

The terrifying love of war.

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Abstract

War needs to be rethought. As many concepts and theories about its existence are ready, many questions remain unanswered. As soon as war breaks into everyday life as a reality and it can no longer be ignored, the questions become more urgent.

If one wants to think through war down to its philosophical basis, it is necessary to clarify the position of philosophy from which all further views, concepts and narratives are presented. Understanding war means clarifying philosophy in relation to violence (1), as well as deciphering the possibility of the human relationship to the world (2) and therein the possibility of war (3-4).

Keywords: war – peace - terror - violence – understanding – reflection – interexistence – morality

Introduction

War again? The phenomenon that is as old as humanity and whose pathology has long since been uncovered is back in the spotlight, yesterday as today. Wars irritate the consciousness of a respective generation and the necessity of writing about war leads back to antiquity. Even Thucydides, the chronicler of the Peloponnesian War, was shocked by the pathology of human destructiveness. War, in this view, "has always" plunged people into an abyss "which is itself and in which no one awaits it, no God, no civitas either, to lead it home to peace." (Metz, 2012, p. 45)

War needs to be rethought. As many concepts and theories about its existence are ready, many questions remain unanswered (Geis, 2006). But as soon as war breaks into everyday life as a reality and it can no longer be ignored, the questions become more urgent.

Two decades ago, a consensus on modernity was questioned in this context. If possible, so the criticized agreement read, war should be kept completely out of the present household. But: "Those who no longer wage war (...) wrote Herfried Münkler, for example, in view of the wars in the Balkans in 1999, "must also no longer think war" (Münkler, 1999, p. 678).

The ambivalence remains unresolved to this day: war is considered unacceptable, an extreme evil. However, the refusal to think of it as a phenomenon and to outlaw it as a means of war leads to a moral dead end.

The accusation leads the present reflection into a broad field in

which a loss of orientation threatens. For all the uncertainties in the field of geopolitics, which cannot be resolved here, a particular cognitive interest is in the foreground. In which categories is a war to be grasped as an object if one wants to understand it? What contribution can we expect from philosophy and hermeneutics if we place war at the center of reflection - and always presuppose its necessary ostracism in social orders?

The interest is thus less aimed at a normative justification, but rather at a determination of a relationship with indeterminate consequences. One might assume that this task is associated with clear answers. In the simplest terms, war exposes the brute force of man, his bestiality, and irrationality. The quest for power, booty, honor, territory, and possession forms the basic pattern of the *terrifying love of war* (Hillman, 2005; Münkler, 2002). Understanding war would thus be a didactic task that combines the political actions of a given era with psychological determinations. In this respect, the attempt at understanding observation leads to the certainty of the Hobbesian world.

However, the phenomena of war and violence cannot be translated into simple equations. Their complexity complicates philosophical reflection: violence must always be considered in the light of a particular purpose and is thus incomplete. And thinking one step further, it must be considered that even philosophy cannot do without violence, that in the extreme cases violence and philosophy enter into an unholy alliance.

Violence and Philosophy

Philosophy's relationship to violence is exceedingly complex. This goes back to the irritating insight that even still the philosophical movement of thought allies itself with violence or cannot sufficiently distance itself from the claim of non-violence. For violence, simplification already begins at the moment of linguistic empowerment, simplification, generalisation, and even at the moment when we try to bring events down to a common denominator. The philosophies devoted to this aporetic relationship are numerous (Derrida, 1967; Id., 2000; Waldenfels, 2000; Kapust, 2014; Butler, 2005)

For contemporary reflection, the legacy of the 20th century is at the center, whereby it is not only about the historical events, but also about the aberrations of social theory. The violence of this century was also the violence of culture and thus also of philosophy. The accusation weighs heavily: philosophy, reduced to a sentence, turns to violence and in the course of this thinking becomes the philosophy of violence (Wood, 2000). This constellation leads into the depths of philosophical traditions and finally ends at a fork in the road. One path is the path of violence, which is paved by philosophy through concepts and thus becomes part of destructive power; the other path is properly understood as a form of distancing. It is not a matter of getting rid of violence for good, but of clarifying its preconditions and formal characteristics.

The first path seems to correspond to the thought movement of Martin Heidegger's phenomenology. In the footsteps of Heraclitus and Nietzsche, violence is transferred into an ontological determination. In everyday understanding, we assume that violence exists as an intentional structure between people and is thus referred to as agreement, renunciation, peace or even reconciliation. In the ontological dimension, on the other hand, the world relationship as a whole becomes thematic; violence becomes a topos, a quantity to which people must relate. It should be emphasised that these are two completely different ways of thinking about violence.

Violence in the sense of Heidegger's existential philosophy (Heidegger, 1979) is as original as it is inescapable and cannot be overridden by formal oppositions. Man himself is violent already in the sense "that he needs violence because of and in his violence-activity against the overwhelming" (Heidegger, 1987, p. 115). The world is violent in itself because it shows itself to man as something overpowering.

