



STUDI E RICERCHE

The Lightness of the War. Modernity, pedagogy and conflict of action

Gianluca Giachery

PhD, Adjunct Professor of General Pedagogy | Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures and Modern Cultures | University of Turin
| gianluca.giachery@unito.it

Lo splendore della guerra. Modernità, pedagogia e conflitto dell'azione

Abstract

War is one of the conditions of modernity that has changed the strategies of geopolitical constitution of the world. In the current processes of change in the balance of power, a jagged map of national borders emerges, especially in areas such as the Middle East and Southeast Asia. The dimension of continuous "total war" has taken on such pervasive significance in human everyday life, thus requiring the attention of pedagogical and educational reflection. What is the degree of implication of our lives in the opposition of multiple interests, which has made war an indispensable continuum to define the real? What, moreover, is the role played by ideology in the spread of war as a "democratic instrument" for conflict resolution?

Keywords

total war, existential planning, ideology, critical pedagogy, friend/enemy dialectics

La guerra rappresenta una delle condizioni della modernità che più ha modificato le strategie di costituzione geopolitica del mondo. Negli attuali processi di cambiamento dei rapporti di forza emerge una mappa frastagliata dei confini nazionali, specie in aree quali il medio-oriente e il sud-est asiatico. La dimensione della "guerra totale" continuativa ricade sulla percezione individuale del mondo, richiedendo così l'attenzione della riflessione pedagogica ed educativa. Qual è il grado di implicazione delle nostre esistenze nella contrapposizione di molteplici interessi, che ha fatto della guerra un continuum ormai imprescindibile per definire il reale? Qual è, inoltre, il ruolo giocato dall'ideologia nella diffusione della guerra come "strumento democratico" per la risoluzione dei conflitti?

Parole chiave

guerra totale, progettualità esistenziale, ideologia, critica pedagogica, dialettica amico/nemico

1. The Dark Side of Ideology

As its immediate function lies in the ability of extending and regulating the action of individuals, pedagogy has always lived the strange paradox of keeping away from any reflections on the meaning of war. This is the unspeakable that comes out of a recursive estrangement revealing in the prohibition of naming the primordial impulse of that irrational reason which leads human beings to destroy each other. Except from the rare cases of libertarian pedagogy, any pedagogical considerations about war has always been included in a generically pacifist dimension, as if it was a domain to be exorcized through an undeclared disinterest.

The fact that, in general, a discipline such as pedagogy may express its own aversion towards such a brutal violence like war, should not be seen as a condition of heuristic privilege, since the vast majority of the *doxa* tends to declare its own negative judgment towards any form of mortal or aggressive conflict. And yet, what emerges is the immediate opposite of the pacified expectation. Reality goes beyond any form of individual or collective judgment and puts to the test – as Kant and Hegel already pointed out – the position of alleged universality of some “categorical imperatives” which, strictly speaking, are supposed to reflect the singularity of Self-consciousness.

The modalities and motivations that, starting from the second half of the twentieth century, peace education has embodied, although supported by movements of great moral and political importance, do not satisfy the preponderance of data that, literally, submerge the recent history with the continuous downfall of territories and extermination of entire populations.

Rather than dwelling on the meaning and importance of peace education, then, it would be advisable to resume the inexorability of what Hannah Arendt already defined the “total world war” (Arendt, 1993).

If the conflict dimension within any relationship has been analyzed from an educational, sociological or psychological point of view, the huge “grey zone” always remains – apparently inexplicable – which regards a specific dividing line (we might call it ontogenetic), according to which nobody should feel entitled to harm the life of anyone else.

The secularization of the concept of life, then, has not brought any benefits to the safeguard of existence: despite the millennial appeals, the interests of power seem to prevail on the spiritual and ideal ones. Keeping aside – in this analysis – any nihilistic misunderstandings (even in the importance assumed by this position)¹, we claim that an attitude is intellectually clear and critical if it takes the risk to point out the permanence of an historical ontology of the real that describes the only awareness phenomenologically possible – although terrible – to accept: war is (with its victims and continuous transformations) the only identifiable historical constant which has built our modernity (Bauman, 1991).

