

EUROPE, WAR AND THE PATHIC CONDITION. A PHENOMENOLOGICAL AND PRAGMATIST TAKE ON THE CURRENT EVENTS IN UKRAINE

Albert Dikovich

University of Constance

albert.dikovich@uni-konstanz.de

ABSTRACT: In my paper, I develop a phenomenological and pragmatist reflection on the fragility of liberal democracy's moral foundations in times of war. Following Judith Shklar's conception of the "liberalism of fear", the legitimacy of the liberal-democratic order is seen as grounded in experiences of suffering caused by political violence. It is also assumed that the liberalism of fear delivers an adequate conception of the normative foundations of the European project. With the help of phenomenologists such as Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Michel Henry, the paper aims to philosophically deepen the liberalism of fear by outlining a theory of "pathic evidence" as a normative foundation and the concept of a common "flesh of the political" as a shared moral sensitivity that sets boundaries to political conflict as well as the political imaginary, excluding what I call the production of "monumental meaning". It then examines the question which political conditions are needed for this evidence to become a shared, communal criteria of ethical thought, and considers inner and outer challenges to the transmission and reproduction of this evidence in time, drawing especially on John Dewey's ideas of democratic communication and social intelligence. In the current war, the following problem appears as crucial for the "soul" of European democracies which are confronted with the need to respond to Russia's attack: How can a political morality grounded in pathic evidence be sustained, once it is challenged by an aggressor who, out of cultural and political reasons, shows a higher level of toleration towards violence? Besides aggression from an external foe, there are also temporal dynamics that further the loss of the inhibiting force of pathic evidence from the inside. As it shall be argued, boredom can be such a factor. The paper concludes by drawing conclusions for the current war in Ukraine.

Keywords: Liberalism of Fear, War & Peace, Political Violence, Pragmatism, Phenomenology, Ukraine, Europe

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to analyze the moral rift that underlies the current political rift between Europe and Putin's Russia. That there is such a rift is indicated by the fact that the Russian invasion of Ukraine has brought back war as a means of politics into the heart of Europe. Banning war as a means of conflict is the most fundamental aim of the

European project. "Never again!": this catchphrase of the interwar pacifist movement has become the guiding principle of European Politics, the taboo on war demarcates the line between the politically justifiable and the unjustifiable in the relations of those who are part of this political and ethical community. In the past year, Europeans witnessed in shock how untroubled the Russian head of state seems in starting a spiral of escalation and destruction in pursuing dubious ideological motives, an unreasonable desire for absolute security that really is a pretense for war, and very possibly a profound disgust precisely for the European peace project that he has come to challenge.

I will discuss the question of whether the key difference lies in a certain organizing principle of moral and political judgement, in the availability respectively absence of a certain foundational axiom. I will call it *pathic evidence*. I want to outline this idea by engaging in a discussion with several phenomenological and pragmatist thinkers. I will elaborate the idea of the foundation (Stiftung) of an organizing principle of thought by a historical, bodily experience: the experience of the violence of modern warfare and totalitarian rule. Phenomenology helps to understand the intermingling of the empirical and the transcendental, of the bodily and the ideal in experience, thus enabling to conceive of morality not as founded in *a priori*-concepts or in rational calculation of maximal general advantage, but as sedimentations of past experiences and thus history. Pragmatism helps to conceive of this process as a dialectics of means, ends and the consequences of the application of means that is mediated by certain conditions of communication and a certain constitution of the public.¹ It will be discussed if a difference between two kinds of moral reasoning is rooted in different political systems, the freedom of communication and thus the capacities of making something evident. Democracy and authoritarianism provide different chances for the pathic evidence to become collectively shared. Whereas pathic evidence is – as shall be argued

¹ The paper thus engages in a dialogue between phenomenological and pragmatist thinking as it has been recently suggested by Sebastian Luft; cf. Luft 2019; cf. also Bourgeois 2002.

– essentially a breakdown of meaning, authoritarianism is marked by the tyrannical stabilization and clinging to a certain political project of meaning, thus by the suppression of pathic evidence. It is a rift in what I call the *flesh of the political*; a rift concerning the appearance of war that itself appears in this war and confronts European politics with a profound moral dilemma. The paper finishes with reflections on the fact the latter not only has to face an exterior that is marked by moral alterity, but an endangerment from the inside. From this *metaethical* standpoint, it is shown that the criteria of ethical thought are fragile and have an innerworldly fate. Thus, the philosophical reflection on the fragility of the moral foundations of the liberal order leads to the political question of securing conditions in which the pathic condition not only survives but might become a common one after the ongoing bloodshed and destruction has come to an end.

1. Pathic Evidence and the Flesh of the Political: Phenomenological Perspectives

If one looks at newer advocacies of liberal democracy such as Richard Rorty's or Judith Shklar's, their key characteristic is that liberal democracy is defended as an arrangement that impedes the bad rather than supports the good. If any comprehensive consensus can be achieved under the conditions on modern pluralist societies, then it is the consensus about the absolutely undesirable (c.f. Michéa 2010). The commonality of practical reason is thus constituted not by a criterion of the right as it has been the case in the philosophical tradition reaching from Plato to the Frankfurt School, but of the universally *wrong*.