Various starting points can now be thought of to clarify this philosophical construction in relation to political reality (starting from Heidegger's biography: Farias, 1989; Faye, 2005). It is obvious, however, that philosophy opens itself up to violence: in

The war as a teacher

History has aspects that suggest a learning process. The phrase "Historia Magistra Vitae" appears in older texts; it famously said that history itself is effective as a teacher of life. History teaches us something - and with good reason, the same could be said of historical wars.

Wars also have a teaching and ordering function. They shape the human relationship with the world, for better or for worse. They flow into myths and narratives that form a certain image of the world.

But can we go so far as to recognise in war a master teacher who has taught us lessons that can never be forgotten - and by which one henceforth is directing? Is this overly strict, violent teacher helpful in gaining orientation in history? Or is it not rather the case that historiography stands before a stream of history and one merely pulls out individual debris without directing or stopping the stream in any way?

Understanding the history of violence may be a false expectation. Perhaps it would be wiser to follow tradition and ask *questions of history that* always allow only provisional answers. As is well known, it depends on which points of view, which times of war, and which forms of violence are brought into focus. Is it about the nation in its historical function of order, which had developed into a comprehensive promise since the 18th century? Is it about the history of revolutions and the promise of history-making? Or is it about the violence of taking possession of foreign spaces and foreign peoples? Do we learn something from history when we look at events from the height of the eagles and contemplate the eternal dance of power and geopolitics? Or if we look at events from the center of the basic humane situation?

It may be difficult to derive a universal claim from the diversity of perspectives. The location-boundness of the observer is decisive. For example, we can trace Europe's wars since the 18th century and reconstruct their path into world history. Accordingly, one could reconstruct the regional wars, the wars of the cabinets, and the colonial conquests, for which the term European "Theatrum Belli" has become common. And one would be directed to follow this theatre of war in its further course, which extended across the entire globe in the 20th century. It is, therefore "world history", if only because the theatres of war went beyond Europe. However, this narrative would be quite Eurocentric. European states had the power to plunge the world into war. At the same time, they accelerated the decline of the great empires and thus undermined global hegemony (Langewiesche, 2019, p. 34).

Thus, we are faced with the challenge of transforming the history of war into a form that is binding for all. However, this is an exaggeration that is inappropriate and carries the danger of using history as an instrument. This danger comes from various directions. There is, for example, a fatal "liaison dangereuse" between the politics of history, the perspective of the contemporary witness, and historiography, which is rarely brought to our attention. Even when history is taken into the service of a popular pedagogical purpose, its dignity and autonomy are endangered. Master narratives emerge that, while grounded in historical knowledge, can lead to rigid repetition. No matter how one turns it and which particular position one takes - there is a danger of self-reference. History then becomes the object of extra-historical purposes (Sabrow, 2014, p. 13-26).

The contradictions, on the other hand, must be made clear: the pedagogical aspects are fundamental and the reappraisal of a

violent epoch is deeply serious.

Only the claim of enforcing historical narratives remains problematic.

The realisation of the history of violence is an immense challenge. It

"succeeds" only if one traces the reflections back to elementary determinations. It touches on older impulses in the philosophy of history, as we shall see, and yet it comes with reservations.

The motives, which we can only hint at here, are ambivalent: the narrative perspective remains tied to the location of the suffering people, without being able to grasp a *telos* of these experiences. That which is suffered can be portrayed retrospectively and grasped in its course; it can also be linked to individual meaning. But an overarching horizon of purposeful history is not meant by this; there is simply no *telos* of a third party, no *cunning of reason* as in Hegel, no *providence*, and no *intentions of nature*. In this respect, history is blind and autonomous; people are largely exposed to history. The "nonsense" of history only becomes apparent from a higher vantage point (Koselleck, 2010). Individual people cannot know what results in their actions will lead to (except for those subjects who want to rape history as well as people with all their might). The intentions and plans remain singular and unconnected; at least no large historical subject can stand out that would direct history from a higher place.

Nevertheless, objections to normative stubbornness remain. People look at their history and interpret it with a view to future events. They not only act as if they could direct their history towards a goal, but they also act purposefully and rationally. Against all irrationality they encounter, they align their actions with their evaluations and narratives. In this attitude, we recognise what is, if you will, an ultimate historical-philosophical claim. According to this, a human world is something other than merely an evolutionary development that remains completely beyond the will of human beings. The contradictions are to be kept conscious: there is indeed no *final standpoint of history as such*, but man's capacity for narrative synthesis and for reconstructing "their own history" is undisputed. One can derive from this dialectic a type of historical-philosophical thinking that combines the critique of universal history with underlying normative patterns of thought (Rohbeck, 2004).

The idea of the saving critique, as it was conceived by Walter Benjamin, can only be read in deeper layers. It can only be understood as a weak version of the older messianic impulses.*

The following reflections show with fundamental intent under which conditions we can speak meaningfully of violence in human existence. The first meaningful question is not how we can tame violence and get rid of it once and for all, but whether this has already succeeded or failed. What is binding, on the other hand, is the philosophical question of the possibility of a human world. To what extent can we understand ourselves as human beings and understand the violence in this world?

Philosophical anthropology *according to* Heidegger (Rentsch, 2000) first recognizes the full division of the basic human

situation. It consists of the practical life situation, in which individuals can relate to themselves. This basic situation includes the irreversible temporality that determines all history as irretrievable. The gradient toward death determines the uniqueness of existential life, but unlike Heidegger, insights into *common life* can be derived from it.