In this perspective, the issue regarding the good or wicked “nature” of man – exquisitely pedagogic, related to the socio-political derivation of the relationship between individual and community – seems to have become obsolete.

This is an issue that arises from Aristotle but which, for example, in Rousseau – as opposed to Hobbes –, essential reference for the radical pedagogical change of modernity, found its immediate resolution in the contrast between *homo naturalis* and *homo civilis*, also thanks to a virtuous function of the individual’s properties (Starobinski, 1988; Cambi, 2011). Moreover, just drawing on Rousseau, Kant has never stopped highlighting the link between education and formation of man so as to allow the “exiting” from his original “state of minority”.

The immediate pedagogical consequence of this “reality of reality” is what Adorno had already reported in *Minima Moralia* (Adorno, 2005) as the “fetishization” of relationships, that is the instrumental transformation of the regulative function of morality which, according to Kant, refers to the public use of reason (*ergo*, of judgment). The disparity that comes from “those who have” and “those who do not have” the right no longer regards the claim for justice, freedom and equality, related to a specific social class (the bourgeoisie, the proletariat, the working class, etc.).

In his interpretation of Hegel, Kojève’s warning about “the end of history” – deliberately misunderstood by his most distracted epigones (first of all, Francis Fukuyama) – comes from the observation that the

1 Erbetta, 2007.

two great poles of post-history (Western democracy and post-Stalin Sovietism) have completely distorted – as Napoleon did at the time of Hegel – the closed circularity of the idealistic realization of the Absolute Spirit. If, on the one hand, Hegel correctly saw the rise of a new system of state and production (with the relative structural changes in the labor force later identified by Marx), on the other hand he had subordinated such transformations to a preventive consolidation of the state pervasive structures of control and coercion.

The triad state-individual-community had caught the attention of Max Weber, with his great studies on the relationship between economy, society and religion. The absolute form of nationalization, after all, can be found both in the known and corroborated expressions of Western liberal democracies (in particular in Europe and U.S.A), and in the former Soviet one, but even more in the government structure of a large territory (*Grossraum*) such as China.

From a geopolitical perspective, for instance, it is clear that no comparison can stand between two “large spaces” such as China and India from the point of view of the multitude, either in the relationship between productivity and development/export capacity, or between production and territorialisation of the state apparatus. The proactive expansion undoubtedly tips the scales (not so much with regard to resources as, in fact, their redistribution) in favour of China (Laruelle, Peyrouse, 2013).

This condition of apparent geopolitical instability – which, recently, with reference to the Afghan situation and the new Taliban takeover has been fallaciously ascribed to the US “lack of interest” in continuing to stand as a “defender of the democratic principles” – renews the suspicion that what lies behind this assumed “lack of interest” may be a fire that could flare up in an even more disruptive way.

In a devastated Europe, with national structures radically modified compared to the defeat of the central empires in 1918, the scenario that emerged after the Second World War turned out to be more complex and magmatic, since it did not only define the two opposing blocs (East/West), but it also started a slow, constant and unstoppable process of “regional” wars, now defined at “low intensity”, now in contrast with the advance of the communist ideology. The fact however remains that, between regional wars and post-colonial liberation conflicts, the numbers regarding the loss of human lives (paradoxically in opposition to the constant increase of the total world population) are really impressive: from the onset of the First World War to the seventies there were almost 260 million of military and civilian victims, in addition to an imprecise number of permanently disabled persons or people who have lost any productive and reproductive abilities.

Quoting some considerations by Carl Schmitt, Giorgio Agamben has clearly talked, in his interpretation of Thomas Hobbes, of “global civil war” (Agamben, 2015, p. 1).

