

# On the Violence and the War

## What is the most Important Philosophical Problem of War?

### A Possible Interpretation on the War

Sándor Karikó\*

**Abstract:**

Wars and war conflicts have been seen through history. It seems this is a necessity. From the history of philosophy – among others – Hegel can be quoted, who set the necessity of wars to moral cause. Karl Marx continues: he shows how unleashing wars relates to the appearance of property and ownership. According to him, man approaches the terms of production (mainly the land and its resource) as if they were the man's hands or own accessories. This general correspondence in the history of philosophy (could be hard to challenge its justness), does not negate the moral lesson: it is everyone's responsibility to protect peace, sedate war conflicts and solve them.

**Keywords:** war, violence, property, moral, peace, individuality

Motto:

“It is not given to humanity to live in eternal peace.”

Coleman Phillipson

**Introduction**

The subject of war and its conflicts cannot be analyzed enough, there is tons of scientific literature about it, but still we don't know enough. Unfailing and ineffaceable subject which cannot be closed, because, unfortunately, war itself keeps following history forever. We can safely state the fact, that predestinated responsibility typifies politicians, war historians, jurists, priests, generals and upper-deck ratings, researchers of moral and religion explaining and judging war issues (in general and concrete relations). And of course – maybe not with the same effect as the previous ones – philosophy cannot stay neutral.

As likely as not we could bring up many more scientific and intellectual professions involved, but I would remind for just one: art. Many art forms deal with war issues and – for me it is obvious – all of

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\* Emeritus Professor, University of Szeged Faculty of Juhász Gyula's Training, Szeged, Hungary, karikosandor7@gmail.com

the significant (classic) artworks enrich our knowledge and image about war.

Undeniable, the subject of war brings up many self-explanatory questions, views, which won't be written down here. But I think, the basic dilemma is “*why is war even exists?*”, which question by the way must be analyzed by philosophy with some answer for it or a thought about it at least. Why does human history work out the way that war repeatedly and constantly appears in it? Why cannot be war conflicts cut off? Or if these type of conflicts appear all the time without end, but at least why can't we wipe out war from future history forever, peremptorily?

We all know (earlier generations experienced it) war is followed by terrible devastation. Human constructed buildings destroyed, nature damaged, herbs and animals dying, and most importantly human existence become in danger and then dozens of people die. We can be surprised by Leo Tolstoy in his novel *War and Peace*: “millions and millions of people had to go from the west to the east and kill people like themselves the same way as people coming from the east to the west did some centuries earlier” (Tolstoy, 1993: 10). For a first look war seems unexplainable and hard to understand. But we can see this kind of state when „life is constantly questionable” (Krasznahorkai, 1999: 146) is an unavoidable “accessory” of human civilization history. What is more, it seems like war itself moves the whole history. The great Russian realist writer gives an uncertain answer for the – essentially philosophical – dilemma, that „Why is war unleashed (...)? We don't know, but people unite in certain groups for some specific goal and (...) that is the way it is because other way it cannot be imagined, this is the law” (Tolstoy, 1993: 430).

I think this “law” basically the definition of necessity. Other artists, sociologists and philosophers recognize the correspondence in the concept of “law” and “necessity”. What is more, they not just discover the connection but also take it on. The incident of war becomes not only unavoidable, but also majestic. There are many examples in polite literature. Obvious to think of – randomly picked – Shakespeare's *Henry V*. The king says, who miss the battle will regret their absence later. (Shakespeare, 1972: 400) War appears as a “heroic action”, a summary of certain virtues (like bravery, good-fellowship, self-sacrifice etc.) In connection let me refer to a contemporary Hungarian writer, László Krasznahorkai, who mentioned an important psychological phase in his novel, titled “War and war” (which is a magnificent literary work about war conflicts and morals): “great achievements raise up men, and men desires greatness, the greatness needs (...) the great action itself, which

(...) can only be accomplished in danger, (...) the pitch of danger (that what war is according to the author – S.K.)” (Krasznahorkai, 1999: 146).