In the primary world, people orient themselves with practical concepts of meaning and with forms of fulfillment and failure (Rentsch, 1999, p. 192). Human life consists of active engagement and shaping, from which arise the perspectives of responsibility, guilt, meaning, unjustifiability, and identity. The features of the human situation are furthermore characterised by fragility, threateningness, power and dominance, asymmetry and neediness, violent distortions, but also moral claims (Ibid., p. 194).

This results in a perspective with contradictory categories. Violence and non-violence must be thought of together in the context of the situation indicated. There is a systematic connection between non-violence and the constitution of the human world; and there is the constant possibility of violence, which we experience as exposure, fragility, and vulnerability. Fragility arises from the constitutive insecurity and defencelessness of all our actions. We are unprotected from all the adversities of everyday life, we live without guarantees and securities, even if the modern way of life plays us precisely this. To speak of a lack of guarantees in human circumstances is the first step towards a comprehended history.

History has never been consistently non-violent. This means that we must first consider historical existence in its irrevocable fragility before we can even speak meaningfully of the idea of non-violence. This, in turn, does not at all mean viewing the world as an eternal battleground and ascribing all meaning to our actions to conflict, divisiveness, and confrontation. Bellicism has no "meaning" for existential philosophy. Rather, the interplay between pervasive violence and the forms of non-violence is to be considered.

Fragility means: that evil is a reality, and violence is always possible. From the very beginning of our existence, we are dependent on each other and must rely on others. Exposed to one another, we are required to form communication in solidarity.

Where does violence begin? And how can forms of non-violence be distinguished? Violence begins in the moment of forgetting and denial. We live not "because" we owe our lives to others, but by experiencing meaning together, which we owe to no one. Morality is the realm of remembering the conditions of meaning in common life; this becomes explicit in the truthfulness of common language, in the importance of cooperation in realizing common life, and in the constitutive importance of unconditional openness. If these universal forms of practice are undermined, "violence" is at play, in all the historical forms which history tells. The pursuit of non-violence remains bound to these and other criteria. No instance, however, vouches for this claim.

From this moral-philosophical position, determinations of violence can now be specified in more detail. The practical foundation of life is set; it consists of the implicit Call to understand

communicative solidarity and to align one's own actions and designs with interexistence (Rentsch, 1999, p. 264). However, violence is thus not relegated to the margins of a "higher", morally perfect form of life, but is to be made legible in the realm of common life. It "shows itself" in a plethora of distorted and distorted modes, in strategies and omissions, in forms of language and laws. This immeasurable magnitude of possible violence is to be systematically decoded here and finally interrogated in the large-scale form of war.

We proceed as follows: violence is first presented from a phenomenological perspective. The concept of war is thus described in the context of European philosophy as an existential topos. The dismaying love of war is here held in an unusual light: it can only be understood in a dialectical movement of thought.

In every historical situation, a conflict arises between the human capacity for violence and superior power. And it is this dark conflict that supposedly brings out man's capacity for violence in the first place (Heidegger, 1987, p. 119).

It is difficult to see anything in this other than an unconditional affirmation of violence - and it is precisely on this point that the present discussions should offer an alternative. Violence appears in this theoretical universe as a challenge that is not simply to be understood in negative terms as a disturbance, but which demands the human being as the "agent of violence" (Ibid, p. 115).

The ambivalence of social theory by no means lies solely in the past. "Whoever before 1933," wrote Reinhart Koselleck, "spoke of determination (leading to death) could no longer escape ideologization after 1945 at the latest" (Koselleck, 2000, p. 100). The pathos of the 1920s has long since faded, however, and the political categories of *the people, loyalty, actuality, and freedom from death* no longer have the same meaning today.

If one makes it simple, one could therefore ascribe these semantics to the moods of the times before 1945 and place them in a historical constellation that would be closed. One could thus distance oneself from this past and keep the political categories away from oneself since they appear as the expression of a fundamental aberration. But what about the specific social theory that has, as it were, witnessed and accompanied the violence of the epoch, that has, as it were, lent it a subsequent legitimacy? The question leads us back to the basic distinctions of the phenomenological movement of thought. The first point of view of critical reflection is to clarify these distinctions and their misalignments.

The assertion that violence is overwhelming and at the same time undeniable in the human world is to be problematized. The irreconcilability, which is sometimes openly expressed, sometimes implied in somber images, contradicts the basic determinations of a moral world. In the context of existential analytics, it is a "thanatological" determination of temporal concern. In "Being and Time" (Heidegger, 1979), concern for one's being was defended against philosophical traditions. As is well known, it was an attempt to abandon traditional metaphysics and radically place the human being in the open. According to this, man has only an empty future before him and determines himself as a subject of

severe loneliness. Death as the outermost limit and the actual being-capable result in a world view that can be described as political thanatology. A worldview that radicalizes the call of concern and, as is well known, could not distance itself from the historical eruptions of violence.

