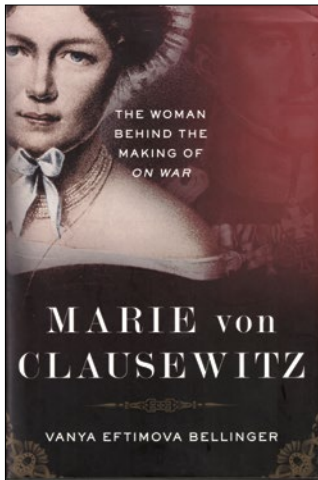


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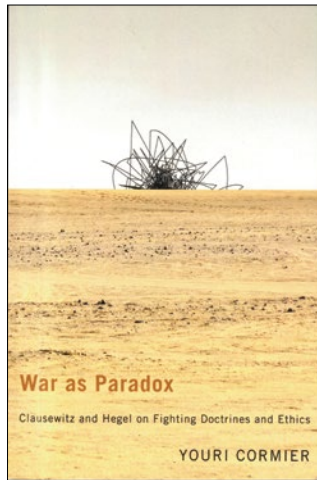
Marie von Clausewitz: The Women behind the Making of "On War"

by Vanya Eftimova Bellinger

New York: Oxford University Press, 2016

xiv + 299 pages, US\$29.95

ISBN 978-0-19-022543-8



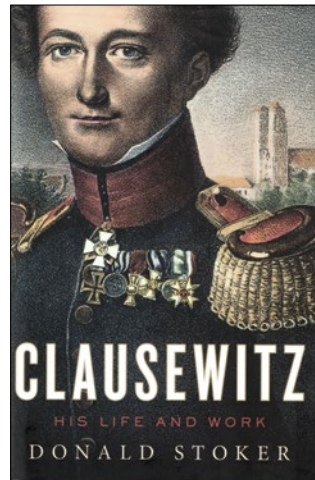
War as Paradox: Clausewitz and Hegel on Fighting Doctrines and Ethics

by Youri Cormier

Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016

315 pages, NP

ISBN 978-0-7735-4768-1 (paper)



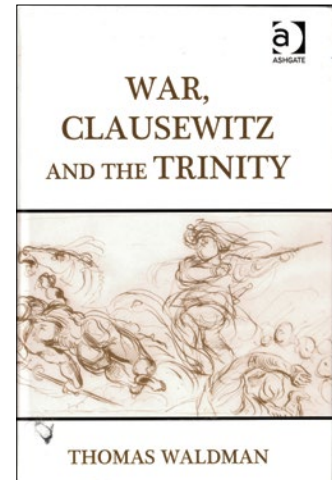
Clausewitz: His Life and Work

by Donald Stoker

New York: Oxford University Press, 2014

xvi + 354 pages, US\$27.95

ISBN 978-0-19935794-9



War, Clausewitz, and the Trinity

by Thomas Waldman

Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2013

203 pages, NP

ISBN 978-1409451396

Carl von Clausewitz Reviewed

by Bill Bentley

These four recent books on the Prussian General Carl von Clausewitz (1780-1831) attest yet again to this master theorist's ongoing interest to practitioners and scholars in the fields of strategy, international relations, military theory, and civil-military relations. His masterpiece, *On War*, has been of enormous influence worldwide ever since its posthumous publication in the 1830s. There have been innumerable testimonials to its impact, but four will suffice here to make the point. According to Major-General JFC Fuller, Clausewitz rises to the level of a Galileo, a Euler, or a Newton. T.E. Lawrence (of Arabia) considered Clausewitz the intellectual master of all writers on the subject of war, and the British philosopher W.B. Gallie is of the view that *On War* was the first and to date, the only book of outstanding intellectual eminence on the subject of war. Finally, one of the leading strategic theorists still writing today, Colin Gray, has concluded that for as long as humankind engages in warfare, Clausewitz must rule.¹

The books under review here fall into two distinct categories; Bellinger's and Stoker's are conventional biographies, whereas Cormier and Waldman address Clausewitz's work, especially