For the liberalism of fear, a product of the bloody twentieth century, the wrong on which everyone can be expected to agree has appeared as a consequence of the most uncompromising and fanatical attempts to achieve the good, however this good has been defined. The insight into the absolutely wrong is thus the result of a process in which cer-

tain ethical values and social goals were pursued, in which certain means were applied, which in turn resulted in consequences that forced a reevaluation not only of the means, but also the ends themselves. The restriction to the definition of the bad is the result of a process of learning, where the will to perfect the organization of the social has shown to pervert itself in its ardent assertion. If there is a plurality of concepts of the good in a society, every attempt to enforce a particular understanding of the good at the cost of others, has to lead to a state of war in which every good, including the one that one is pursuing in a revolutionary or dictatorial way, is diminished and where the bad flourishes. If one presumes with John Dewey that experience is a process of experimental implementations of practical hypotheses on the relation of ends and means that have to be assessed in light of consequences created by this experimental implementation (Dewey 2004, 59-75), the result of the great political experiments of the 20th century is essentially the evidence of what has to be categorically prevented and not what has to be strived for. The good is a subject of open inquiries conducted by individuals and groups, in which no definitive and consensual answer can be expected to be found. To a certain extent, liberal democracies provide the space for a public, and not only individual and private exercise of inquiry and experimental realization of concepts of the good; but this space is strictly confined according to what the prevention of the universally recognizable bad demands.

The "liberalism of fear", Shklar writes, "concentrates on damage control" (Shklar 1989, 27). It wants to be two steps ahead of the evil lingering and threatening to break into the pacified and secured society; it thus fights the evil with far-sighted precautions and not only with emergency measures. Its categorical imperative is not to repeat the

mistakes of the past. It is a political morality rather of renunciation and even resignation than passionate activism. It inhibits the revolutionary imaginative powers that envision the perfectibility of the social order by reminding the fatal consequences of past great experiments. It prefers languidness to passion, it cools emotions down to a level that is not in danger to erupt into violence by telling the stories of past nationalist enmities and the endless misery of interethnic and interreligious hate. It thus depends on the fact that the memory of the catastrophic results of the big political experiments and great wars of the younger past is preserved and that the images of suffering and pain continue to speak for themselves of the falsity of what has caused them. In Shklar's words: it is on "historical memory" as a "faculty of the human mind that the liberalism of fear draws most heavily" (ibid.).

I call this kind of evidence of the false *pathic evidence* (cf. Dikovich 2020). It is the evidence of what cannot be justified as a means for ends, a price that has to be accepted for the sake of the good. The wrongness of what appears as wrong does not have to be explained or founded; it is evidently incommensurable with any meaningful pursuit of the good. As the evidently senseless, it thus structures the ethical and political imagination, and the production of political meaning. Phenomenologically speaking, the correlate to the pathic evidence as *noema* is the *pathic condition* within the *noematic* consciousness. It is a consciousness affected by what it sees in such a way, that the experienced becomes an organizing principle or *axiom* of its thought and its will. When it thus does reason in favor of a certain path of political action, it eventually will come back to pathic evidence as the final criteria of judgement; the memory of the great wars, of concentration camps, the rule of terror, the millions of dead. The path that has to be taken is always the

one that will most probably prevent the repetition of these events and actions.

In the *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl differentiates between two modes of evidence. *Adequate* evidence is the quality of a certain insight to be *complete*; here, there is no sense of "infectedness of the experience with unfulfilled components, with expectant and attendant meanings" (Husserl 1960, 15) that accompanies the intuition of truth. This quality, however, is hardly ever actualized in experience and philosophical reflection; in fact, Husserl hints at the adequation being more a regulative idea than an achievable quality of evidence: "The question whether adequate evidence does not necessarily lie at infinity may be left open" (ibid.). In contrast, apodictic evidence is one of actualized "absolute indubitability". It is this kind of evidence that elevates a noema to become a primordial, first truth that rests in itself and needs no further explanation, thus a truth of axiomatic status. "An apodictic evidence", as Husserl writes, "is not merely certainty of affairs or affair-complexes [...] evident in it, rather it discloses itself, to a critical reflection, as having the signal peculiarity of being *at the same time the absolute unimagineness* (inconceivability) of their *non-being*, and thus excluding in advance every doubt as 'objectless', empty" (ibid., 15f.).

Husserl mentions that evidence must not be adequately given to be apodictic (ibid., 16; cf. Schmid 2001). Quite the contrary, this is the regular case for any evidence that philosophical inquiry may reach. Every insight is surrounded by a field of obscurity, even in the case of the Cartesian *cogito* it is only known *that it is true*, yet Husserl could dedicate the bigger part of his life work to the question *what that really means*, i.e., what the *cogito* implies.²

² It is therefore only an assessment of the "facticity of the ego" and not "self-transparency" that phenomenological reflection can achieve, as Hans Bernhard Schmid argues; Schmid 2001, 231, 218.

Empirical experience is always accompanied by the “open possibility of becoming doubtful, or of nonbeing, in spite of evidence” (Husserl 1960, 15). It remains in the realm of the merely probable. Pathic evidence is apodictic, yet not *a priori*; the bad had to be historically encountered to become a constitutive criterion of thought. Once it is encountered, it structures ethical thought as that what is necessarily bad and must never be again. There cannot be any context imaginable in which the seen could be legitimated by a higher good for which it serves as a means and enablement; a system of thought that would argue in this way would be the perversion of moral thought. The liberalism of fear is the thought that corresponds to a historically acquired subjective condition; acquired by the affection caused by extreme suffering that is experienced only by a minority, but is seen and known to have taken place by the majority: the horrors not only of totalitarian rule, but also of modern warfare. It is the condition, not of a subject that heroically proves itself and clings to its ends despite enormous defiance and pushbacks, but of a subject that experiences the breakdown of its guiding and meaningful ideas – revolution, the new man, national pride and prestige, the *Herrenmensch*, etc. – in the face of pain: not only pain suffered by oneself, but pain perceived in the faces, gestures and cries of others.