It is unquestionable in the processes of war there are some psychological and moral strains, noble virtues like these. The connection between war and morals can be really analyzed from this angle. At the same time – as we will see later – this relation must be explored from some other viewpoints.

### **Discussion**

I think if there is some reason to consider war positive effects, then we have to review certain civilized, more precise social-economic (and scientific) consequences. For example in a chapter of Wolfgang Pohrt, contemporary German philosopher and sociologist’s new book (the title tells a lot already: “There is no advance (...) without war”) he brings our attention to the fact that “industrial capitalism is also made by war. Who created the market? Of course, the army. The general liability for military service means all of a sudden 100.000 or more uniforms needed and therefore material, cotton. (...) That created textiles, the first industrial mass production” (Pohrt, 2012: 26).

Clearly we could bring up many other certain historical examples where war creates positive, unpredictable (or did not wanted!) changes and progressive procedures in the timeline of history. Social developments like these – certainly – cover our views of war. But however may our opinions, image turn out; the basic question still is that really *what is war* and most importantly *why do people go to war against each other*. This dilemma comes up all the time and keep many people excited, not giving them a moment of rest.

So what is war, more precisely what is force in it like? What mysterious pressure, interest or necessity, or even misbelief moves the wholes process? Can we say Clausewitz, classic of the subject, that war is the “activity of human connection?” (Clausewitz, 1999: 107). Therefore a manifestation which is continued politics “only” with blood. Or simply do we beguile ourselves with that mysterious explanation which tells war is the devil itself? (Teichman, 2006: 2) Why it is a necessary symptom? Why is war necessary?

Obviously, philosophy deals with the questions above for a long time (as many other social sciences). It would be valid to analyze critically the rich material of philosophical history (it would be a huge challenge), I could not consider as my duty even the review of it. I have to settle for some edgy, but not well-known (or acclaimed!) philosophical thought’s highlight. I received some motivation from Jenny Teichman, Australian philosopher’s book. In her work, titled *The Philosophy of War and Peace* she writes about the subject from different angles in a form which is easy to follow and understand. A reviewer of

her book entitled to write that: “Teichman is the best, when she sets the totalitarianism, the conversion and the torture’s politics against the moral confusion which describes the contemporary thinking of the west” (Lang, 2009: 115). I don’t mean to underestimate this problem’s importance, and surely she has successfully defined some lessons at this point. (Paraphrasing this would be another great study.) For me the first chapter of her six part book is more interesting where she sums up and analyzes the most important philosophy historical thoughts from Plato, Aristotle through Grotius till the representatives of the 20th century about the substances of war. I think, the philosophical outlook and analysis in this subject – as in many others – deserves a warm welcome, this chapter of the study has written for the same reason. In the following text I want to add something – even if it is not too much – to set the philosophical basics of war’s subject. I want to bring up and analyze two classic thinkers, Marx and Hegel’s thoughts about the subject, especially some of the words, conceptions by Marx. The direct – actually negative – motivation has given by exactly Teichman who did not recognize the importance of Marx’s concept. I think, without diminishing Teichman’s merit, we must clarify and detail that image and view about war.

But at first let me recall an earlier philosopher’s view. Hegel – as known – in his work, titled *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* refers to the multiple liability of the state. According to Hegel, the state’s purpose is not only ensuring the individual’s life and property. The state’s sovereignty requires the sacrifice of individual’s life and property. Here is the moral issue of war: “War is not to be regarded as an absolute evil and as a purely external accident. (...) War is the state of affairs which deals in earnest with the vanity of temporal goods. (...) War has the higher significance that by its agency, the ethical health of peoples is preserved in their indifference to the stabilization of finite institutions: just as the blowing of the winds preserves the sea from the foulness which would be the result of a prolonged calm, so also corruption in notions would be the product of prolonged, let alone ‘perpetual’ peace” (Hegel, 1945: 210).