The existential concept of the world proves to be problematic in many respects. At the center of our reflection is above all the *instrumental point of view of care*. Dasein, which amounts to death, is oriented towards nothing other than concern for one's own self-being. The structure of care remains walled off nomologically.

In contrast, it must be emphasized that in the analysis of human relations of care, being with others must be systematically taken into account. What is lacking is the formulation of moral grammar that addresses inter-existential relations.

A theoretical decision is indispensable for the theme of violence. In radical isolation, individual existence confronts its mortality - and draws from it the power of being-capable. The totalisation of the relations of violence must be problematised in this respect.

The alternative now by no means lies in a mild gesture of reconciliation, which would not be theoretically tenable. Rather, we have to describe the basic determinations of existence in a different form. Philosophical anthropology asks with equal radicalism about the conditions of possibility of a common practice. There we encounter first and foremost the moral grammar of human designs of meaning. Human concern, the overcoming of violence, and the acquisition of a moral attitude first take place in a communicative horizon (on this: Rentsch, 1999, Id., 2000).

This philosophical orientation is of eminent importance for understanding violence. Reduced to a strong thesis, it could be said that the analysis of interexistence preserves the basic idea of phenomenology without falling into thanatology. As we shall see, we can transfer the irritating love of war into a philosophical worldview. The possibilities of renouncing violence and solidarity enter into this worldview just as much as the dislocations of violence. Both aspects are to be considered in the existential analysis.

As described at the beginning, the following considerations are intended to contribute to an understanding of historical violence. For this purpose, the basic ideas of hermeneutics are used. Here, understanding does not function according to the pattern of making texts and sources accessible. Rather, it is to be understood as an achievement of the practical relationship with the world. The human ability to understand belongs to a horizon that opens up the reality of the whole to the one who understands. In view of violence, however, this process of understanding is highly problematic - as shown, it must not go back to the unconditional affirmation of human relations of violence.

The errors lie, as indicated, in the narrow focus on death analysis. In the worst case, the analysis falls prey to a longing for death and becomes nihilistic. In contrast, the basic question must be considered, which addresses the possibility of a human world and then gradually incorporates the reality of evil and the fact of violence into the considerations.

Thus, if one wants to think through war down to its philosophical basis, it is necessary to clarify the position of philosophy from which all further views, concepts, and narratives are presented. Understanding war means clarifying philosophy in relation to violence (1), as well as deciphering the possibility of the human relationship to the world (2) and therein the possibility of war (3). Understanding war is, after all, a task with various dimensions (4).

Aporias of violence

If, in accordance with social theory, we understand violence as an unconditional component of our existence - what would we need to consider beyond this admission? Does violence remain an intangible, abstract, unthinkable quantity that we never really comprehend, as a majority of philosophical viewpoints suggest?

At the very least, we should insist that the more precisely we spell out the criteria of meaning, the closer we come to violence as a phenomenon. Already with the presentation of scientific criteria that have life-world relevance, we leave the problematic traditions of positivism. As is well known, there are patterns of thought that do not let us go because of their suggestive power: the world would be non-violent if only the achievements of civilisation were preserved. The world would become more just, harmonious, and thus non-violent as long as only the evil natural impulses were suppressed. The state of nature would thus become "history" and the present would shine in the splendor of the promises of the philosophy of history. We would thus have relegated violence to a dark corner of history and any real violence that penetrates our present would be nothing more than an unpleasant relapse into past times.

There is much that is questionable about these motifs, much that also corresponds to real development. For our presentation, however, we need a different approach to violence without disregarding the value of progress. In principle, violence stands in the middle of our world relations, it forms manifold alliances in and with language, and violence stands between and within our orders. Its symbolic character shows up in rituals and practices, in interpretations, and even in our dreams. It is thus no small decision *not to* attribute violence to a past state of nature.

Another distinction has to be made. We are used to looking at violence from a psychological point of view. That is, violence is something we observe from afar, in various encounters and confrontations. Sometimes we ourselves are affected and perhaps even scarred by the violence, sometimes we are able to reject the violence far away because it appears as the problem of others. Throughout, these are individual psychological approaches to events in which the motives of the actors drive the actions. We are then faced with violence as if we only had to decipher the psychological dispositions to understand everything.

In contrast, from the point of view of philosophy, violence requires a supra-individual perspective. It is to be seen above all as an aporetic relationship and in mediation with meaning.

Violence is to be understood as an aporetic relationship. The conventional approach sees violence as a break with a *rule*, the disregard of an expectation. The core of violence, however, seems

to lie in the moment of *violation*. Violence and violation are intimately connected. This does not mean, however, that all violence should be related to the position of the victim. Any reduction undermines the complex event, which is to be located between diverse spheres (hereafter: Waldenfels, 2000; Id., 2014; Delhomme, 2014; Kapust, 2014).

Linguistic distinctions are indispensable: things and objects can be *damaged*, and people and persons *are injured*. The violation presupposes a self-reference: one turns against the integrity of the person and against the integrity. In addition, a violation is also connected with the perception of a rule. But here, too, the shift in meaning is possible and exceptions must always be taken into account. Not every violent act breaks the law, and not every transgression of a rule is illegal. In principle, an act of violence goes beyond the damage to property and the disregard of a rule (Waldenfels, 2000, p. 13).