Being result of an *τραύμα* in the original Greek meaning of the world, of the infliction of a wound and of pain, thus originating in the world, the pathic evidence is not only *a posteriori*, but it can also never be *adequate*, since it is – as all innerworldly givens are – surrounded by an obscure nexus of facts and circumstances concerning its origin. Pathic evidence is objectified as the manifestation of a certain empirical *condition* or *disposition* that is acquired through factual events. For the reflective *cogito*, the pathic evidence is at the same time evidently true and the

object of doubt; *ethically true*, that means evident as a criteria for the distinction of good and bad, but at the same time doubtful as to whether it connects with the *real*, i.e. concerning its fate as a innerworldly fact, as a human disposition that has to survive in the world. This is the point where the rupture of realism and idealism, between interiority and exteriority, between morality and necessity, between – in Henry’s terminology – the subjective “truth of life” and the “truth of the world” (Henry 1996, 21-70), come into effect in liberal thought. They are expressions of self-doubt. Liberalism differentiates from Christianity by not affirming the former *against* the latter, but by claiming that a society can be built where both are reconciled. However, it is marked by an ever-present insecurity about its core belief. Regarding its origin, it cannot be sure what the pathic condition really is: whether it is not merely a weakness, an uncured *τραύμα* which has to be overcome in order to keep up with the demands of innerworldly existence. This doesn’t mean that the pathic evidence appears as morally untrue; it merely means that morality must not always have the last word in the realm of intersubjectivity, that only a nonviable sentimentality absolutizes its demands and that we have to acknowledge the subsisting state of nature and remain able to act out violence if we don’t want the good that we have achieved to become prone to those who do not share our condition.³

Following Merleau-Ponty and his interpreter Myriam Revault d’Allonnes, it can be spoken of “la chair du politique” (Revault d’Allonnes 2001; cf. Merleau-Ponty 2007, 170f.), the *flesh of the political*. If we interpret the political in a Schmittian sense, as the field of the antagonistic split between *us* and *them* where conflicting projects and visions of the social are pursued, then it is the constitution

³ See i.e. the liberal debate on *Realpolitik*; cf. Bew 2015.

of the flesh that determines how far we are willing and able to go in our political endeavors, what can be a meaningful act in this pursuit, and where the boundaries of the meaningful and justifiable are overstepped. If a political project always has to withstand the pressure that results from the resistance of the political adversary and the unexpected consequences of one's actions, and if it needs a subjective force (i.e. will) to withstand this pressure and hold on to it as a meaningful endeavor, the limit for this force is reached when it comes to a certain intensity of suffering and cruelty. The *pathic* is the subject's experience of its own limitedness, not of the *I can* that Merleau-Ponty describes as the primordial opening of the world (Merleau-Ponty 2006: 171), but of a *I cannot* (cf. Henry 2000a, 247-255) that limits the world and thus gives a structure to it, the *dimensions* in which the subject can unfold itself and where its embeddedness becomes possible. This is also the space where politics as non-violent, contained conflict is realized. It therefore also limits the corporeality of politics, the grade of affection and consumption of the bodies of subjects by politics. The sensing body is protected from politics tyrannical claims to use it for the realization of meaning. The corporeal regime of politics is based on a regime of memory and ethical sensitivity that has pathic evidence at its center. There is a sense of community between adversaries when there is the trust in the sameness of this limitations (cf. Simmons/Wellborn 2022); the sentiment of common limitations is the base for reciprocal trust. The flesh as common element (cf. Henry 2000b, 160-179) thus encompasses and restricts the political as the medium of division.

The use of the term 'flesh' is justified because it is not a purely rational judgement about the bad that is at work here, but an experience that is indeed conditioned and formed by meanings and

thus the sedimentations of a certain culture. Yet it also encompasses the affective and corporeal nature of the subject,⁴ since it is only as a being capable of suffering that it can be affected by the sight of pain. One can speak with Michel Henry of the pathic evidence as an experience of "auto-affection" (Henry 2020, 109; Vassilicos 2015); a self-relation that is rooted in a more fundamental layer of existence than thetic consciousness. Pain and suffering as primordial modes of auto-affection of the subject are, according to Henry, essentially experiences of the limits to its capacities (cf. Henry 2003). In what is called pathic evidence here, it is the capacity/incapacity to experience something as actually or potentially meaningful. It is thus the experience of the limitations of thetic, meaning-giving consciousness. The noematic reverse side of this is the evidence of the necessarily meaningless. The flesh is the point where the sphere of meaning and the real connect; the pathic experience is the point where this connection fails, usually in the mode of shock and trauma: where for example traditional notions of soldierly heroism disconnect from the experience of modern warfare, or where the sight of starving farmers disconnects from the idea of a revolutionary eradication of vestiges of the old order.

There is, however, one major problem with the liberalism of fear. It is plausible to deduce an ethics of political self-limitation from the pathic evidence. Yet how should one behave according to it in the face of an *other* that is not only not affected in the same way by the sight of violence, but also has the power and the will to harm me? Will the law of reciprocity in war not force me to apply violence and be cruel in order not to fall victim to the others cruelty? Shklar's essay, which was published just in the

⁴ One can therefore say that the train of thought elaborated in this paper is situated in what is called the "affective turn" in the social sciences and in philosophy; cf. Clough/Halley 2007.

year 1989, is written from the vantage point of a triumphant liberal democracy – triumphant because of the ethically catastrophic results of its alternatives. It locates threats rather on the inside rather than on the outside since the threatening outside really seemed to have vanished, it focuses on radicalism rather than on war.⁵ What is new in the current war is the acute sense of vulnerability that has emerged with Russians full scale invasion of Ukraine, it's determination to attack the liberal democratic model with violence on a large scale and with the silent support or at least toleration by new global powers such as China and India.