Agamben’s reflections on “global civil war”, which reconfirm the fratricide dimension of global conflict, do not only bring back the attention on the destructivity of war – which in any case would be an ethical and moral issue to be taken into great consideration – but rather on the whole historical process that, in modernity, i.e. from XVII century, has led to the overall modification of governmental policies. Especially after the Second World War, continual war is one of the most well-established (and radical) aspects of transformation of the global geopolitical paths.

Although considering the colonial liberation wars, the structures and territorial boundaries have been changed in such a way that they no longer acknowledge the national divisions as they had been decided in the agreements among the winning powers: United States, Soviet Union, England and France. The Soviet Union itself no longer exists as unitary entity, just as some countries from the former Soviet bloc (for example, Czechoslovakia) and other “non-aligned” countries (like Yugoslavia), but pertaining to the European continental complex, have transformed and later delegitimized – as a result of bloody conflicts – the pact that has held them together for decades. Following this example, it would be possible to focus on South-East Asia, North Africa and Middle-East areas.

In short, war seems to have really dominated and determined, in its transparency, the complex scheming of global changes in the relationships among human lives (Fisher, 2009, p. 16).

The ideological prehension of capitalism regarding each individual and society – by means of different instruments – is achieved through the expropriation of what Fichte saw as the correspondence of subjectivity and objectivity (*Thathandlung*), of internal and external, selfhood and otherness: despite the distinction, according to Fichte (and to Hegel through the full realization of *Geist* as self-consciousness) the indissolubility of the relation between thought and reality, thinking activity and world, remained firm.

Capitalism completely empties the individual-form – not only through the ideological repetition of the self-representation as “the only possible world” – through the monadic fragmentation or, on the contrary, the complete identification of singularity with the mass.

2. The Long Night of The Next Millennium

When he was invited to Harvard University in 1984 as Charles Eliot Norton Poetry lecturer for the 1985-86 academic year, Italo Calvino wrote five lectures that would be published after his death with the famous title *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*. As we know, Calvino died on September 19, 1985, so his lectures were never delivered. The themes they address seem startlingly topical, however. The first of the lectures in particular, titled “Lightness”, forces the reader to come to terms with an existential impoverishment that upon careful examination, leads us far away from what is normally meant by the term, revealing instead the pervasive depth of a fascination that crops up through-out the history of culture, from Ovid all the way to Dante, Boccaccio, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Montale, Henry James and Kundera (Steiner, 2005). More than just a guidebook, it is a voyage across the turbid yet initiatory sea of the Gorgons.

Lightness explains, in part, the irony and weight of our time, the “short century” that Hobsbawm has described (Hobsbawm, 1995), but whose economic, political and cultural dynamics have not been well understood.

Lightness, moreover, fits in perfectly with the existential solitude of our habits, the inexplicable, narcissistic discontent of our societies (Lasch, 1975), the disappearance from our horizon of a future, which at this point has been subsumed by the administrated present of our lives (Horkheimer, Adorno, 2002; Butler, 2005).

Indeed, if there is an aspect that lightness does not tolerate it is the impatience with which we transfer our needs, in a nonsense whose explicit measure was provided by Beckett in *Waiting for Godot*.

Lightness/heaviness:

Whenever humanity seems condemned to heaviness – Calvino writes – I think I should fly like Perseus into a different space. I don't mean escaping into dreams or into the irrational. I mean that I have to change my approach, look at the world from a different perspective, with a different logic and with fresh methods of cognitions and verification. The images of lightness that I seek should not fade away like dreams dissolved by the realities of present and future [...] (Calvino, 1993, p. 7).

Built around the pairing and opposition of lightness/heaviness is the discourse of impatience. An impatient person is someone who cannot wait, who wants to be ahead of his times, who is anchored to the idea of achieving immediate results, which are often futile and disappointing. One could say that our era, so fraught with inhibitions, is characterized to an impressive degree by the heaviness of impatience. This is where the lack of a future takes root. This is where memory is overwhelmed and erased, because the past, in its dimension of transferral, loses its negative value and is utterly doomed to oblivion (Freud, 1929).

