

Topic 2. Immanuel Kant.

The world itself is in perpetual motion and motion is to be seen as one of the immanent characteristics of both a single human being, a member of the population, and the world as a whole. War is motion, war is the changing of paradigms but this act of the substitution of ideas need not be approached in the known manner. In the quote that is being analysed in this essay, Immanuel Kant words several very prominent and strict ideas which set unquestionable boundaries to the essence of war. The main proposition in the quote is that there is to be no war. In Kant's mind war can be divided between the war between you and me in the state of nature, which is a more personal level and includes individual conflicts; and the war between states. Both of these distinguishable parts of war should be wholly abolished as war is not the way in which everyone should seek their rights.

The ideas behind the quote and the outlining of my interpretation

In this essay I will try to incorporate my own ideas to the peace theory of Kant, while reimagining the whole definition of war. The main proposition in the quote from *The Metaphysics of Morals*, that there should be no war, seems reasonable enough, especially taking into consideration the consequentialist view and the daunting statistics of both World War I and II and other international conflicts. However, without being unnecessarily radical, it is possible to rephrase Kant's ideas in a less limiting way, when viewing war itself differently. The main proposition that I am aiming to arrive at by the end of this essay is that war in itself should be redefined not as as a necessary evil but an immanent condition of the human being that is mirrored by societies in order to reflect political goals. Wars as the continuation of politics should be abolished but the idea itself, due to its immanence, cannot be exterminated.

Immanuel Kant has worded his views on war and peace perhaps most clearly in the essay *Towards Perpetual Peace*. In this piece of writing Kant relies on his famous ethics in stating that war altogether should be abolished but also suggests several helping measures in order to achieve this very noble goal. For example, Kant writes that no peace treaties should be conducted in secrecy and that there can be no way in which the states which are at war hide their agendas of not staying peaceful eternally. It is paradoxal in a sense that in that same

essay the great German idealist also proposes that war in itself has played a crucial role in the lives of humanity. It has made people inhabit all parts of the world, it has set them in motion and made them grow, which are both characteristics of life. Kant has himself claimed that the idea of perpetual peace is never actually attainable. Hegel has supported this by adding that war is a means to help us understand the vanity of temporal things and perpetual peace is a beautiful illusion. But the quote under question seems to be mostly derived from Kant's ethics rather than his political views. In the *Metaphysics of Morals* Kant suggests that every human being should act so that the maxim of his will could be used as the universal law at all times. This is one of the possible wordings of the categorical imperative. In order to test different imperatives a simple pattern is developed in Kant's way of reasoning. We can compile a chain of propositions and consider them as Kant considered loaning money and suicide in his ponderings.

- 1) I have killed a man in the state of war.
- 2) Could this sort of action be morally valid as an universal law? Is it possible, that it is morally right to kill a man in the state of war?
- 3) It is not right since if everyone in the world conducted such an act, there would be no people left.

From these ideas it becomes apparent how and why the quote suggests that war altogether should be abolished – this applying to both war between individuals and states. It is simply incompatible with Kant's ethics in the strictest sense. The other part of the quote suggests that states are always externally in conflict and to that Kant says that states, which should be republican in that the act of war is decided upon, waged by and consequences suffered by the same people, should form a federation which is connected by international law. From the abolishing of war altogether, it is clear, that raging conflict, which essentially is unmoral and wrong, should not be used as a means to seek one's rights.

Redefining war

Having established the basis of this quote and explained the ideas behind the propositions stated in it, I would now like to elaborate on the idea that war in itself should be defined in a different manner and because of this Kant's radical peace-oriented ideas shall be given a slightly different connotation. Throughout history people have defined war in uncountable ways. One option is to use the constructionalist view and the act of de-contextualisation of war. War as a linguistic aspect is never fully independent from its political background. Nowadays the war discourse provides extensive research which essentially proves that war has an undoubtedly negative connotation, whatever the conditions of the war may be. Therefore, taking war out of context is difficult, if not impossible. What I suggest is taking war out of the context that it is generally acknowledged in and placing it in a new one which

is synthesized by the use of different already existing ideas. The phenomenology of war is complex and perplexing at times – which is apparent in Kant’s considerations as well as he both admits its power and rules it wrong. War should be seen as irrational forces which use rational means to arrive at a goal. This creates an opposing duality, a certain conflict in itself and in the essence of the definition. However, this does not say anything at all about the way war is perceived but rather the way war perceives itself as an entity. To explain this duality, a few examples: irrational forces are fear, the hunger to rule, the unexplained desire to be powerful while rational means are armed forces, mercenaries, propaganda and massacre to name a few. This sort of definition sets the first boundaries to the new understanding of war.