If the liberalism of fear as civilizational model is grounded in the communality of the pathic condition, then its other is constituted by the lack pathic auto-affectation, by the lack of limitation. Rather than primitiveness, *barbarism*⁶ is thus a form of monstrous, excessive *ability*; namely the ability to support the sight, the suffering and the causing of pain. The barbarian is the personified dubiety concerning the pathic subjectivity, the menace of the world to devour the moral, the threat that the apodictic might turn out as mere inadequacy of the subject in relation to the necessary. The liberalism of fear has shown paradoxical reactions to this menace: The appearance of the alleged barbarian provoked violence in the name of non-violence, attempts to force upon the others the sameness of the condition by violently breaking their will, thus transgressing exactly those limits which one is aiming to secure. This has been the ugly result of the so called “war on terror”, the war of a coalition of Western democracies that was conceived of as a response to the first major disruption of the triumphalist self-assurance

of liberal democracy since the fall of communism, to the acts of religious extremists that showed a shocking willingness to go to carry violence to the extreme – to mass murdering of civilians and suicidal self-sacrifice. It on the one hand created excretions in the form of barbarians among the own ranks, of specialists of violent transgression and humiliation such as the prison guards of Abu-Ghuraib, on the other hand – and more importantly – relied heavily on mediating technological apparatuses that create an ever-greater distance between the doer and the deed, that almost spares the former the sight of the latter. Religious extremists have their heroic and monumental meanings that enable them to do what they do; the post-heroic societies of the West have their high-tech means of sterile killing from the safe distance (cf. Luttwak 1996). Both sides intend to terrorize the other into submission.

2. Democracy and Pain: Pragmatist Continuations

Having departed from the self-reflective stance of phenomenology, we may now shift to a pragmatist perspective on the pathic subject as well as its *other*. Pragmatism's strength lies in situating the subject in specific relations of communication and interaction as well as in cultural and political contexts that condition the constitution and stability of the moral subject and its relation to the world.⁷ These conditions have to be taken in consideration if moral reflection should not only bother about the assertion of the validity of its guiding moral principles and values, but also about *making these values work* in the world as it is – a style of moral thought that John Dewey called “thinking which is operative” (Dewey 1929, 271).

⁵ For extrapolations of a Shklarian theory of international relations and war see i.a. Royer 2022 and Stullerova 2022.

⁶ Cf. Henry's description of barbarism as a sort of inhibited auto-affectation of the living subject; Henry 2020.

⁷ See i.e. Dewey's critical examination of the German history of ideas and its political development during World War I that tries to develop the moral motives driving Imperial Germany as a warring party; Dewey 1915.

Since the liberalism of fear depends on the historical memory of events to which it is an answer and reaction, it must reproduce and transmit the condition that was acquired in these historical breakdowns of meaning. This is not only the educative work of culture, but also of economy. Firstly, the pathic evidence is socially instituted as a criterion by the gesture of memorial culture that points at the possible – the suffering that has happened – as that what should become impossible by the social and political order. Thus, the memory of war and suffering becomes a central motive in the artistic production of liberal societies. Yet liberal societies not only rely on the moral sensitivity of their citizens cultivated by the arts, literature, philosophy and religion. One of the key elements is the economic dispositive and the formation of desires. The citizens are also in possession of goods he/she is not willing to risk for whatever great political enterprise that demands violent conflict. For the sake of pacification, liberal societies want to see their citizens in need of certain standards of material well-being.⁸ For those who are not able to reach the latter by their own effort, the modern welfare state comes into action.

Thirdly, politics itself is a medium of the pathic. More than any other philosopher, Immanuel Kant is the spiritual father of the European Project. In Kant's philosophy of history, the existing antagonistic and violent mode of politics breaks down, given a reality of warfare that is incommensurable with its constitutive notions. Kant did not reject war categorically, attributing to it certain virtues such as the overcoming of bourgeois egotism to martial culture, thus aligning himself with the German respectively Prussian tradition of heroic political thought

(cf. Fichte 1815). Yet he predicted a future moment where the material and human costs of war would exceed a limit beyond, which no political legitimation of war as a means of solving conflict would be possible anymore. Therefore, the ethical system of militaristic heroism would have to come to an end, its value would become unrealizable, or rather would have to adapt to a new, juridified, and thus pacified political reality. By speaking of nature as the "great artist" that would "make harmony spring from human discord, even against the will of man" (Kant 1903, 143; cf. Ertl 2019). Kant leaves here the apriorism of his philosophy and refers to the sub-rational, sentient element of human being that we called, following Merleau-Ponty, the flesh.

However, Kant's choice of words suggests that he sees some kind of natural law operating in human history, that the point where war loses all possible meaningfulness is in a way programmed into the human constitution. Thus, the pathic experience of war would be nothing but a natural reflex caused by overwhelming suffering – suffering either experienced in catastrophic events or anticipated and made evident by intellectuals that, according to Kant, might be able to spare humanity the fate of having to painfully learn from great errors.