Thus, the perspective of the victim of violence must be addressed first and foremost. Reduced to a sentence, in the moment of violence *something is done to someone*. This moment contains a distinct truthfulness. The sphere of the body is central. The body as a sphere of vulnerability is at the beginning of the philosophical reflection on violence (Derrida, 2000; Levinas, 1997, Merleau-Ponty, 1994). The body is visible, touchable, and threatened; it is a form of territory that can become the site of violence (Waldenfels, 2000, p. 15). The history of violence can be told, as it were, as a history of bodily experiences: from forced flight to degrading clothing, burglary, expulsion from one's home - it is always about links with the human body.

From the point of view of experience, questions need to be asked that explore the quality and form of the suffering (Delhom, 2014). The field of violation can be central or peripheral, and the nature of the suffering can be direct or indirect. In current violation and structural violence, it is evident that it does not have to be directly about a single target. In many cases, violence permeates the lifeworld and can hardly be kept out of habits and orders.

However, the further one moves away from the sphere of corporeality, the more complicated the analyses that identify violence as a meaningful event become. In a situation of war, for example, one can recognize an anonymous event in which responsibilities become blurred. In the broad field of violence, collectivity, individuality, and anonymity go hand in hand. If one brings things to a head and asks about the individual imputability that exists despite all anonymity, one is pointed to another antinomy. For phenomenology, the moment of violence reveals an

The interplay of speech and counter-speech, violence and counter-violence, action and counter-action. The individual stands in his or her individuality in a social space that is a field of violence (Waldenfels, 2000, p. 17).

It is the interconnections that suggest the original strangeness of violence: victims stand next to other victims, perpetrators next to accomplices, accomplices next to recipients of orders, powerless people next to actors. Saints and heroes can be found on other linguistic levels; the primary focus here is on a space of violence in

which the forces are distributed in certain ways. These spaces open up a spectrum of perpetration and complicity, of positions of powerlessness and suffering, closely intertwined.

This raises the question of how we can get out of these confusing circumstances by virtue of philosophical reflection and whether we can extract meaning from things. Violence "happens" and is thus free of meaning. However, as we know, the human psyche demands interpretations of meaning and exaggerations in order to gain something from what cannot be grasped, beyond fatalism and nihilism. Moreover, we have to consider violence as an episode in a specific relationship to a respective order.

Violence varies according to the order in which it appears (Ibid.). As a revolution, it is directed against a particular order whose time has passed. As a legitimate struggle, on the other hand, violence is taken into the service of order when the cause of justice or even a "fatherland" is to be defended.

But beyond that, violence also occurs in the shadow of orders - and this facet still seems closest to the present. We know the long-lasting devastating civil wars in history and the present that cast a long shadow. The political backgrounds are complex, but on the surface, the lack of a recognizable order seems destructive. The zones of state and rule are furrowed and only residually present; but also the target horizon of an order to be achieved remains in the dark. This distinguishes the wars of the present from the wars of the past. In the context of European history, for example, one spoke of state-building wars, which were full of sacrifices and losses, but which in the long run brought about the order of nation-states.

This draws our attention to what is perhaps the decisive relationship. Violence is formed in connection with a particular meaning. Violence becomes meaning and the meaning itself acquires the character of the violent. The connection seems abstract, but it can be applied to various historical situations.

In a human world, the phenomena of war and violence must be placed in relation to a symbolic, linguistic and moral perspective. The experience of violence does not remain with itself, it has to be classified, rationalized, and "processed". Plans are made on how to anticipate future events. Reasons are explored as to how the events could have happened. Violence becomes significant on the horizon of the general: wars are made big, and violence is described as useful and expedient. The particular - which is only recognizable from the singular standpoint of the individual - is assigned to the general. More recent philosophical

Contributions already recognize the motif of the violence in this (Kapust, 2014; Baumann, 2001; Butler, 2004). Meaning itself is violent because it does not let the subject rest.

Violence is transferred into grids, transformed into legal procedures, and framed with a halo. The narrative of violence becomes a *history of salvation, sacred violence, a culture war, or a struggle for recognition*.

The meaning of war

This philosophical consideration is helpful if we want to transfer

the irritating love of war into a historicizing perspective. In a philosophical and historical perspective, war has a deep structure with various dimensions. Its roots go back to antiquity. Even then, war has ascribed a meaning that was supposed to elevate it above conventional practice.

We can, however, draw a line from this past to the modern age: War, then as now, is thought of as a mode of appearance of the "Polemos"; it is ascribed to the greatest possible significance. Philosophically, it must be remembered that the realm of thought is never completely detached from the realm of practice. Rather, acts of action and cognition flow into one another; Dasein, which thinks, is always already Being, which is performed.

The connection between war and meaning is demanding because it cannot simply be controlled by moral intuitions. The moral condemnation of war is necessary and urgent, but this leads to an unpleasant reduction. Only when the essence of war is *thought* - this is perhaps how one can summarise the borderline of philosophy - is a position of moral sublimity avoided.

The dialectic of the polemic (hereafter Stadler, 2009, p. 7-15) should be noted. This follows the original antagonism, the divisiveness, and the conflict, which is given a universal form.