Now, if war consists of two different layers, the rational and the irrational, it can be considered multidimensional. War can be waged between states, between you and me (as Kant states) and in oneself. In actuality these ideas are all the different states of one entity as they derive from the same basis of connection between man and war, which shall be discussed in further parts of the essay. I believe that war between states on the large scale is just a magnified reflection of the relationship between human beings and this plurality of rationality and irrationality in war should be detectable in humans as well. We can say that the individual and war are connected because a man’s state of being is a model of the same irrational forces and rational means as war is. Herman Hesse imagines the human to be like an onion with several layers that are waiting to be peeled away. The first one of those is the rational and the deeper and harder to reach layers reflect the irrational being inside a human being. In man the rationality and irrationality can be interpreted differently that in war, the rational being is the one who considers possible consequences, it is often associated with pragmatism, while irrationality is usually connected with faith, love, humanly emotions or passions. However, there is no way to compare man and war unless they are put to a more similar starting basis, a new context, that is, unless we take the phenomenology of war and the phenomenology of man and look at them through the same lens.

A linguistic approach

The new context that war shall be but in or the common perspective that we are going to acquire in this essay, is a linguistic one. The rational layer of war is the one, which follows the commonly used syntactic pattern: the predicate states the action and is itself conditioned by the subject, the object is a goal or a means to be achieved. According to this, the rational person would say in the context of warfare: “I fight”. *Fight* is the predicate and it is apparent that there must be a subject – the *I* –, in this case the object is omitted as it is not of interest to us at the moment. Now, this sort of linguistic analysis can be used with every uttered sentence and still prove to be rationally true. Approaching the irrational layer, I shall consider an idea suggested by Friedrich Nietzsche in his work *Beyond Good and Evil*. It is possible that in the modern society the subject becomes conditioned by the predicate,

which could be interpreted by the following pattern: if there is a subject, there must be an action. Therefore “I fight” in the irrational sense should imply that if there is an *I*, there is a *fight*. I would like to explore this idea not on the historical or “time-sensitive” basis, in which one of these approaches is more modern than the other, but in stating that the irrationality becomes prevalent in the state of war. In addition, this helps to arrive at one of my next main points, that the sense of war is embedded and immanent in man.

To continue with the linguistic considerations that apply to both individuals and war, the role of subject and object seems to be reversed in war. Humans as separate entities are usually, in a rational state the conductors of some activity. However, in war and with irrational forces, the mass of people become objects, which are means used to arrive at an end. The objectification of man is apparent in both individual passions when man is passive in trying to control his emotions, and in war.

The last idea to support the proposition that war and the individual can be reimagined and made more similar through language, comes essentially from Ludwig Wittgenstein. In his *Tractatus* he sets the guidelines for the picture theory. Atomic facts can be transformed into pictures. These pictures of facts are the rational aspect of war and the human. The irrational part is the translational mechanism. What I mean by this is that the essence of the theory suggests that pictures use symbols to convey messages and the mechanism used to transcribe the idea of symbolizing is basically what gives us the most information (in Wittgenstein’s case it exposes tautologies and contradictions, in mine it illustrates the irrationality and similarity of the two phenomenologies).

What can be arrived at from this discussion are several basic concepts.

- 1) Man and war share similar characteristics, the most prominent being the duality of rationality and irrationality.
- 2) These similarities can be observed on a linguistic level.
- 3) Since there is war in oneself, war between you and me, and war between states and man and war are connected, it can be deduced, that war on a higher level is mirroring the war on a lower level by magnifying and elevating it.