Yet it is clear that the level of tolerance for violence is variable and not fixed, due to a constant, trans-temporal anthropological constitution of men and women. The ability to tolerate, and even appreciate, the sight of extreme violence is dependent on cultural resources of meaning. It was probably Rousseau, who as the first modern thinker, saw the correlation between different grades of sensitivity towards pain and different forms of government, and thus integrated the sensitization for the pain of others into his program for the education of the democratic citizen outlined in his *Emile* (cf. Rousseau 1979, 211-355; Revault d'Allonnes 2008,

⁸ Liberal theoreticians have therefore lamented that liberal peace is secured only to the price of the preponderance of shallow material desires; cf. Bolz 2002.

34-44). What Rousseau envisages here is solidarity as an ethical and affective bond merely *within* the state: the suffering subject for which Rousseau's *citoyen* is able and ready to sympathize with is the *concitoyen*. One can see Rousseau as an intellectual predecessor of the political thought of Richard Rorty, who conceives of the maxim of the reduction of pain and cruelty as the core of a liberal, humanistic and reformist ethos (cf. Rorty 1989, 141-198). The liberalism not only of fear, but of solidarity admits the public showing of vulnerability – in diametrical contrast to an older liberalism of heroic self-assertion in which the suffering individual cannot expect its grievances to be acknowledged. The progressive sensitization for pain becomes possible because of the freedom of every individual to articulate its grievances, and fight for the public's recognition of the latter as defects that must be overcome. What enables this shared sensitivity is thus democratic communication. Needless to say, the question of what can be legitimately called suffering remains controversial, thus creating a rift within the consensus of the principle that intense suffering has to be prevented.

However, the dependence of the pathic “flesh of the political” on communication is not only to be found in the interior relations of the polis, but also on those to its outside. The affinity between a social order characterized by political liberties and the pathic condition was already understood by Kant. Kant did not speak of democracy, but of the republican constitution of the state, yet what he meant by that is a political order that is legitimized by protecting the freedom of the governed; a task that is not accomplishable for the state without the freedom of expression and public discussion. According to Kant, it is not only in relation to inflictions of harm in the interior of the polity that the republican political order supports a growing awareness; it is in relation to

the dealings with other states, and thus in relation to war, that he speaks of the superior sensitivity towards violence in republics.⁹ As the German philosopher famously argues in his writing *On Perpetual Peace*, only the “republican constitution apart from the soundness of its origin, since it arose from the pure source of the concept of right, has also the prospect of attaining the desired result, namely, perpetual peace”. The reason is the following:

If, as must be so under this constitution, the consent of the subjects is required to determine whether there shall be war or not, nothing is more natural than that they should weigh the matter well, before undertaking such a bad business. For in decreeing war, they would of necessity be resolving to bring down the miseries of war upon their country. This implies: they must fight themselves; they must hand over the costs of the war out of their own property; they must do their poor best to make good the devastation which it leaves behind; and finally, as a crowning ill, they have to accept a burden of debt which will embitter even peace itself, and which they can never pay off on account of the new wars which are always impending. (Kant 1903, 122f.)

It is not only the possibility, and therefore necessity, to take responsibility for securing one's own wellbeing that will make the citizen of the republic refrain from every act of war that is not absolutely inevitable in order so safeguard the latter, but the very possibility to freely discuss the costs of war. In Republics, the consciousness about what has happened, the possibility to express and share the pain experienced and thus the chances for individuals to be collectively formed by the experience of violence and pain, is very different compared to societies where the state has control over the collective processing of what has happened. Because war is an endeavor that has to be backed up by meaning as a force that motivates actions (Clausewitz 1908, 27-45), autocratic regimes use tyrannical means to stabilize this meaning, that is en-

⁹ On Kant's Theory of Peace see i. a. Doyle 1983. The empirical verification of the “democratic peace theory” and thus of Kant's assumptions is a widely debated question today. It suffices to say that there are empirical data that back the democratic peace theory; cf. Gelditsch 1992.

dangered by the reality that differs more and more from what was envisioned when the war was begun. Modern instruments of communication and visualization can both create a common perception of the face of war and thus create shared evidence or be used to cover and alternate the reality.¹⁰ In autocracies, the means of production of shared evidence are exceedingly monopolized and used to promote a certain narrative, image and ideology. Individuals who experience what must not happen according to the guiding ideology, must remain publicly silent and alone with their memories; the possibility to witness itself is taken away from the subject; beginning with the confiscation of the personal smartphones of the soldiers to ever expanding censorship to the absurd language regime that permits this war to be called by its name.

It is clear that such a regime of stabilization of meaning can be very efficient, yet never be total in the sense that there rest informal channels of transmission that it cannot close, and that democracies tend to adapt such a regime themselves as the costs of war rise. And of course, political liberties do not guarantee that people do not fall for false promises and illusory expectations concerning war. But as long as democratic – or, in Kant's terms, republican – freedoms determine the way a people deals with war, at least there is the chance that this happens in an intelligent way. The means of unmasking the great illusion are given – even though, however, this only happens after the evil deed is done, in retrospect, as an accounting for past mistakes. Meaningless wars are mistakes of a magnitude that their usual consequence is the removal of political leaders and governments. Obviously, authoritarianism is defined by the fact that stepping aside for someone else is not an option for the rulers. The more it becomes thus clear that a war as a means of politics has been started on the base of miscalculations and

illusions, the greater the effort to stabilize an image of what is happening favorable for the rulers.

For pragmatists such as John Dewey, *intelligence* is the key criterion for the evaluation of political systems. Intelligence is a mode of dealing with problems, whether they are of scientific, ethical or social and political. Intelligence is defined by a non-dogmatic, inquiring, and experimental as well as dialogical approach to challenges, that occur in research or in practical action (cf. Dewey 1977). It is constituted by the readiness to put into question, what is considered as valid, whenever something unexpected and incongruous with one's guiding assumptions occurs. As mentioned before, in the field of practical action, this means that the ideas guiding our actions should be constantly reevaluated in view of the consequences that arise in the process of pursuing them.