From this text, we can obviously see: war – if we want it or not – necessary social event. This necessity interestingly stands on moral view at Hegel. In connection it is worthy of note Cruysberg from Leuven, contemporary philosopher’s reaction. He claims it is right to take morals into the war-theory; what is more, we must pay attention to the war and morals historical changes too. For example, he looks *honor* as a moral virtue, and then he finds out “the state like the ambitious individual can see any critic as a disgrace, and therefore a motive for war. (... But today – S. K.) there is no war for honor, but for higher rank motives. It seems,

honor is no more respected as a motive for war. Rather (...) because basic humanist (...) reasons. Or the so-called civilized nations now rarely refer to honor as an official legitimacy for war. (...) They more likely to organize *land-* and time-limited interventions (...) now they rarely take risks even on the lives of deployed soldiers” (Cruysberg, 2007: 33-34, 140).

Uncontroverted, in the earlier times honor as a virtue and moral value was cherished, and offending that had a predestinated role in starting and maintaining a war. And we can experience that now this legitimate base – sadly – fades away, or in worse cases even vanishes. As if it would give its place for something else, a higher ranked principle above morals, which seems like an extremely abstract and vague ideal, mysterious motive, human move. Hegel stuck at accenting the – classic – moral view of war, maybe this lead him to his “interesting war-theory” (Cruysberg, 2007: 133)

Inserting morals in war-theory, apparently cannot be skipped, but I think there is need for more work to settle the basics or at least we must try it. We must reveal the deeper social roots of war’s motive and manifestation. In other words: do not narrow down the analysis of war to search for certain moral-spiritual categories, thoughts and virtues (like bravery, ambition, honor, etc.). Search for the *root* of all war, the *deepest* and *most generic* philosophical basics of it. We do not have to look far *in time* from Hegel in this case. Perhaps my statement is going to be surprising: there are instructions in the works of Marx which can push forward and deeper the research of war.

I know and feel, referring to Marx is not such a grateful decision nowadays. It is not hip to build from Marx (too), but it is to revile him. And to many others it is the best to totally stay away from him. For many researchers, teachers, intellectuals (who had been believers of Marx themselves that time) his name had become a curse-word, they try to degrade, diminish his thoughts to intellectual poverty. I do not want to deal with the political-ideal metamorphosis problem, not if it would not be relevant and exciting social dilemma. But from my subject’s view I must accent two things, general methodical lessons and concrete theoretical realizations. I will describe the last viewpoint a little more detailed.

About the methodical lesson I want to recall a remarkable but forgotten Hungarian philosopher from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, József Somogyi. By the way he was the senior lecturer in University of Szeged JGYPK institution (where I also teach now) between the two world wars. He defines the followings as a general policy (we can surely undertake these words still today): “we must keep the objective clarification of sense, edgy critical taste and above morale, trendy words, mass sense of taste, searching for the truth within problems *sub specie aeternitatis*. The

independent thinking ability and critical perspicacity have supremely described by exactly the fashion – we do not follow” (Somogyi, 1940: 9-10).

Today in Hungary (it is not soothing we are not alone with it) there is some intellectual courage needed to analyze thoughts by Marx in times and circumstances when it is absolutely not common. But in his work of lifetime there is a viewpoint – this time theoretical –, which brought me to him. Namely (and this is a stronger reason than the methodical lesson highlighted by József Somogyi) he discovered and deeply analyzed the theme (hopefully it will emerge from the next sketchy introduction), where – in my opinion – every war-research could be established. Or at least it seems like a good thought, which certainly worth discussing.

First of all, let’s take a look to his view about the connection of war and morals. Already known the works of Marx, it is not a surprise; he highlights the negative effects of it. I would only remind for one concrete example. According to the author of the *Capital*: the war is the great common task, the great common labour, which basically always means “*the concentrated and organized force of society*” (highlight from me – S. K.) (Marx, 1906: 823). It can’t be denied, the most brutal violence happened in the modern colonial wars, where nations thought model-like states (Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, France, England) had the responsibility for them. Marx harshly criticizes these otherwise Christian states’ wild and vile colonial economy, exploited campaign against many people. It is worth to highlight out of many atrocities the example of Netherlands in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The Dutch, who were first in the development of the colonial system, they model the quarry of incomparable vileness. Marx states clearly: „Nothing is more characteristic than their system of stealing men, to get slaves for Java. (...) The young people stolen were thrown into the secret dungeons of Celebes, until they were ready for sending to the slave-ships. (...) Wherever they set foot, devastation and depopulation followed. Bajuwangi, a province of Java, in 1750 numbered over 80.000 inhabitants, in 1811 only 18.000. Sweet commerce!” (Marx, *ibidem*: 824).