On War, from a detailed, philosophical perspective. Bellinger's work is particularly interesting as she uses a large number of hitherto undiscovered letters exchanged between Clausewitz and his wife Marie, or between close friends from the moment they met in 1802 until his death in 1831. On one level, Bellinger's book is a love story. The story the letters tell is of a couple deeply in love and sharing a deep interest in philosophy, history, politics, literature, and the visual arts. On another level, Bellinger gives us a much more personal picture of Clausewitz, the man influenced rather profoundly by his highly intelligent, politically astute, and sensitive wife. This then fills in some gaps in Stoker's more traditional account of Clausewitz's life, which takes us through the great Prussian's military career, detailing his role in many of the great campaigns and battles of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars (1792-1815). Both provide useful, *sometimes* new, and *always* insightful accounts of Clausewitz's activities and work during the period of writing *On War* from 1815-1830.

Cormier and Waldman focus, not on the *man*, but on his *work*. They seek the major influences that shaped Clausewitz's theorizing, and ultimately, the philosophical architecture that grounds the final theory.

Fundamentally, this involves explaining the origins and philosophical rationale of Clausewitz's distinction between *absolute war* and *real war*, and the meaning and importance of the "trinity" at the core of Clausewitz's definition of war as 'merely the continuation of policy with the admixture of other means.'

Cormier is particularly interested in establishing direct links between Clausewitz and the German philosopher Immanuel Kant, and subsequently, Georg Hegel. Although he devotes about the first half of *War as Paradox* dealing with the Kantian influence, he does not succeed in making a convincing case. Bellinger probably comes much closer to the reality of this relationship when she concludes that "...in all probability Clausewitz probably never read Kant's treatises but came into contact with them through the lectures of Johann Kiesewetter. Clausewitz's tendency to use precise definitions and abstract notions in particular seems to correspond to Kant's emulation of the method of the sciences in philosophy as instructed by Kiesewetter."²

Cormier makes a more compelling case concerning Hegel's impact on Clausewitz. This is not surprising for a number of reasons; perhaps not the least of which is that they knew each other well in Berlin during the 1820s when Hegel was a professor at the University of Berlin. Also, as Christopher Clarke informs us, "Hegel's influence was profound and lasting. His arguments diffused swiftly into the culture."³ Cormier makes a strong case that Clausewitz's dialectical thinking was derived from Hegel. However, even though Hegel is the thinker best known for the concept of 'dialectical development,' the idea was formulated by Hölderlin, Novalis, and Schlegel long before him. Clausewitz knew all three well.⁴

Equally significant in tracing the relationship between Hegel and Clausewitz is their perspective of war itself, and its role in the state. According to Hegel, "...just as the blowing of the winds preserves the sea from the foulness which would be the result of a prolonged calm, so also corruption in nations would be the product of prolonged, let alone, perpetual peace." Hegel thus concludes that in peacetime, bourgeois life is the bog of humanity, and that it is only through war that bourgeois man is elevated above his own self-interest to concern himself with the state.⁵ Compare this with Clausewitz: "Today, practically no means other than war will educate a people in the spirit of boldness: and it has to be waged under daring leadership. Nothing else will counter the softness and desire for ease which debase the people in terms of growing prosperity and increasing trade. A people and nation can hope for a strong position in the world only if national character and familiarity with war fortify each other by continual interaction."⁶

Most telling of all regarding the relationship between Hegel and Clausewitz is the use of the trinity construct to ground their philosophy around the concepts of *the absolute* and *the real*. For Hegel, Absolute Spirit (the Ideal) is represented by the trinity of Religion, Art, and Philosophy. In the real world, the Absolute manifests itself most fully in the State which in turn consists of the trinity of the Family, Civil Society, and the State. Furthermore, the State, for Hegel, was an organism possessing will, rationality and purpose. Its destiny, like any living thing, was to change, grow, and progressively develop. Hegel vehemently rejected the metaphorical machine-state favoured by the high Enlightenment

theorists on the grounds that it treated free human beings as if they were mere cogs in its mechanism.⁷

Turning to Clausewitz, this military theorist posited the concept of Absolute War (the Ideal) represented by the trinity of Passion, Chance, and Reason. In the real world, these elements or 'moments' were associated mainly to People, the Army, and by Politics or Policy. For Clausewitz, an army should not be conceptualized as a machine but as a conscious, willed organism with its own collective genius. It is important to note here that around 1800, the word 'politics' had taken on the meaning of the conduct of external affairs. Much of what we today consider 'politics' was then deemed to be 'administration,' the domain of worthy bureaucrats perhaps, but certainly not a concern of aspiring statesmen.⁸ In a moment, we will see that this metaphor of an organism is ubiquitous in all Romantic philosophers, historians, and artists.