It is its possibility to develop social intelligence that in Dewey's view sets democracy apart from other systems of government (cf. Dewey 1954, 208-210). Social intelligence evolves in public discussion. The value of democratic freedoms thus lies in the intelligent dealing with the problems of social organization or collective action that it enables – first and foremost by the possibility to problematize things. Before social problems can be dealt with, they have to be perceived; and the best sensorium by which these problems can be detected are the senses of the subjects themselves.

In the context of (political) morality, the question of normative principles and values and the question of intelligence are inseparable in a Deweyan perspective. The key point of Dewey's moral philosophy is not so much the creation of new normative principles and values or the affirmation of old ones, but the consideration of different conditions of moral thinking and the expansion of control over these (cf. Dewey 1929, 256). It is in this sense that

¹⁰ Susan Sontag has thoroughly written about the technical innovations that made such shared evidence possible; Sontag 2013.

democracy becomes a demand of moral thought since only under the condition of democratic communication the authentic pursuit of universalist claims immanent to moral norms is possible. It is also the multiperspectivity and inclusiveness of democratic communication that is the strongest – although not necessarily sufficient – antidote to the dogmatic and ideological ossification of morality and the atrophy of moral faculties such as the pathic sensitivity.

Ideally, unrestrained multiperspectivity is needed for the intelligent evaluation of the guiding values, ideas and ends of politics that might in some cases legitimate war as a means. As Dewey has argued time and again, ends can only be intelligently evaluated in the light of the means. By separating ends and means (*ibid.*, 266) – including suffering, death and destruction as costs that have to be paid for the achievement of an end – and making the ends absolute, ideology may seek to stabilize its core concepts such as national honor, the revolutionary liberation of the world and the like. Democracy therefore sets a limit to the possibilities of political and ideological production of meaning since by letting the suffering speak out it sheds light on costs that can hardly be integrated into a legitimizing narrative which builds on lofty ideals and affectively charged notions. Intersubjective communication constitutes the medium by which the intersubjective world is phenomenalized; the tyranny of political and ideological meaning lies in the inhibition of this phenomenalization and therefore in a blind pursuit of monumental endeavors. Even when the point is reached where the catastrophic consequences of one's actions can no longer be neglected and covered up, this does not necessarily mean that a change of mind takes place; for one thing suppressed shame and unwillingness to admit one's own errors may cause the continuation

of the path of destruction, for another thing the collective capacities of interpretation may be crippled to the extent that people will cling even more to the meaning provided by those in power to have at least some means to account for what happens.

Of course, in wartime, governments of all sorts cripple and distort this sensorium. The most important means here is the cutting of the communicative ties by which the sensed – the reality of war – could be shared. As it has been mentioned before, democracies at war also resort to censorship and other means to suppress “disturbing” information. Yet authoritarianism distorts this sensorium not only during the war, but also in preparation of it as well in its aftermath. Therefore, subjects under authoritarian rule might rather easily accept war as a means of politics, since the consciousness of what has happened is systematically hindered to develop. It is this lack of awareness that evokes most strongly the sentiment of alienation in relation to today's Russia. The relations nourishing the development of social intelligence are cut in two ways; in a synchronous way by cutting the ties of communication between the coexisting subjects, and additionally in a diachronous way by distorting and manipulating the transmission of past experiences through memory. In terms of sheer numbers, the Russians in the Soviet Union were the ethnicity in the Soviet Union that have suffered the greatest losses of human lives in the Second World War.¹¹ Yet it is obvious that the lessons Russian memory politics has drawn from it are very different from those that are guiding Europe (Malinova 2019; Carleton 2017). It is well known that militarism has been pushed by the Putin regime, that the wars of the past, including the Great Patriotic War, are an ob-

¹¹ In terms of proportionality to the overall population, the citizens of the Ukraine Soviet Republic have suffered the highest death toll.

ject of glorification unclouded by the pacifist condemnation of war as such. On the contrary, Putin's propaganda tells Russians that the Great Patriotic War is a continuous event that has entered a new phase, that the Nazi-menace against Russia was always present and has never stopped and that it is today once again time for a heroic patriotic sacrifice. Militaristic *Kitsch* has also done its part in preparing the country for war (cf. Dikovich 2022): The famous images of children dressed as planes and tanks with the Z-symbol indicate how far parts of Russian society have lost touch with the reality of war. It is simply astonishing that the evocation of an event as bloody as the war against Nazi-Germany seemingly does not cause the strongest anxieties and concerns among the Russian people that for the most part let themselves be dragged without resistance into an escalation of violence with an unknown outcome.

3. How to stay what we are

way too long the artillery and the tanks stayed silent in their hangars

way too long the rockets stood waiting and aimed in their shafts [...]

someone wrote of the end of history,

that it stopped its flow, rarely waking up, joking out of boredom

and where are you, the heroes of the front and the heroines of the hinterlands

battling the burdens of separation at the conveyor belts

Boris Khersonky

Kant already knew that such a thing as global peace cannot be hoped for as long as the abilities to perceive the gruesome reality of war, and thus the pathic breakdown of the ideologies that underlie these acts of violence, are blocked by the authoritarian suppression of social intelligence. Before global peace could be established, the

republic as political form and thus liberal conditions for the development of social intelligence would have to be universalized. During the high tide of liberal democratic optimism three decades ago, Kant's dream appeared more attainable than it had ever been before. In the new multipolar state of the world, where the fact has to be accepted that authoritarian regimes have held their ground and will continue to do so, these hopes are not only shattered; with the war in Ukraine that is not only Putin's war against the neighbor state, but a war against the West as a whole, we are forced to face the fact that an adversary that uses his arsenal of means of manipulation and suppression to keep its population in line with the war effort, challenges democracies to take up the bloody and ugly business of war.