In reference to Kundera's novel the *Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Calvino writes:

For Kundera the weight of living consists chiefly in constriction, in the dense net of public and private constrictions that enfolds us more and more closely. [...] Perhaps only the liveliness and mobility of the intelligence escape this sentence: the very qualities with which this novel is written, and which belong to a world quite different from the one we live in (Calvino, 1993, p. 7).

The level of philological finitude of the term “transparency” brings back to the expansive and, if a reference to Nietzsche is allowed, *recursive* enlargement of the pedagogical saturation of existence. It replies to the surface disquiet which characterizes the fundamental instability of existence.

No “planning” (the very cornerstone of the pedagogical function) and no reflective ability on the present can be addressed as the decisive *telos* of what was prefigured as the actual existential foundation.

This intransitive dramatization of social life (namely, everyone lives his own silent anguish for himself) comes out of the clear impossibility to reveal any kind of projectuality (expectations on personal and pro-

fessional fulfillment, as well as on proper emotional sphere), because of the passive living of a present whose routine nature is on the one hand reassuring, but also disturbing due to the symbiotic relation it creates between the self and the world. There is no *difference* which may ensure the singularity, but rather a persistent sense (necessary) of adaptation to the multitude.

The disarming submissiveness of criticism faced with the excessive power, on the one hand of the post-capitalistic ideology and on the other hand of the *politically correct*, may lead to think that no alternative to the capitalist organization is possible. In brief, no analysis (political, social, philosophical and pedagogical) exists that may overcome the tricky situations of a system which, as a whole, is intended as *Gestell* (Heidegger) or “administered society” (Horkheimer and Adorno). On the other hand, the financialisation of the exchange systems has led to the dematerialization of the relationships between the individual and consumer goods, therefore the capitalistic precept of the compulsive purchase has become a self-generating mantra which improves, even more, the centuries-old *telos* of capitalism: to produce and consume goods endlessly.

3. Ethical Invariances: The pedagogical Issue

In its analytical-constructive dimension, pedagogy (in its dual direction of formation and education) includes axiology in its fundamental elements of immanent criticism of the regulative effectiveness of the individual *within* community (Madrusan, 2008, pp. 122-140). The educational experience in the clinical field is, in this sense, exemplary. In the relation between two subjectivities (and here a difference already arises), that is educator and patient-user, the assertive and truthful *clinamen* of the relationship takes place. *Assertive* because it is the same educational institution (or function) that demands the way each *nomos* has to be performed – which, in this sense, beyond any comprehensible differences of negotiation, can be only disciplinary, namely it provides the subject with real adaptive attributes to the context; *truthful*, because it is actually through the relation between two differences (regarding the pronominal egologic dimension recalled by Husserl, starting from his *Logische Untersuchungen* of 1900-1901) that a mediatory combination is reached which is, at the same time, negotiating and regulative (Sola, 2008).

The area of the transpersonal self, in its possibility of appersonization the otherness, becomes, as reported by Eugen Fink, one of the truthful way of explication of the fundamental ontological difference between two entities called “beings” (Fink, 1978). The problem posed by Fink’s interrogation does not regard just an incisive definition of the features of being (as this case would lead to a mere qualitative and quantitative cataloguing of scholasticism), but rather the appropriative signification included in the desiring dimension of recognition (Kojève, 1969).

This issue, after all, involves those marginalizing situations most exposed to the risk of deprivation - *ex lege* - of individual rights, as it may be in the case of those who have committed a serious crime or, similarly, of those who, it is claimed, – arriving from other countries – are not “entitled to citizenship”.

The distinction between what is in law and what is not goes back, therefore, to the very constitution of the socialized life: it becomes *ontogenetic* part of human reality, the *distinction* itself being a peculiar activity of man. It is through this distinctive position that man creates his own environment and the relationships with his similar.