War as an immanent entity of the man

Now, so far we have only tried to establish the essence of war and in doing so drifted from the original quote. As war has proven to be interconnected with man, it is impossible to abolish it completely. So, therefore I would like to pose one of the central propositions of my essay – war cannot be altogether exterminated from the world. In the following section I shall try to explain, why that is so. War, the irrational forces that are put to use through rational means, can be, according to Kant, divided into two – the war between one against

another and the war between states. I would like to add the war in oneself. In my view, the first one is a simple conflict, a clash of ideas, while the second uses these irrational forces and rational means to achieve a political goal (leaving the war in oneself out of this consideration for a second). General Carl von Clausewitz has said that war is just the continuation of politics and in the second proposed meaning of war it is apparent that the previously established definition concerning duality is limited by the political goals. I believe that this political factor from war can be abolished. This is the part where I agree with Kant. War should never purposely be used in order to achieve something that was failed to be done by politics on either a national or international scale. Politics in war are not rational means and neither is the completion of separate and biased national goals of international level justified.

As I stated before, having redefined war as the multiplied and magnified irrationality of human, it seems to me impossible to abolish the war in oneself, which from there on out can be reflected on others, which will result in a war “between you and me”. This idea of having war embedded in our existence and consciousness has been visited and revisited a number of times but perhaps the most well-known of these theories was developed by Thomas Hobbes, who suggested that the natural state of humanity is a war of everyone against everyone. People feel the need to secure themselves against one another, we lock our doors when we go out, we used to carry weapons which nowadays might have been turned into the securing feeling of a pepper gas bottle in our pockets. The point of this is that we ourselves are inclined to believe that some sort of violence is inherent to us. People used to hunt and kill for the purpose of surviving and as Elias Canetti states, the hunting pack is the first of the crowds or groups of people and people are known to be by volition a part of a so-called pack as this limits fear and makes us more similar which helps my move toward my next point.

What is common in all types of war – that in oneself, that between me and you and that between states, is that they all aim at arriving at a median and making us more equal – whether by economical power, territory or morality. In the single human this equality is to be seen as balance between the rational and the irrational layer. In the war between you and me it is the idea to be transformed from different subjects into similar objects, to be made a pack. In the war between states it is the will to create competitive powers which are equal in principle.

From this part of the essay the following things can be derived:

- 1) War can be abolished as the violent continuation of politics since the inclusion of politics in the definition of war and its consideration as a rational way to achieve a goal is not inherent in the discourse of war.
- 2) War in oneself cannot be exterminated.

- 3) As war is immanent and the principles of war – the common denominator being the resorting to the median and the duality or rationality and irrationality – are shared by all three forms of war (in oneself, against the other, between states), war cannot be abolished altogether.

Seeking rights on all levels

The last part of my essay shall touch on the topic of right and the proper way to seek rights. Sun Tzu states that all war is based on deception. This lays the ground for saying the war can itself never be in its common state, a basis for the establishing of rights, since they are based on truthfulness. In addition, as David Hume states that rationality cannot be used as a sole indicator of morality it becomes apparent that since war is *a priori* immanent in man it can not be seen as a measure of what is wrong and what is right. So far, I have considered three branches of war - the conflict in oneself, the conflict with another and the conflict between states. If we have established that due to war being an inherent human condition – as one strives to be balanced – it is impossible to exterminate the phenomenon itself, it is important that we resort to conducting a war that is just in the most possible ways. War can be abolished as a political means, that is because it is not just to wage war to fulfil a state's selfish goals and it does not usually strive to be equal or achieve the median but to be more powerful, however a war of defense against aggression is justified. Since I have stated that war is a reflection of human irrationality on a larger scale, the attempt to establish universal rights should start from the original image, which is being mirrored on larger scales and reflected unto others - that is man in himself. In the theory of just war, three components are usually stated: *jus ad bellum*, *jus in bello* and *jus post bellum*; which accordingly showcase the sufficient reasons for entering war; the ideas and principles that should be followed while in war and govern the act of warfare; and the measures taken after the conflict has ended. I shall try to use the opposite method from the first parts of the essay and move from the war between states to war in oneself. There I need to resort to several existing theories of ethics to make the three components compatible with one's individual morality. What is considered by rights here are human rights. Man should under all conditions be granted human rights, the universal laws which implant in one the duty to allow people live in the least specified conditions of peace. This means that these ideas that are to be reachable by all, are not in anyway privileged but follow the basic human needs. If we were to depend on Kant's ethics only and the categorical imperative, it would seem to be too strict as it would rule out the whole of war. In the first part of the essay I used the following method of stating my ideas:

- 1) I have killed a man in the state of war.
- 2) Could this sort of action be morally valid as an universal law? Is it possible, that is is morally right to kill a man in the state of war?

- 3) It is not right since if everyone in the world conducted such an act, there would be no people left.

This imperative is faulty when dealing with such irrational forces as war and it does not take into account several conditions. The idea of the morality of killing in war could also be worded like this:

- 1) I have killed a man in a state of war with the motive to prevent further killing, as this man was a terrorist.
- 2) Could this sort of action be morally valid as an universal law?
- 3) It could possibly be morally valid since the motive of the action was good and aimed at achieving good.

These sorts of ideas are more common to the utilitarians. While the categorical imperative, which basically suggests that one should act toward others as one wishes to be acted upon, is powerful in itself, it should be mixed together with the utilitarian principles of John Stuart Mill. This constitutes the ideas of *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* in the case of individual – be sure that your motives are good and you act according to a universal maxim but consider that the consequences of your actions result in causing the most possible goodness to the biggest possible number of people. *Jus post bellum* can still be derived from Kant's original principles in his essay *Towards Perpetual Peace*. It is important to leave the act of deception away from the act of war and therefore conduct a state in which peace is possible to be arrived at. Deception can be abolished, using our linguistic analogy, through deconstructing the picture mechanism that war and man are, seeing behind the symbols of atomic facts and rational means to expose the translational or interpretational device.

Closing remarks

War is a difficult phenomenon to understand and an even more difficult one to explain. It is motion in the sense that it is an opposition, a growing duality, which is expressed in different ways. The main propositions of my essay were in part contradicting the views of Kant and in part in agreement with them. What can be collected from everything stated before, are the following ideas:

- 1) War can exist in oneself, between me and you, and between states.
- 2) War and man can share similarities, which can be looked at and compared by linguistic terms.
- 3) The war in oneself is immanent and as in war men are indistinguishable objects, the immanence is also common to the "you", making the war between me and you unextinguishable.

- 4) The war between states is a magnified reflection of the war in oneself as it uses the same principles – resorting to the median and the opposing ideas of rationality and irrationality. Therefore, in the general sense war cannot be abolished.
- 5) There is to be no war as the continuation of politics between states. The continuation of violent politics does not usually strive to make the participants equal but rather distribute the power in a way in which one of the states becomes the ruler and the other the ruled. This is not compatible with my theory of the definition of war.
- 6) One's rights should be sought by establishing a just war in oneself and magnifying this newfound balance to constitute a new discourse of war between me and you and between states.

To end my essay, I would like to propose another analogy for war, since it has many faces and many different sides to it. No analogy is perfect but I believe that the one presented showcases the several ideas introduced and revisited in this essay. War could be looked at as theatre. People or actors are transformed from subjects to objects, the means of conveying a transcendent message. The individual preferences, identities or personalities are lost and actors take on a completely new role. The very rational way of presenting the idea of the play – using props, the musical pieces supporting the performance – is actually a deception, it is a way of delivering a bigger message, an irrational emotion, sadness in a tragedy, love in a romance and the sense of laughter in a comedy. The objective of a play is to make the audience reach *catharsis* or an awakening, liberation and it is the same with war, the aim is to accomplish equality, a balance in oneself. Theatre should never be used as propaganda or means to a political end. The phenomenology of war will offer discussion for centuries to come but hopefully the old-fashioned discourse can be remodeled to become something more constructive – whether through one's self-development or the evolution of international law.