Examples from Marx can be continued at will, and there is no doubt, colonization as the many other forms of war spells itself into history as violence, which brings huge pain and destruction. The discovery, awareness of open and hidden forms of *violence*, but firstly *convicting* social violence *clearly, firmly* are all-time moral obligation and responsibility of humanity. This is the main moral lesson and order of every war. The historical forms of violence obviously change with time, but the moral lesson always stays the same: war (as a concentrated social violence) is very undeserving and degrading to humanity, why it is

reprehensible and unacceptable. It is not much comparing this to the effects and power of violent behaviors, acts, but not standing up against it morally means that humanity gives up itself in every way degrading its fate to a simple toy of it.

The moral questions about war are important for Marx – as the same way for Hegel –, but it is apparent that he highlights some other legitimate connections of them. But he moves forward in his analysis, and makes a general history-philosophical discovery, which takes the base of the dilemma of the need for war to another level in its roots. It is quite understandable that Marx was excited about the question of why people maintain war. For a first sight it can be surprising he suggests a new starting-point for the analysis: set the base for the concept of *property*. At this point his analysis becomes more abstract but deeper in thinking, and the results forms into a unique conception. I may state, *the words of Marx about the birth of property and historical forming sets the base the whole war-research*. Or, at least it is a necessary, irreparable philosophical essential for every research of war. Let's take a look of the most important texts by Marx!

*Property*, which is the summarizing category of history eventually “*Property* thus originally means no more than a human being's relation to this natural conditions of production as belonging to him, as his, as presupposed along with his own being: relations to them as *natural presuppositions* of his self, which only form, so to speak, his extended body” (Marx, 1972: 370-371). The thing is that property itself is the production's relation of natural assumption: a connection, which belongs to the human nature. In this case according to Marx *land* is the key. We cannot accent the social-historical importance of land enough: it is material, tool and product at the same time. A “big laboratory”, the natural arsenal which starts the historical movement and repentance. Pristine union of property and land, what we talk about here, where: „property – i. e. the relation of the individual to the *natural* conditions of labor and of reproduction as belonging to him, as the objective, nature-given inorganic body of his subjectivity” (Marx, 1972: 357).

In other words – and here we get a direct instruction too about the meaning of war in a history-philosophical way: “they relate to it (namely to land and ground – K. S.) as their property, although they never stabilize this property. (...) *Warfare* is therefore one of the earliest occupations of each of these naturally arisen communities, both for the defense of their property and for obtaining new property” (Marx, 1972: 370). So it is not a coincidental formula, this view of property (as the sheer augmentation of the human inorganic body) comes up as a part of a direct and often analyzed concept. The view of the “mature” Marx – not surprisingly for me – is advancing in the most philosophical earlier work, but in a very abstract form. We can read the following lines in economy-

philosophical scripts: “both the material of labor and man as the subject, are the point of departure as well as the result of the movement (and precisely in this fact, that they must constitute the point of departure, lies the historical necessity of private property” (Marx, 1970: 70).

Of course the texts above can be extended with new add-ons and expansions. But perhaps the viewpoint of war and its necessity by Marx is sensible from this much. It belongs to the person himself, his body – which is unquestionable – like his two hands. Therefore those are his natural property. His life’s natural assumption. The human looks or tries to look the same way to the land, the ground and their product, together with the animals and people of the land. *Like those belong to his existence!* Like those are his hands’ extensions! With the most generic words: there comes up a unique, pristine symbiosis between man and nature, which materialized in property and its relations. Property becomes the starting-point, historical beginning of social movement. And in the end, this relation becomes the inducement of every war and conflict – even if someone does not recognize or deny that fact.