In the television series *The Walking Dead*, one group of villains that the heroes encounter in the woods of Georgia are the inhabitants of a place called "Terminus". The heroes of the series, a group of men, women and a child always on search for a secure shelter and food after a zombie-apocalypse has taken place, find signs near railways that suggest that Terminus is a place where humanness has stayed intact amidst all the violence and anarchy, and where straying individuals could finally find peace and security they so desperately long for. Of course, these hopes are in vain, and the inhabitants of Terminus – an old, abandoned railway depot – turn out to be the most gruesome and inhumane of all the foes the group has encountered so far, luring people into a trap, slaughtering and finally eating them. In one scene, the head of the villain group recounts the sad story his community has gone through that led to its utter moral corruption. The offer for sanctuary was at first meant sincerely, but it was exploited by a group of marauders that raped and killed the members of the community that was almost wiped out. The conclusion that was drawn from the vulnerability that resulted from one's own

good will, and the trust in a common humanness, was to allow oneself no longer any human sentiment towards outsiders. The complete dehumanization of the other is displayed in the act of cannibalism. For the head of the villain community, it was the evil world outside that has forced such a behavior upon the members of Terminus. By the practice of cannibalism, they assimilate themselves completely to the evil outside, they become counterparts to the zombies that have lost all humanness. Of course, the logic of a Hollywood-TV-show demands that such a morally corrupted group has to find a brutal end themselves.

The Zombie-genre, since its appearance in popular culture, has reflected civilizational *Angst* (cf. Drezner 2022). It is the aforementioned deeply rooted doubt of the pathic subject – of the *pathic cogito* – about its own nature that can be seen processed here. Looking at commentaries on the events in Ukraine, one often finds such a sense of an exploited trust and a regret for the vulnerability that resulted from it. Clearly, the willingness of Putin's Russia to start an inevitably very costly war against the largest country of the European continent has come as a surprise to the democratic West. The notion of a common rational cautiousness concerning the destructive forces of modern warfare and a common taboo prohibiting to ever bring back war to Europe has turned out to be illusive. The question now is how to deal with an adversary that is different on the profound level of moral and affective attitude towards war? What kind of relations can be kept up with an adversary that accepts bloodshed among innocent civilians and the sacrifice of so many of its own citizens as a legitimate cost, and even threatens the use of nuclear weapons in order to pursue phantasms of a past empire that should be restored?

To counter any tendencies to step into the trap of the barbarization of the other (cf. Staudigl

2018), and therefore demonize and dehumanize the men and women who execute and support this war of aggression, one has to remind that the main reason for this war is tyranny and the damage to intersubjectivity that are rooted in the latter. In that perspective, the fact the Russian people if not supports, for the most part tolerates Putin's war, is mainly grounded in the systematic deprivation of the possibilities to develop adequate reactions to what is happening. Yet this incapacitation of social intelligence means an enhanced power of the rulers to mobilize their populations for violent adventures. Accordingly, Putin's original assumption seems to have been that the post-heroic West would keep its distance from Ukraine out of fear of an uncontrollable escalation of the conflict. However, one of the most striking effects that the current war has on European societies is the return of political heroism into supposedly post-heroic cultures (cf. Münkler 2007; Bröckling 2020). Today, European political leaders are eager to stress their continuing contribution to the struggle, going so far that the latest EU-summit has taken place in Kyiv, a city inside of a war zone. Western governments appeal to their populations to bear the impending consequences of a severe economic war and engage in a contest of endurance and material sacrifice with Russia. A big part of Europe is sending military aid and upgrading its own arsenal of weapons, with some European countries currently surpassing the U.S. government's military assistance by forming a coalition for the delivery of state of the art war planes to the Ukrainian army (May 2023). Thousands of men and women from Western democratic countries have joined the Ukrainian forces since the beginning of the war, advertisements on YouTube present the partake in the fighting as a heroic adventure to Western audiences. Ukraine, a country at the periphery of Europe, has become the hero

of the Western world in a new struggle between the free world and the autocracies of this world; more, it has become the role model for a Europe that declares to be ready to fight for its values and democratic institutions. Politicians formerly known to take a pacific stance against military buildup and militarism such as members of the German Green Party now voice the most ardent support for military support and armament inside the European Union (cf. Koschorke 2023). A new hardness is displayed as a reaction to the notion that Putin has exploited Europe's naïve pacifism. The war is by some liberals even declared to be a revitalization Europe and the collective West that had already started to crumble under the impact of populism and the rise of new global powers.

How could the pathic condition as it has been described above be maintained under these circumstances? May it well have been nothing but a luxury that some European democracies could enjoy for a few decades which lived under the protective screen of the West's hegemonial power, the USA? Has now begun a new epoch where it can no longer be avoided to get one's hands dirty? Europe and America have, as Robert Kagan and Robert Cooper have argued, lived in separate worlds during the last decades; a "postmodern paradise" where international relations are entirely dominated by international law, diplomatic negotiation and economic cooperation and where war as a means of politics has been eliminated, and a world where brute force remains an indispensable means of self-assertion. Thus, the moral rift that has become evident between Russia and Europe has already existed in a less dramatic version amidst the countries of the global West. In this situation, Europe has regularly spoken as a moral authority, blaming the USA of militarism and imperialistic behavior and laughing about the heroic pathos of American claims to

act as guardian of peace and liberty, while forgetting that itself was part of the zone of security and peace at the center of a world-system guarded by the hegemon with military violence in the peripheries (cf. Kagan 2004; Cooper 2004, 153-187).