In contemporary times, the philosopher Peter Singer and the biologist Hugo Engelhardt have proposed a clear differentiation between people who “have rights” and, on the contrary, people who, living a particular difficult situation that causes their impossibility to decide (subjects suffering from severe psychiatric diseases, elderly people or, in short, individuals with highly disabling deficits in judgment skills), do not have the same rights as those who – presumably – can bear the burden of responsibility, choice and decision (Esposito, 2004). Both these authors’ strategy seems to rely on theoretical constructs of the maximum economic exploitation, that refer to Bentham and Mill and that, actually, end up with a utilitarianism brought to its extreme consequences. The fundamental objection, however, raised for example by both scholars of ethics and philosophy, and also by physicians, is: who decides who owns the status of person and who, on the contrary, that of non-person? Think of what Martha Nussbaum wrote, investigating the concept (legally relevant) of “disgust”:

One area of the law in which judgments of the disgusting are unequivocally central is the current law of obscenity: the disgust of an average member of society, applying contemporary community standards, has typically been taken to be a crucial element in the definition of obscene. The Supreme Court [of the USA, *Ed.*] has noted that the word “obscene” contains the Latin word for filth, *caenum*, and that two prominent dictionaries include the term “disgusting” in their definition of them. [...] The disgust of a criminal for a homosexual victim may be seen as a mitigating factor in homicide. The disgust of judge or jury has frequently been regarded as relevant to the assessment of a homicide where potentially aggravating factors are under consideration (Nussbaum, 2004, p. 73).

At the same time, Honneth investigated the concept of “disrespect” – intended not only as psychic but also as social-formal category – related to the issue of recognition, *ergo*, in his perspective, of the regulatory function of law.

For with the normative reorganization of legal relations that developed under the pressure of expanding market relations and the simultaneous rise of post-traditional ways of thinking, legal recognition split off from the hierarchical value order insofar as the individual was in principle to enjoy legal equality *vis-à-vis* all others. The normative structural transformation that went along with this institutionalization of the idea of legal equality should not be underestimated, since it led to the establishment of two completely different spheres of recognition, revolutionizing the moral order of society: the individual could now – certainly not in actual practice, but at least according to the normative idea – know that he or she was respected as a legal person with the same rights as all other members of society, while still owing his or her social esteem to a hierarchical scale of values – which had, however, also been set on a new foundation (Honneth, 2003, p. 140).

Disrespect, disgust, disdain are forms of disrecognition of the other which, in addition to depriving him, *de facto*, of his rights, place him in a dimension of submission. Here we find one of the differences between the political reform of Rawlsian liberalism, proclaimed by Nussbaum, and the thematic assumption of tolerance (a perspective already identified by Adorno in *Minima moralia*) as one of the ways to constantly lower the threshold of social conflict.

Nevertheless, Agamben’s and Esposito’s reflections have already highlighted – with different research directions, however compatible – the permanence in modernity of that frailty of the borders between humanity and inhumanity. In fact *homo sacer*, being “dear to gods”, goes beyond any statute of humanity and, for this very reason, is expendable. The “third person”, according to Esposito, reduces subjectivity to mere pronominality (Esposito, 2012, pp. 104-151).

As in the relation between individual and law, therefore, the question to ask is ascribable to what Castoriadis intended as the search for autonomy (*autos-nomos*: giving oneself a rule in self-limitation) and which regards, specifically, the terms of education and educability. In the relation self-others a *quantum* of discretion is always manifested, which represents the autonomous decision skills of every individual. The regulative function of relational truth can only pass through – in this case as in the norm-law – its nomothetic concretization.

Therefore, a pedagogy (as well as a philosophy) which focuses its attention only on values would fall – as Nietzsche had realized – in the moralistic crucible of asseveration. The *Soll*, even in the tension of its necessary feasibility, would prove to be the forcing absolute that regulates, only through the violence of the law, how our action is responsive (Resta, 2007, pp. 167-214). The universalistic ethics of the normative imperative (although, as Kant wanted, internalized, that is, turned to “categorical”) inevitably clashes with the “hard nut” of being that reveals its independence right in the face of the most difficult test, namely the request (implicit in every system) of unconditional and obedient acceptance of the social context.