So war is a necessary event according to Marx, and to reveal and understand it – sketched above – we must go down to its deepest historical roots. But it is important to recognize that this necessity does not occur like fate, at all costs or a mystery above humanity. So it is not some mysterious force or an unexplainable curse on humanity. In connection with this, let me refer to Ferenc Tőkei’s concluding statement – as I know the best Hungarian philosopher of the works by Marx –, which has been avoided by the researchers of war. “Historical materialism – says Tőkei – is not admits any kind of relation and institution’s general necessity, abstract and eternal ‘unavoidability’, but is not giving that to the coincidental either, rather reveals the all-time historical necessities and makes some more general conclusions based on those” (Tőkei, 1977: 177-178). Marx talks about war with this historical dialect.

Apparently, Tőkei’s way of thinking and language, are based on defined views of Marx. In that sense, his theoretical, methodical views, philosophical thinking feed upon the works of Marx. But it is not a problem *of its own*, because every great thinker can be described by a certain source, defined explanation and linguistic description. Let’s think about any other classic philosopher’s way of thinking! However the Hungarian philosopher’s quotation above, I think – in proportion with Marx’s view –, contains a discovery, which worth a highlight and thinking more about it. Precisely: we must react shortly to his phrase and explanation of necessity’s “historical dialect”.



Truly, war and violence see history through, and we cannot be certain these kind of events going to stop in the future. In every war and conflict basically concrete historical interests, relations and objective pressures manifest themselves. Historical dialect exactly means, these are not happening above people, independently. So war is “not an absolute eternal social fact, rather a relative symptom depending on social changes”, – points out Sándor Giesswein, a forgotten Hungarian sociologist. With more generic words: “the show us war as a relatively independent variable in the ever-changing human scene, (...) war conditioning and supporting these in the most surprising and lasting ways” (Giesswein, 1915: 6). Obviously, human activities and participant’s conscious-emotional status work and summarized in the process. And at this point enter *morals*. The individual (a prime minister, political leader, military general, and owner of a multinational company, program-editor, teacher, artist, or anybody else) can’t be unconcerned in the question of why and how a war conflict starts. A man takes the floor and protest against the war and every kind of violence. As the individual is responsible for his own fate, in the same way every nation – on different levels – also responsible for the way of the world form. The reasons of violent conflicts and wars can’t be affixed to only economic or power interests, necessities.

### **Conclusion**

Many think that way if war is necessary then every moral objection, effort is useless and pointless. For me it is still obvious that there is significance of moral views, responsibility and sense. It has also functionality if a war has already started. At this time it is a basic moral order to lead the opponents to the courtroom which is the place to argue, not the battlefield, where they take each other’s lives. This kind of moral view and gesture – certainly – not always leads to success, but if only one war conflict has been solved by this way, it was worth the try. And let’s not forget that in the other unsolved examples there is still hope for peaceful solution.

Because we cannot forget for a moment (I referred to a literary example in the beginning of my study, now for a closure let me do that again) the beautiful lines of László Krasznahorkai from his novel quoted earlier: peace is “the biggest achievement of humanity” (Krasznahorkai, 1999: 162). Agreed with the writer, let me add this – in orientation of my concrete theme –: *defending peace is a moral duty for all of us*. In the end, let me respond to the chosen thought of Coleman Phillipson to my motto, which says: it is not given to humanity to live in eternal peace. It seems like, it is a true statement, because we know well, experience the fact that if we shout for peace, there is need to be war, we like it or not. Many recognized this unique connection between war and peace.

Remember to the lines – of Giesswein again –: “war and peace is two presuming factor one another, like light and shadow. Where is no war, or, at least, the opportunity for war, there is no point of a movement for peace.” (Giesswein, 1915: 36) But I rather accent the second word, peace: in my opinion peace is the priceless, irretrievable treasure of humanity. Gaining that and defending it constantly is a community problem and work as huge – if not bigger – as war itself.

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