Plato, Cicero, and Augustine gave the war a specific form: War was thought of as ethics, as law, and as a form of faith. The categories can be traced up to the present day; at that time, however, the assumption of an original cosmic, transcendental harmony was at work in the background. The justice that is established through war is anthropologically mediated. It has its origin in external spheres, which people never come close to. Accordingly, the war would always also be an expression of a way of being that has its origin far from human actions.

In the age of rationalism, a different image of war came into focus. War was seen primarily as an instrumental means of man, it served to enforce a will, and became a means of power, exemplified by Machiavelli (1965). But modern legal thinking was also founded in the Western European Middle Ages. The School of Salamanca shaped the legalization of war (Grice-Hutchinson, 1952). War was legitimate when a just cause (*ius ad bellum*), a state authority (*ius belli*) was combined with the appropriate conduct (*ius in bello*).

This construction is still relevant to the present and has produced a specific way of reflection: wars are thus accessible to an interpretation that recognizes them as "just" and "morally legitimate" (Walzer, 1992). The Contradictions, however, will never be resolved: if we understand war as a legal act, we are already in a field of violence in which the air for moral concepts becomes thin. Causes, motives, good reasons, categories such as justice, authority, and legal processes - all this will not be found in pure form in the reality of war.

However, let us remain at the level of the meanings attributed to the essence of war. The phase of change from the Middle Ages to the modern era is to be appreciated. The primary issue here was the legalization of violence. Ways out of unrestrained morality in the form of religious wars had to be found. As is well known, the form of the rational state rose above the devastating wars derived from transcendence in the early modern period. Early state power was no less violent and bellicose, but it was a profound change in thinking. The religious ultimate justification became the argument

of the state's will. The absoluteness of religious struggle was overcome; the formal state created a new mediation. Wars were transferred into the purpose rationality of the state (Grotius, 2003; Hobbes, 2010).

Finally, in the 19th century, war returned to the realm of "polemics". This means that war is not subject to contractual thinking alone; it cannot be understood with rationality and calculation alone. Rather, it is linked to cultural morality, which is recalled in the age of emerging nations. Philosophy confirms this turn towards the culture of war (v.

Bredow/Neitzel, 1991). According to Clausewitz, war reveals the essence of the political; in Fichte, we read of a transcendent duty to fight for moral freedom. Nietzsche, too, sees the phenomenon of war as a form of cultural self-assertion - war may not be redemption, but it is a therapeutic means. The decline of culture would only be prevented as soon as the warlike impulses are seized again. These are aspects of a philosophical worldview that is far removed from contemporary motifs and yet are discussed again and again (Bohrer, 2006).

An examination of the phenomenon of war, as we can see, always comes up against the basic antinomy of violence. An immediate taking of sides seems impossible; every reflection is required to work its way towards the contradictions of the object. The assumption of ancient thought that warlike violence is not a characteristic of the psyche but an ontological quality is probably the most difficult thesis here. Modern social theory has translated this suspicion into various terms and thus indirectly confirmed it: in Heraclitus, Western thought was set in motion by stylizing war as the "father of all things". In Heidegger, this idea is taken up again; war thus proves to be a force majeure that compels us to take a stand (Heidegger, 1987, p. 47).

The existential task of human culture is revealed in the overcoming of the original violence, which one cannot escape. The existence of war thus reveals a communal dimension of life (Stadler, 2009, p. 11).

These thoughts can only be explained in a perspective that proves to be open to contradiction. Already in Kant, one finds the contradiction that war, on the one hand, is to be regarded as the ultimate evil, as a scourge of humanity that is to be controlled. And yet the Königsberg philosopher expressed himself with polemical stylistic devices that war advances civilization (Kant, 1795).

War awakens people's passions, which resemble anthropological tensions: Sigmund Freud saw in the First World War an expression of the unfolding of love life in alliance with all hostile impulses. Thanatos and Eros find each other and combine to form a theatre of cruelty (Freud, 1924).

These contradictions can also be seen in contemporary theories. The challenge lies in understanding death as naturalness and war as normality (Hillman, 2004, p. 52 ff.). War penetrates the crust of superficial thinking. For Foucault, war becomes the basis of all social orders (Foucault, 2000). History takes place in the form of war, not in the form of language. At this point, at the greatest

distance from thinkers like Hannah Arendt, the capacity for language is degraded, obscured by the strategies of power.

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Let us try to translate this constellation into an "equation". Different levels are to be distinguished. The connection between violence and meaning proves to be outstanding. Ethics must be oriented towards this distinction.

The discourse of the third is superimposed on the simple facticity of violence. It is a form of inversion (hereafter: Kapust, 2014, p. 55 ff.). The violence becomes significant and the experience itself is given over to a "higher logic". That is, violence becomes the center of attention, while the unavailability of the unique experience is overlooked. In the excess of violence, any "higher" meaning is undermined. The violence suffered can hardly be captured in words; what always remains is a diffuse speechlessness and the withdrawal of meaning. In this respect, violence is "only" pure experience; it remains walled up in a singular horizon.