4. Endless Metamorphosis: Friend or Enemy?

Indeed, it is impossible to fathom the powerful ideological device of wars unless one understands the mechanisms underlying the creation of the public enemy (Said, 1997; Eco, 2013). Here again, everything revolves around a strategic opposition and a paradox, the enemy/friend distinction. The effectiveness of this contrast lies in the way it demonstrates the power of the coalition: when there is an enemy to face,

coalitions are created that immediately manifest their alignment, their strength and their strategy of prevarication.

A key author, in this regard, who despite his past, had grasped the longing for constant conquest inherent in the development of Western societies, is Carl Schmitt. It is interesting to note how this figure, who under Nazism was the true inspiration behind some of the Third Reich's most drastic laws, silently inspired the expansionist policy of the liberal democratic West through certain concepts, simple in their essence and effective in their implementation, of geopolitical strategy: "greater space" and "living space" on the one hand, and friend/enemy on the other (Schmitt, 2011).

Essentially, says Schmitt – who after the defeat of Germany and the end of World War II already saw the United States as the future arbiter of world controversies (Schmitt, 2011, pp. 30-74) – to ensure their survival, states must constantly expand their "greater space" (*Grossraum*) in order to maintain the principle of "living space" (*Lebensraum*) needed to guarantee the *sic imperat* of a vast military, economic and political power (Müller, 2003).

Indeed, Schmitt writes:

man is not a creature wholly conditioned by his environment. Through history, he has the ability to get the better of his existence and his consciousness. He is aware not only of the act of birth, but also of the possibility of a rebirth. [...] The scope for his abilities and for action on history is vast. Man can choose, and at certain moments in his history, he may even go so far, through a gesture peculiar to him, as to change himself into a new form of his historical existence, in virtue of which he readjusts and reorganizes himself (Schmitt, 1997).

In this sense, one could say that Schmitt is a perfect student of Hegel, since by highlighting the Absolute Spirit through the actions and work performed by man, he elevates freedom to an essential concept, though corrupted by the conquering power of brute strength (Hegel, 1976).

The other distinction, closely tied to the previous one, is the one between enemy and friend. "A declaration of war", Schmitt emphasizes, "is always a declaration of an enemy" (Schmitt, 2007, p. 85).

The flight towards and fascination with universal history conceals violence, which in both Hegel and Schmitt is never explicitly declared but always taken for granted. War generates a necessary violence upon closer examination, every human relationship, from the Hegelian perspective of recognition, is simply the constant evolution of one individual's supremacy over another (Strauss, 2000). For this reason, Schmitt emphasizes, performing any act of violence means taking a risk. Whether this risk can be legally tolerated or not does not matter in this case, because what is significant is the almost implicit necessity that the individual or individuals who perform the action incur a substantial share of danger to their lives or those of others.

The word *risky* – Schmitt writes – also has a precise meaning, namely, that risky actions are treated at their own risk, and the worst consequences of their success or failure are taken for granted, so that there can be no question of injustice when the severest consequences ensue (Schmitt, 2007, p. 28).

From this perspective, the Schmittian need for a distinction between friend and enemy becomes even clearer: "In the theory of war", he writes, "it is always the distinction of enmity that gives war its meaning and character" (Schmitt, 2007, p. 89).

Far from remaining vague, war demands that one identify an object with opposing interests, while defining a field of exclusion and inclusion that establishes the spheres of affiliation. This is where the term *coalition* takes on significance and it is precisely in this perspective that it establishes the rules for differentiating between those who are *friends* and those who are *enemies*.

Specific, stringent rules that nonetheless can be modified in accordance with shifted scenarios and the expansion or restriction of military, political, or economic interests.

