

Letter to Editor

Busting the Icon: Restoring Balance to the Influence of Clausewitz (Fall 2007)

Congratulations on the first issue! A fresh approach is as welcome as it is needed. Excellent articles . . . generally. Meilinger writes with a fine, challenging style. For over 200 years writers and thinkers have both praised Clausewitz as the second coming or critiqued him as a pseudo-analyst upon whom generation after generation has overrelied, bringing untold hardship upon the human race. Both perspectives have overstated the case. And while there have been gross misunderstandings of what Clausewitz was attempting to say and to accomplish—and significant problems from armchair warriors roaming the countryside—Clausewitz himself stated that hopefully someone else with a greater ability (and more thorough understanding of Kantian metaphysics and its relations to time and space) would arise to bring forth what he was working on and to refine the preliminary work—a preliminary work. “Absolute” by definition in Kantian explication is that which is not in time and space. Once something arrives in the dual human intuitions of time and space, it ceases to be absolute. Clausewitz was tasked with understanding the implications of the new Kantian metaphysics for warfare. That Clausewitz argued absolute warfare had arrived on European battlefields marks the fundamental misunderstanding of the system he was tasked to understand and “operationalize” in empirical reality. He knew he had tried, and he knew he had come up short. Kant takes a lifetime—Clausewitz had only a very short time to fathom something that had not come along since Copernicus. The original misinterpretation is now being critiqued, and this misinterpretation of the misinterpretation is being brought forth with intent to clear the fog. God only knows why members of our officer corps find chance and uncertainty so difficult to deal with—much of their education has been based on it. Meilinger, on the other hand, should be congratulated on bringing some of us out of our slumbers (note Kant’s reaction to Hume). Again, congratulations on a fine first issue!

James McNabb, PhD

*Adjunct Professor, International Relations
and National Security Policy
Troy University, Kadena Air Base*