1. Examine the relevance of human nature in the study of peace and conflict.

Ans: Peace and conflict studies is a social science field that identifies and analyzes violent and nonviolent behaviours as well as the structural mechanisms attending conflicts (including social conflicts), with a view towards understanding those processes which lead to a more desirable human condition. A variation on this, peace studies (irenology), is an interdisciplinary effort aiming at the prevention, de-escalation, and solution of conflicts by peaceful means, thereby seeking "victory" for all parties involved in the conflict. This is in contrast to military studies, which has as its aim the efficient attainment of victory in conflicts, primarily by violent means to the satisfaction of one or more, but not all, parties involved. Disciplines involved may include philosophy, political science, geography, economics, psychology, sociology, international relations, history, anthropology, religious studies, and gender studies, as well as a variety of others. Relevant sub-disciplines of such fields, such as peace economics, may be regarded as belonging to peace and conflict studies also.

Humans are naturally aggressive; no, aggression is learned. War is genetically based; no it is not. The answer is not one or the other but both. The polarities turn out to be false polarities. In these questions, there are no absolutes; everything is a matter of degree. In seeing only absolutes, one misses the critical degrees, yet it is in these degrees that lie the answers to the questions of how humanity has gotten along in the past and how we can get along in the future.

The debate, often fierce and emotional, unfortunately obscures where, in fact, scientists and scholars do agree. Few would disagree that humans are both capable of violence and capable of controlling violence. Most would acknowledge that humans sometimes live in a sustained condition of war but also sometimes live in a sustained condition of relative peace.

If human beings were as inevitably aggressive as we are often pictured, why do we not kill each other far more than we actually do? All the police in the world could not keep people from doing what comes naturally. If war is our natural state, why do the great majority of human conflicts not end in violence? How is it that human societies can live in internal peace and coexist nonviolently with their neighbors for long periods of time? Just because we naturally eat doesn’t mean we need to overeat. Just because we like sex doesn’t mean we need to rape. Just because some humans like to dominate doesn’t mean we need to enslave others. That aggression is innate doesn’t mean that violence and war are inevitable. Indeed, there is nothing wrong with aggression in itself; primate mothers, for instance, use mild forms of aggression to teach their offspring correct behavior. It all depends on how the aggression is expressed and for what purpose.

Human behavior is extraordinarily flexible, as is reflected in the extreme variation in societal rates of violence. Some indigenous cultures like the Waorani of Ecuador manifest levels of violence as much as a thousand times higher than others, such as the Semai of Malaysia. Or consider the contrast between England and Colombia, more than fifty times more violent. Some of us live in societies that more closely resemble England in levels of violence, others in societies that more closely resemble Colombia, and most of us live somewhere in between. The level of variation alone suggests that far more than human nature is at play. One does not find whole societies that eat or make love even ten times more often than others, let alone a thousand times.

The variation derives, in great measure, from how people choose to deal with their differences. Violence is not an autonomous phenomenon but one choice among many for handling disputes. People are constantly coping with their own, their own and those of others, making choices as to which procedures to use. Humans, in other words, are conflict managers.

2. What is war? Explain the idealist and realist view of war?

Ans: War is a state of armed conflict between states, governments, societies and informal paramilitary groups, such as mercenaries, insurgents and militias. It is generally characterized by extreme violence, aggression, destruction, and mortality, using regular or irregular military forces. Warfare refers to the common activities and characteristics of types of war, or of wars in general. Total war is warfare that is not restricted to purely legitimate military targets, and can result in massive civilian or other non-combatant suffering and casualties.

The concept of absolute war was a theoretical construct developed by the Prussian military theorist General Carl von Clausewitz in his famous but unfinished philosophical exploration of war, Vom Kriege (in English, On War, 1832). It is discussed only in the first half of Book VIII (there are only a couple of references to it elsewhere) and it does not appear in sections of the text written later. This indicates that it was an experiment that failed and was meant to be dropped.

The notion of an “absolute form of war” is very clearly derived from the new style of warfare introduced by the French Revolution and brought to a high level of performance by Napoleon Bonaparte. Although it is presented as a philosophical concept, and thus probably not capable of perfect attainment in the real world, it was nonetheless modeled very closely on Napoleon’s most masterful campaigns and was intended to be pursued or emulated by commanders “when possible.” Absolute war was characterized by very high levels of energy and professional competence, and it aims at the destruction of the opposing force and the attainment of a political decision by force of arms. It contrasts to a weaker, less competent—even pointless—form Clausewitz called “war of observation,” based on the carefully circumscribed use of force in the century or so prior to the French Revolution. This two-ended framework appears to have been experimental. Clausewitz became quite critical of it by the middle of Book VIII—thereafter the term absolute war dropped out and the weak and unfilled nature of “war of observation” was transformed into a perfectly legitimate, respectable form called the “limited aim.” In Book I, drafted later, the term absolute war does not appear; for practical purposes, war in the real world is described using a spectrum bounded by the limited aim of wearing down the enemy’s will to carry on the military struggle vice the most ambitious form available in reality, the aim of rendering one’s opponent militarily helpless.

Absolute War is often confused with the very different concept of “ideal war” featured in the first chapter of On War. In that discussion, Clausewitz explained that ideal war is a philosophical abstraction—a “logical fantasy”—that is impossible in practice because it is not directed or constrained by political motives or concerns, nor limited by the practical constraints of time, space, and human nature. He called warfare constrained by these moderating real-world influences real war. Absolute War is also routinely confused with “Total War,” a term that does not appear on Vom Kriege.

The recognition of total war since the start of World War I has arguably created a degree of confusion for many scholars, who may have failed to understand the differences between it and the concept of absolute war, often using the terms interchangeably and blaming Germany’s conduct of “total war” on the writings of Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz. In reality, however, Clausewitz neither coined nor used the term “total war,” and “absolute (or ideal) war,” it is argued, is quite a different concept. Total war is essentially a war in which the home front (that is, a state’s