Schmitt writes: "Every attempt to bracket or limit war must have in view that, in relation to concept of war, enmity is the primary concept, and that the distinction among different types of war presupposes a distinction among different types of enmity" (Schmitt, 2007, p. 89).

5. Not a Phantasy: The Legacy of War

Some events occurred over the last thirty years – even if they can appear now distant – have radically modified the global geopolitical condition, causing the attentive reconsideration of the legitimacy of the protection of international rights, so as they were redefined at the end of the Second World War.

The impressive temporal consecutiveness of these episodes may underline, in its entire extension, the radical change of the geopolitical paradigm, through war interventions aimed at destabilizing (in a clearly Schmittian perspective of ‘exceptionality’ and decision-making necessity deriving from total war) specific areas of the planet (no more East/West nor North/South of the world), which include, sinusoidally, territories – clearly identified – of strategic interest.

The logic of exceptionality of the global conflict turns to the non-exceptionality of the permanent destructive action, which does not find a goal in itself, but rather in the conservation of a sufficient level of extraction of resources. The exception is, as Schmitt repeated, a state of things which allow the suspension – without time limits – of any habitual and constitutional management of law (and of rights). Exceptionality, therefore, as Schmitt again repeated, is a condition of the law which, although not abjuring itself, lives in/of the institutive paradox of its own self-regulation (Agamben, 2005, pp. 35-36).

The clear separation between the norm and its realization has remained (and still remains) at the basis – as, during the 1920s, it was already underlined in the debate between Schmitt and Kelsen, another important European jurist, supporter of constitutionalism – of the contradictory primordial source contained in natural law, that is “who” (or which body) is the effective holder of the enforceability of the law (including international law). Enforceability that, as Benjamin correctly warned, can only go through an absolute metaphysics of violence.

Following this theory of exceptionality, we continue underlining the decisive events that have caused the further change of the political paradigm since the early 90s of the twentieth century.

On August 2, 1990, nearly a year after the fall of the Berlin Wall (which took place on November 9, 1989), Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. On January 17, 1991, the United States, with the authorization of the UN and bolstered by a coalition of 35 Countries, attacked and invaded Iraq, launching Operation Desert Storm. One can argue that this military operation, so strongly desired by George H.W. Bush, radically modified the global geopolitical configuration that had taken shape at the end of World War II.

If Schmitt’s aforementioned ideas about the need for an enemy and the construction of “living space” have any significance, they must be linked to that event and to the current configuration of the wars underway.

In 1995 NATO intervened in Bosnia; in 2001 the International Security Assistance Force (guided by the USA) invaded Afghanistan; on March 20, 2003, the Second Gulf War began, spearheaded by George W. Bush; on March 19, 2011, a contingent of French, US and British forces (which shortly thereafter, and not without controversy, passed under NATO control) attacked Libya.

Now, to pose a question that exactly thirty years ago, at the beginning of the First Gulf War, attracted the attention of intellectuals (Said, 2004; Chomsky, 2004), philosophers and international jurists, is there such a thing as a “just war”?

In a much-debated booklet published in March 1991 under the title *Una guerra giusta? Sul conflitto del Golfo* [“A Just War? Thoughts on the Gulf Conflict”], which gathered together articles by one of the 20th century’s most authoritative philosophers and intellectuals, Norberto Bobbio not only examined questions of a legal and formal nature, but distinguished, in the pacifist ranks, between utopists, the acritical, and theorists of nonviolence.

The fact – he wrote – that a war can be considered legitimate does not mean that it is also obligatory. A legitimate war is simply a war that is not prohibited, that is an exception to a prohibition. An obligatory war is a war that not only is not prohibited but is required. The distinction between a non-prohibited war and a required war lies at the heart of the difference between just war and holy war (Bobbio, 1991, p. 14).

Despite Bobbio’s emphasis on the tragic nature of war and the need, nevertheless, to make choices, he circumscribed the nature of the military intervention as related to international law: “A war must not only

be just, but effective and useful, if it is to be a means suited to the end, which is to mend the breach of law. In other words, it must be successful, and limited in time and space”².