Thomas Waldman takes on the task of analyzing Clausewitz's Trinity in detail. To begin with, the Trinity is not merely a triad or three elements associated with each other, but, like the theological trinity, Clausewitz's is 'three-into-one.'⁹ Waldman reveals convincingly why and how the superficially reductionist primary and secondary trinities (passion, chance, and reason: people, army, and policy) are nothing of the kind when they are properly understood. According to Colin Gray, "...to the best of my knowledge, no one has unpacked Clausewitz's theory of war more convincingly than does Waldman."¹⁰ With great skill and in accessible prose, Waldman presents the subject of war in Clausewitz's Trinitarian terms with the respect for complexity, nuance, ambiguity, and uncertainty that the master's treatment implies. Waldman's explanation of Clausewitz's theory of war is a major contribution to the provision of better theory for better practice.

The striking similarities between Clausewitz and Hegel can only be fully understood and appreciated in the context of Romanticism, and especially, the more politically-oriented German Romanticism. Romanticism as an intellectual movement should be understood as an overwhelming international tendency which swept across Europe and Russia at the end of the 18th Century and at the beginning of the 19th Century (roughly 1770-1840). It was in reaction to earlier neo-classicism, mechanism and rationalism embodied in the Enlightenment (roughly 1687-1789). It was a synthesizing nature that transformed the entire character of thought, sensibility, and art. Romantic scientists and philosophers were determined to look at nature and society holistically, to see 'wholes' and relationships, rather than discrete events and phenomenon. In other words, they rejected the analytical, reductionist, and linear approach to breaking things apart to study that was so characteristic of the methodology embedded in Enlightenment philosophy.

Donald Stoker's biography clearly detects the influence of the Romantics on Clausewitz when he observes that "...the passions of German Romanticism, the harkening to the classical age, fed upon and powered nationalist's ideas among many German intellectuals." Clausewitz read the works of these writers – Schiller, Fichte, Hegel, and Goethe being perhaps the most important – and soaked up the intellectual passions of his age. His own zealous temperament seems to have made their ideas (the Romantics) particularly attractive to Clausewitz.¹¹

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However, it is Bellinger's biography of Marie von Clausewitz that most clearly illustrates the deep and prolonged friendships and associations with many of the leading Romantic philosophers, writers, artists, and statesmen. These relationships developed first in Berlin during the period 1802-1806, then again in Berlin from 1810 to 1812. Different friends were made in Coblenz during the couples' stay there between 1815 and 1818. Finally, during the actual writing of *On War* between 1818 and 1830 in Berlin, the Clausewitzs' remained both socially and intellectually active with numerous Romantic personalities. The list of these, both individuals and couples, is a long and impressive testimony in the first instance to Marie's noble status and close connections to Prussia's royal court. First and foremost among the friends were Baron von Stein, first Prussian Chancellor, Fichte, Hegel, and the Schlegel brothers, August and Frederick. Others included Goethe, the jurist von Savigny, the famed historian von Ranke, von Humboldt, Germaine de Stael, the philosopher Hölderlin, and the theologian Schleiermacher.