Attempts to articulate it, to make sense of it, remain in vain; the overwhelming power of violence leaves the subject helpless. There is no language left to link experience with criteria of meaning.

This forlornness of violence, which has become paradigmatic for 20th-century philosophy, nevertheless stands in a tense relationship to the discourses of the present. The semantics are pertinent: some invoke a theodicy under post-metaphysical conditions, and some see the end of known history approaching. The experience of violence can take on a salvation-historical, social-psychological, political, or historical-philosophical meaning. In the form of attribution, however, the *meaning of violence* is reversed; the *violence of meaning* overrides the original context.

The ethics we recognize in this antinomy lies in the realm of the singular. Brought to a common denominator, ethics is required to break through the forms of violence by recalling the reconnection to the "singularity of the victim" (Ibid., p. 51).

It is an ethical position with a far-reaching tradition. It takes reflection into more difficult terrain as it leaves the conventional paths of moral reasoning. Can the individual find a moral foothold in concepts of logocentrism and subject philosophy? Emanuel Levinas doubted this in his work and left a provocative philosophy for modern thought (Levinas, 2022). What is decisive, he argues, is the moment of coming into the world; a moment that already carries all ethical answers within it. From the beginning, we find ourselves in the world as exposed; as dependent on one another (Liebsch, 2018). The encounter with others is the immediate challenge of being, which can never be decoded rationally. Guilt and responsibility, being with others, are antecedent qualities of human life.

Levinas left behind a wealth of thoughts that are directed against philosophy's claim to absolute truth and remind us of an eminent relation to the world. Violence is in being itself. Every moral intervention is therefore a risk. In the end, it is not a matter of fixing and determining, but of becoming aware of an unavailable basic situation of suspension. We must confess to this situation without already knowing where this ethic will lead us.

Ethics as First Philosophy promotes the standpoint of the philosophy of the singular. The vulnerability of the other reveals a claim to truth that we can only guess at. This level of the singular must be defended against all the violence that is visible in so many faces.

Under the sign of non-violence

What can we hold on to if we agree with these reflections? What room for maneuver would be conceivable at all if we assume an ontological doom in which violence plays an unavoidable role? Different categories must be systematically related to each other: anthropologically, man as a violent being stands in a basic situation; historically, his existence in spaces of violence must be considered. Only the ability of language, however, allows further criteria to emerge under the sign of non-violence, including the ability to trust. Finally, time is perhaps the most important dimension that comes close to the longing for peace.

The most difficult exercise remains first of all to comprehend the violence of the human being as such. The psychology of insight into the violent nature of man is fragile. The evil in man is difficult to bear - we only bear the thought by keeping evil away from us. With regard to the inconceivable violence of National Socialist extermination, the mechanics are pertinent: *monstrous violence can only be carried out by monsters*; the cruelty of the deeds evokes the image of an *extraordinary, "inhuman" being*. The image of violence becomes, as it were tolerable when the image of the man of violence is simplified. The Nazi perpetrator is metaphysically exaggerated.

Recent research has worked towards a different image of the human being. This image encompasses harmlessness and routine, sociability, and the normality of all human activities. In the context of Holocaust research, not only the ordinariness of evil in the sense of Hannah Arendt has become thematic (Arendt, 1963).

The possibility of killing is also integrated into the scope of modern societies as an "acceptable" act. This exercise in thought is painful, however, because the abyss of the deeds in Auschwitz cannot be equated with the monstrosity of the perpetrators. Rather, parallels with the modern world of work should be noted. Judging by the semantics, *work in war* is related to *work in factories*. Sources from wiretap transcripts, field post letters, and diaries prove that the actors were able to analogize their actions with forms of work: Work that was arduous but honorable, work that was invested with conscience, pride, and ethos (Welzer, 2012; Id. 2005; Browning, 2011; Neitzel/Welzer, 2011).

Different psychological motives have to be taken into account. Contexts and frames of reference are the primary criteria. The social situation of war provides the shift of the frame, even the moral concepts are "adapted" in this specific situation. By no means is it sufficient to state that people lose or forget their morality and morality in war, rather a shift in references can be seen. Work at the front becomes a compulsory exercise; the social group in which one fights forms its own norms. The social near-world becomes decisive; each member sees himself as he believes he is seen by the group (Welzer, 2012, p. 516).

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What image of the human being is generated in war is the one question that gives rise to scepticism. No particular ideological influence is needed to create a specific situation of violence. More important than ideological or political motives is the placement in the social context in the shadow of war. Anthropology must take note here that humans acquire a special attitude in special situations.

Therefore, the inspection of the human being as the essence of violence is not sufficient. One needs diverse criteria of the situation of violence: of space, of times, of signatures.

Historiography puts its finger in the wound of historical situations of violence in which space is the decisive factor. Whenever frames shift and individual safeguards are suspended, an intensification of violent relations becomes apparent. The violence in the "bloodlands" during the Second World War is one of these (Snyder, 2013), but spaces of total dissolution of boundaries were already created at the beginning of the century, especially during the First World War. In the vastness of Eastern Europe, especially in Ukraine, the short-term absence of state authority enabled a particular dynamic (Baberowski/Metzler, 2012; Schnell, 2012). In the spaces that emerged between the respective warring parties, various actors used their

Potential for violence. The view into these spaces is of course disturbing. Both in the situation of the camp and in the context of new wars (Münkler, 2002), the cruel face of war is revealed. Humans, the observers conclude, are in principle capable of deeds that speak against the narrative of the process of civilization.

