessons we learn to current affairs... He does this with all the philosophers or statesmen he studies, and it is at that point that I generally don't like his conclusions.

All the same, I want to highlight the fact that I found some of his observations strikingly accurate, especially those regarding military strategy. Kaplan says that even though many believe that war will become more "clean" and less dangerous for the "professional soldiers" thanks to technology, that will not always be the case. In some occasions, professional soldiers will have to face "warriors" who have nothing to lose, and who think in a totally different way. From Kaplan's point of view, USA's strategy will have to adjust to that truth with "warrior politics", because that is a reality that cannot be denied any longer.

Robert Kaplan is far from being an author with whom I agree on everything... As a matter of fact, I dislike many of the conclusions he reaches in "Warrior politics". I think that he ends up placing too much emphasis on the role of force in the international arena, and doesn't give its due importance to "soft power".

Despite that, I don't regret buying this book, because Kaplan makes some points I consider quite interesting. Also, and probably more important, I was so much against some of the statements he made that I ended up thinking why I believed that those statements weren't true. Due to that, now I am more certain of my opinions, and have quite a few reasons to back them.

On the whole, I think that this is the kind of book that "shakes" you, whether you agree with it or not. As a result, it is thought-provoking, and a book I have no problems recommending to you :)

Belen Alcat

3 of 5 people found the following review helpful.

Nothing changes.

By Paul James Harper

I have been a fan of Robert D. Kaplan since I heard him speak on a BBC television documentary entitled "Pulp Future"....This led me to his Atlantic Monthly article "The Coming Anarchy".

I tend to be a bit more optimistic about human nature than Kaplan and a bit more pessemistic about the benevolence of governments. I tend towards the libertarian side of the political divide.

Kaplan's present work is valuable in seeking out common themes that tend to happen repeatedly in history. The book also serves as an introduction to many ancient classics. This is the biggest problem with buying one of Kaplan's books. I end up going through the notes and the excellent bibliography in order to seek out and read from his original sources. This depletes my wallet considerably while continueing to enlighten me!! I was aware of Kaplan's influence especially with the military. I was a bit surprised by the number of business executives reading his works although he has been a featured author with the Global Business Network bookclub...

10 of 13 people found the following review helpful.

Study the Past to Prepare for the Future!

By doughron

In this little tract which is part philosophy, part history, Robert Kaplan makes the case for a foreign policy

based on state interest and not on notions of international law or higher morality. In building his case for a "realpolitik foreign policy" Kaplan utilizes wars and diplomatic maneuvers of the past going as far back as the Peloponnesian War. It is his thesis that human nature does not change and the lessons learned more than 2,000 years ago are still applicable today. He also discusses and critiques a number of political and ethical philosophies. These are presented in a cursory but easily comprehensible way. Kaplan's presentation of Machiavelli, Sun Tzu, Thucydides, Hobbes, Kant and others are interesting and fair. He draws very specific conclusions which sometimes seem contradictory. For example, Kaplan is highly critical of "determinism" be it of the religious kind he associates with Christianity, the liberal kind which holds that the human condition will inevitably improve, or the ideological kind associated with Marx. On the other hand, he is critical of those who would refuse to observe and pay heed to the lessons of the past in predicting future events. Kaplan saves himself, however, by always qualifying his statements and never espousing absolutes. Kaplan starts from the premise that American style liberalism is a positive that should be expanded. He argues, however, that without political stability, liberalism cannot take hold. In Kaplan's view it is short sighted to insist on elections in a country which would just elect a tyrant. Better to have a benign dictator who can help advance the aims of society. Kaplan's detractors use these views to show that he is not a democrat but a lover of dictatorships. This is not so. Kaplan recognizes the reality that most of the world is not politically or socially mature enough for an American style system. He believes that the United States must promote its own interests, ruthlessly if necessary. Otherwise, we will undermine our ability to ultimately improve world conditions. Thus, Kaplan's philosophy is not the promotion of selfish interests but the pursuit of self-interest for the purpose of ultimately promoting the greater good. Kaplan calls this "Pagan ethos." By this, he simply means a form of Greco-Roman real politik which he observed from reading the works of Thucydides and Livy. Winston Churchill stands as the ultimate "Pagan Leader" and he uses Churchill's "River War." as an early demonstration of Churchill's thinking. I found this book to be a fascinating introduction to a lot of philosophical ideas and a new way of looking at a number of important thinkers. I agree with Kaplan's notion that great powers must act, at times ruthlessly, to promote their own interests and that such action is a sign of virtue not evil. A good example is the allied victory in WWII which brought unimaginable suffering to individuals but without a doubt brought about a greater good. I agree with Kaplan that Wilsonian diplomacy based on international law is nothing more than a grand illusion. All diplomacy is about power. The thing I don't agree with is the degree of reliance Kaplan places on the past. There is a lot of difference between the U.S. today and ancient Athens or Rome. We can learn useful lessons from the past but, as Churchill did, we must be wise enough to distinguish the past from the present where warranted. There is an enormous amount of meat in this little book. I have focused here on a few things Kaplan discusses but other reviews have focused on completely different things. This book is thought provoking and worth reading. I recommend it.

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