Mere friendship, of course, does not in itself demonstrate intellectual influence, so we need to look more closely at the common intellectual structure shared by all these Romantic thinkers. The Romantics were Idealists, and they developed a form of idealism known as Absolute Idealism in an attempt to supersede Kant's Transcendental Idealism. Hegel accepts Kant's insight into what is consciousness or spirit, and also that this consciousness is fundamentally contradictory. He rejects, however, Kant's transcendental solution. The solution, in his view, lies not in *absolute separation*, but in *absolute reconciliation*, not in the distinction of a movement of logical realism and/or the phenomenal realm of consciousness, but in a single phenomenology of spirit. This latter form of idealism, Absolute Idealism, was developed primarily by Hegel, Friedrich Schlegel, and Friedrich von Hardenberg, and it advocates doctrine that everything is a part of the single universal organism, or that everything *conforms to* or is an *appearance of its purpose, design or idea*. The opposition between the real and the idea, the mental and physical, the Particular and the Universal disappears.

In Romantic (or Absolute) Idealism, a Particular is first in order of existence, since to know that a thing *exists*, we must know something about particular or determinate properties. This is because if it exists, a Universal exists in Particulars. A Universal, however, is first in order of explanation because to know what a thing is we must be able to specify some of its properties, some features that it shares in common with other things. Universals do not exist in the spatial – temporal world as such, but are only manifested in particular things. Goethe, for example, in the field of botany, argued that while the outward forms may change in countless ways, the idea of a formative principle remains the same. Goethe called this formative principle the *Urpflanze*. The archetypical plant is not a specific plant anywhere in nature, nor is it to be understood temporally. Von Ranke referred to this universal in history as the *Ideen*: other philosophers referred to the same concept as the *Begriff* or *Notion*.¹²

The *Begriff* is the genuine first and things are what they are through the action of the *Begriff*, immanent in them and revealing itself in them.¹³

This then brings us to the crux of the matter. Absolute War for Clausewitz was the *Notion, Begriff*, or Universal. It is to be understood in terms of the three elements of the Trinity – Passion, Chance, and Reason. Real war is the Particular and always involves the people, the Army and its commander, and Policy. The manifestation of the Absolute appears as the real world and throughout history in many forms. Therefore, the nature of war is eternal, but its characteristics vary widely. When war appears in history, it is always shaped, conditioned, and restrained by contingency, chance, political conditions, and, above all, by Friction.

Clearly, the argument here is that Clausewitz received much of his inspiration when conceiving and writing *On War* from two main sources – his actual experience of the subject, as chronicled in Bellinger's and Stoker's biographies, and by the prevailing *geist*, or intellectual spirit of the age, German Romanticism. Many, if not most, of the practitioners and scholars in the field stop short of this conclusion by virtue of the simple fact that they have not delved deeply into the subject of Romanticism as a study in itself.

The literature on the subject of Romanticism is extensive, and readers interested in assessing this reviewer's hypothesis regarding the relationship between Clausewitz and German Romanticism can readily access this material. The best in this area include: Frederick Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative*; Tim Blanning, *The Romantic Revolution*; Maurice Cranston, *The Romantic Movement*; Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*; and Robert Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe*.

Dr. Bill Bentley, MSM, CD, Ph.D, is currently the Senior Staff Officer Professional Concepts at MILPERSGEN Headquarters in Kingston, Ontario.

NOTES

1. Colin S. Gray, *Another Bloody Century: Future Warfare* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2005), p.39.
2. Vanya Bellinger, *Marie von Clausewitz* (London: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 43.
3. Christopher Clark, *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and fall of Prussia 1600-1947* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), p. 431.
4. Frederick Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle against Subjectivism 1781-1801* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 367.
5. Michael Gillespie, *Hegel, Heidegger and the Ground of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 41.
6. *Carl von Clausewitz On War*, Peter Peret and Michal Howard (eds) (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 192.
7. Clarke, p. 431.
8. Brendan Simms, *The Impact of Napoleon: Prussian High Politics, Foreign Policy and the Crisis of the Executive 1797-1806* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1997) p. 137.
9. Hew Strachen, *Carl von Clausewitz's On War: A Biography* (New York: United Monthly Press, 2007), p.178.
10. Thomas Waldman, *War, Clausewitz and the Trinity* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2013), p. viii.
11. Donald Stoker, *Clausewitz: His Life and Work* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), p.67.
12. David Seaman (ed) *Goethe's Way of Science* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998), p. 75.
13. Thomas Wartenberg, "Hegel's Idealism," in Frederick Beiser, *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press).