Like all societies, Western culture has had to decide when it is appropriate allow for individuals or groups to struggle and when cooperation or control are better for the good of society. When and in what areas should individuals be allowed to compete and when should society as a whole step in to referee? Should the mechanisms of Darwinian evolution be seen as a model for human progress? Is struggle between nations or ethnic groups a good or a bad thing? Are there fixed roles for men and women in the realm of competition and struggle? Does the natural environment place limits on human competition?

The changing responses to questions like these have shaped the experience of the West since the Middle Ages, and the effort to answer them continues to occupy us today. In this course we will trace the history of such questions and try to understand the assumptions and values that have shaped the answers provided by religious leaders, economists, philosophers, scientists, socialists, nationalists, Darwinists, racists, militarists, pacifists, feminists, and environmentalists.

Students taking this course will have the opportunity to think about some of the most crucial issues that have shaped our world. They will emerge with stronger analytical and writing skills and with experience at trying to understand the perspectives of people who are very different than themselves. More information about this course, including the topics to be considered, descriptions of the assignments and grading, and comments from students who have taken the course in the past, can be found at http://iub.edu/~paris10/Conflict/conf%20intro.html