Those in power, Bobbio continued, must “obey the ethics of responsibility, weighing the consequences of their actions. And to be prepared to renounce them, if those actions risk producing an evil worse than the one they are trying to fight. The reparation of a wrong must not turn into a massacre” (Bobbio, 1991, p. 43).

First Gul War claimed some 100,000 civilian victims, along with 20,000 to 30,000 Iraqi soldiers and approximately 350 coalition soldiers who died in combat. Over ten years of war, the Syrian civil conflict (where the interests of different global economic powers are at stake, such as United States, Russia, China, Israel, Turkey, Iran) has caused 191,400 victims and 3,8 million refugees (UNO data 2014). The material damage of the destruction and loss of productivity – besides the cultural ones, related to the pulverization or severe damage of precious archeological sites – is hard to calculate both in the medium and long term. The Afghani war, which lasted ten years, costed 2,000 billion dollars to USA, 2,325 military deaths and about 20,000 injured. History, then, as Hegel maintained, does not admit any “interiority” that is not immediately responsive to the exteriority of the world.

So is there such a thing as “just war”? In the *Phenomenology of the Spirit* Hegel points out that history seems to be an enormous slaughterhouse – as we are reminded by Kurt Vonnegut’s visionary masterpiece of 1965, *Slaughterhouse Five, or The Children’s Crusade* (Vonnegut, 2007) –, in which enlightened reason, the *Aufklärung* that Kant hoped for, has no voice in the matter (Kant, 1784)³.

If Bobbio’s appeal to an ethical sense of responsibility can create a realm of incomprehensibility (a war can be “just” to the degree that the forces deciding that war have the legal power to justify it: a principle, moreover, at the foundation of Schmitt’s justificationalist notions) then we are faced with an obvious paradox. Trying to turn the question round, this writer believes that the contrast between just and unjust is tragically misleading, because, though founded on Kantian principles of morality, it risks overlooking three fundamental factors: power, ideology and necessity.

The *power* is the impressively superior military power of the West, the *ideology* is the obsessive search for an enemy to fight or an ally to praise (Žižek, 2008); the *necessity* lies in the authority of the international law (the UN) that sanctions the rules of inclusion and exclusion (Kingué, 1986, pp. 311-327).

Only an in-depth critical grasp of the problems and scenarios at work can allow a lucid understanding of what is by now an age-old conflict between culture and barbarism. Slipping into barbarism means stifling critical thought.

Let’s get back to Calvino:

Were I to choose an auspicious image for the new millennium, I would choose that one: the sudden agile leap of the poet-philosopher who raises himself above the weight of the world, showing that with all his gravity he has the secret of lightness, and that what many consider to be the vitality of the times – noisy, aggressive, revving and roaring – belongs to the realm of death, like a cemetery for rusty old cars (Calvino, 1993, p. 12).

In this cemetery for rusty cars, war seems to be an ironic, cynical and tragic theater spotlighting the uselessness of existence (Žižek, 2010, pp. 54-79).

2 On these aspects, a much more complex and articulated reflection was carried out by Michael Walzer, in his attempt to “justify” extensively – creating this “extensiveness” of war on an historical continuity that originates from modernity, starting from von Clausewitz’s considerations – the feasibility (and, contextually, the validation) of the use of weapons (Walzer, 1977, pp. 3-30). The first chapter of the book by Walzer was suggestively entitled “The Moral reality of War”.

3 An original and enthusiastic reading of Kant is offered by the study made by Michel Foucault, *What is Enlightenment?* Foucault writes: “From Hegel through Nietzsche or Max Weber to Horkheimer or Habermas, hardly any philosophy has failed to confront this same question, directly or indirectly. What, then, is this event that is called the *Aufklärung* and that has determined, at least in part, what we are, what we think, and what we do today?” (Foucault, 1984, p. 32).

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