The decisive question would therefore not be: what can prevent people from committing such acts? But rather, what criteria must be observed in order to come close to the idea of non-violence and the renunciation of violence. Philosophy and anthropology have the advantage that they can distance themselves from concrete historical situations and engage in abstract thoughts. If special rules of permitted and commanded violence apply in times of war, what principles apply in other, more peaceful times? Where does the violence that prevails in orders of violence "take refuge"? The logic of enabling and empowerment alone cannot explain these phenomena. Any mechanics that assume the execution of a rule remains complex.

As a first instance, we can refer to the human capacity of language. It is true that language cannot deal with violence; language is inferior to physical violence in close proximity. But from the distance of abstraction, we can ascribe to language an incomparably greater power of action. This first requires an illusionless consideration of its polemical quality, which it can assume. Beyond that, however, language is the predominant means of offering lasting resistance to violence.

A subtle dialectic must be observed: for language in the form of rhetoric is also a means of violence - but it is indispensable in order to sound out the scope for non-violence.

Language is linked to violence: by virtue of language we can

exclude others, disregard them and define them down to an object. The ability to draw others into the circle of violence through language should also be noted. This dazzling power of language has preoccupied philosophy basically since its inception. Language is capable of subtle rhetoric and violent persuasion, demagoguery, and manipulation. With the chains of language, allegiance is established. It is the means that complete violence only when physical threat alone is no longer sufficient. If you like, language is the first gateway for enmities. Passions are first heated up by language; word and deed can form a deadly unity. Conversely, silencing is also a subtle form of violence, when we erase others from our collective memory by remaining silent (Liebsch, 2018, Vol. I., p. 392 ff.).

But this by no means exhausts the potential of language in the context of human relations. Language can just as well generate trust, put compassion into terms, and, above all, create scope for the renunciation of violence. A form of resistance is present in language that cannot itself be reduced to violence. The philosophical tradition refers to this peaceful motif of language, in different, sometimes controversial variants.

In this context, Hannah Arendt's thought seems almost classic. According to this, the capacity for linguistic understanding stands in stark contrast to the crude

Violence (Arendt, 2002). Only the communicative grammar of an argumentative assembly can help against violence. The ethos of the political community is formed by the language we use to encounter others, to take them seriously as counterparts, as co-players, or even as opponents.

Finally, this refers to the reflections on an existential dimension. The described love of war is not the last word and not the last thought. The telos of understanding, the tradition that is, as it were, sacred to modern philosophy, is also an "igniting" thought in the context of a polemical consideration. So the last question to be asked is what scope is opened up by linguistic understanding. Across history, philosophy draws an alternative line of resistance. As indicated, from Heraclitus to 20th-century phenomenology, an idea was spelled out that in Dasein itself the form of war was inherent. In this Dasein, however, and this takes us beyond the conventional praises of peace, it also contained the resistance of language. The resistance in language thus goes deeper than assumed. The lack of unity is by no means temporary, but permanent.

Dissent cannot be removed like an obstacle but is at the center of our linguistic disputes. Every speech is therefore threatened by misunderstanding and failure. It is this insight that allows us to justify the ethos of resistance (Liebsch 2003).

What are the consequences of this worldview for dealing with violence? The political discussions cannot be delved into here without oversimplifying the realities. The philosophical perspective endows an abstract sense of the relationship between the capacity for violence and linguistics. The ethos of resistance in the language is grounded in categories of concern for the Other. Every conflict, every violent confrontation has to do with the

violated claims of the Other. Making these claims perceptible, the voices audible and the violations visible is the basis of the idiosyncratic pathos of language. No harmonious unity can be consolidated with it, but at least a claim to resistive speech can be raised (Liebsch, 2018, Vol. I., p. 402 ff.).

One might object that this is a clever play on language: isn't this merely adding the subtle power of words to physical violence? Is it not a continuation of war by other means? And to what extent is the position of the victim affected by this, if it is now additionally about *speaking against others*?

Everything depends on whether one can keep things in balance. Adversity can be dealt with without existential hostility as long as negatory violence is excluded. Conflict within communities is acceptable and can sometimes be used productively. What must be prevented and what we must recognize in the framework indicated: violence must not become blindly violent.

Modern orders have accordingly created safeguards that enable dissent to be aired.

The difference to past times is philosophically concise: it consists of the establishment of a linguistic field with contradictions that are close to democratic thought.

The position of the existentialist philosophy of the early 20th century indicated above has become historical at best if we are to draw a provisional conclusion. For it remained within the walls of a philosophy of the subject that allowed only self-preservation and self-enhancement to apply. This position accompanied de facto violence and inspired the culture of self-aggrandizement. Contemporary thought, on the other hand, has been enabled to remember alterity: this assumes the original alienation of people from the world and the necessary hospitality that is demanded in the face of foreignness that cannot be erased (Ricoeur, 2015).

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