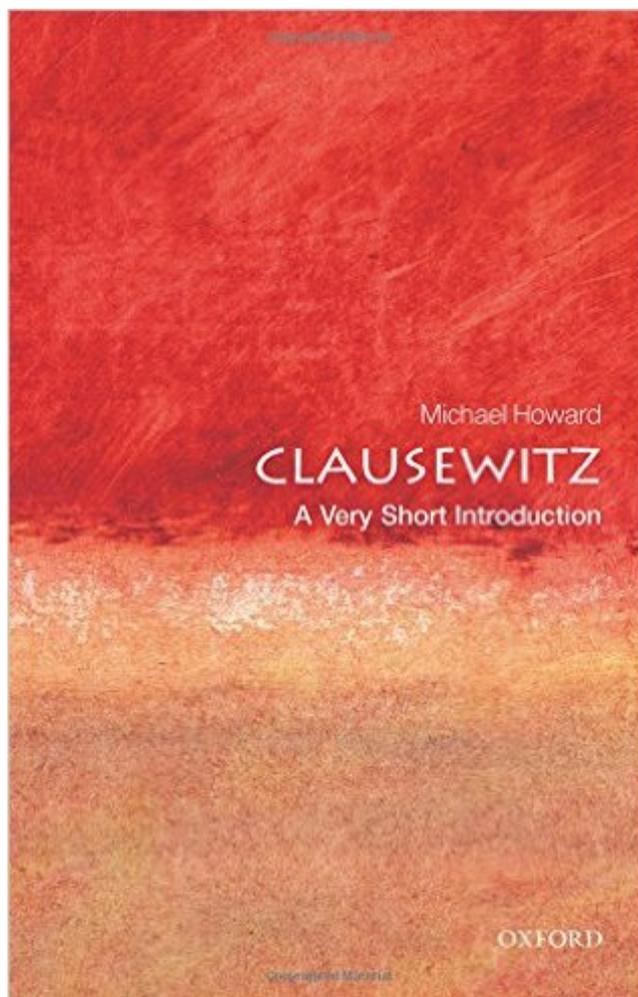


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Clausewitz: A Very Short Introduction



Synopsis

Karl von Clausewitz (1780-1831) is considered by many to have been one of the greatest writers on war. His study *On War* was described by the American strategic thinker Bernard Brodie as "not simply the greatest, but the only great book about war." It is hard to disagree. Even though he wrote his only major work at a time when the range of firearms was fifty yards, much of what he had to say remains relevant today. Michael Howard explains Clausewitz's ideas in terms both of his experiences as a professional soldier in the Napoleonic Wars, and of the intellectual background of his time.

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Customer Reviews

Clausewitz is notoriously difficult to understand, according to Prof. Howard, because so much of what he wrote was not intended for publication. As Clausewitz himself stated, he wrote a "collection of materials from which a theory of war was to have been distilled." Professor Howard, the co-author of the standard English translation of Clausewitz, begins that distillation process in these few pages. He first places Clausewitz in context, with a review of his family origins and military experience. He was commissioned as an officer in the Prussian Army at the age of 12, fought in his first campaign in 1793 at the age of 13 against the forces of Revolutionary France on the Rhine and then in the Vosges. In 1806 he was captured following the French defeat of Prussian forces at Auerstadt, a subsidiary of Napoleon's great victory over the Prussians at Jena. He then spent two years in captivity as a prisoner of war in France. When later the Prussian king allied himself with Napoleon, Clausewitz resigned from the Prussian Army and joined the Russian Army, where he

participated in the Russian victory over Napoleon at Borodino. When the Prussian King, Frederick William III, eventually joined the Alliance against Napoleon in 1813, Clausewitz became an advisor to General Blucher during the Leipzig campaign, though still in Russian uniform. After being allowed by the King to rejoin the Prussian Army he became chief of staff to the Prussian III Corps, which acted as a blocking force at Waterloo. He then spent 12 years at the Prussian Army War College, where he spent much of his time writing his most famous work, *On War*. He died in 1831, at the age of 51, in a cholera epidemic in Breslau, where he had been sent to institute a cordon sanitaire to prevent the disease from spreading.

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