Especially after the fall of the Iron Curtain, the universalization of its own post-heroic and post-national politics and culture seemed to be a realistic future perspective to Europeans who now discover that what they have considered as universal values has been nothing more than a provincial affair (cf. Leonard 2023). By projecting its own, merely provincial history on the world as a whole, it has also succumbed to an elusive, Kantian view of historical teleology where a common rationality in politics would arise from the experiences of catastrophes. Heroic politics had thrived in the rest of the world – partly also in the context of the decolonial movements that actively fought against the European occupiers – whilst war-weary Europe had liquidated its heroic values after two catastrophic wars. According to this view, Europe – especially Western Continental Europe and Germany – has now awakened from a dear daydream and arrived in the only "real" world. It now has to learn that the liberal society cannot be safeguarded by remembering the catastrophic past only. To put it in more Deweyan terms, Europe was guided by values that were spared the contact with the hard realities of global politics and have therefore *never been tested*; their operativity was only an illusion which rested on the blinding out of Europe's privileged situation. In order to be able to withstand in the world, Europe would have to relearn the ability to exert *force* on its enemies; an ability for which Dewey has argued against the pacifist call for the non-involvement of the USA during World War I (cf. Dewey 1980, 266, Dewey 2021, 88). Democracies have to acknowledge the fact that politics does not fully merge into

communication and that it is sometimes indeed the more intelligent path of action to rely on force rather on the power of communication. Europe now stands at the crossroads of either clinging dogmatically to its old pacifist convictions – the political expression of which is the rather helpless idea of resolving the conflict by “speaking with Putin” – or working on the *reconstruction* of its guiding moral principles (cf. Dewey 2004, 92-106).

Yet does the European project, in order to survive, then need itself some sort of heroic and monumental narrative in order to endure the hardships that this great struggle might bring? Will it only persist if it gives up its pathic sentiment and learn to become colder and more distant towards inevitable pain? This would mean more than a mere adaption to a changed situation, it would eventually mean the abolition of its core moral principles and thus nothing less than a moral conversion. Such a conversion could occur as Europe, in order to be able to fight him, adapts to the other that menaces it. Yet by defending itself, it would then also lose itself. The dilemma can be summed up in the question: How can Europe adapt to the new situation and retain its moral core?

It is possible though that the ground for a re-heroization is prepared. In his essay on *Axioms as Postulates* (Schiller 1902), F. C. S. Schiller argued that the truth of the axioms that structure our thinking is not to be sought in a transcendental embedding, or even a reality, that they would reflect, but should be regarded as an effect of their efficiency in laying the groundwork for a coherent and comprehensive systematization of our experiences, interpretations of the world, and thus thoughts. Insofar as they are constitutive elements of the systems that emerge from them, they obtain the quality of *necessity*; insofar as these systems are comprehensive, they appear as *universal*. Thus, no foundational argument

could be given for them that would not be circular. Every axiom has the status of a *postulate*: not only the postulation of a singular, isolated proposition, but of the possibility of a system, of a coherent totality of propositions ordered according to the rule or principle established.

If one applies this thought in the field of *praxis*, then it is the life ordered by them from which practical principles receive their axiomatic status. But what would the equivalent to logical coherence be in this case? It shall be proposed here that such a life is one that we can regard, if not as a good life, then at least as a life that has the potential to become good. This actuality of the good, or potentiality to become good, gives validity to the very fundamental principles that organize our life and our striving for that what makes it worth living. “The great axioms and postulates”, Schiller writes, “are so ineradicably intertwined with the roots of our being, have so intimately permeated every nook and cranny of our *Weltanschauung*, have been so ingrained in all our habits of thought, that we may practically rely on them to stand fast so long as human thought endures.” (ibid., 93) On the one hand, moral axioms and postulates make specific processes and forms of life possible as their foundational principles, on the other hand, it is only in the context of these overarching processes and in view of the experiences and enjoyments that derive from them that the axioms receive their validity.

Schiller tries to show in his essay that the very fundamental categories of our thought are results from an experimental dealing with the world in which some postulates turn out to be more successful in providing a coherent grasp of the world than others. Now the life that is guided by what we call pathic experience is one that takes all necessary precautions to avoid a repetition of what has led to the latter. It is therefore based on the postulation

that certain human experiences are possible, yet not only dispensable, but destructive and incompatible with the good (however the latter is concretely understood). The appeased life that is protected from pain and suffering, from great struggles and sacrifices therefore does not miss out on anything. Fighting and holding to one's ideas in the midst of death and destruction, the faculty to become cold and resistant in the face of the latter, is a human potentiality that adds nothing to the fulfillment of life. It is by encompassing the possibilities of the good that the liberalism of fear proves the validity of its postulates.

Now, profound perturbations of such a mode of life can occur not only when threats from outside impose doubts on a society that its guiding ethical principles may weaken them and make it prone to the aggression of others. They also can come from the inside. Time is of key importance here. The problem with the form of life that develops out of the pathic condition is that the founding experiences of pain tend to fade away. The conservation and transmission of experiences has its limits. Pictures of war and devastation continue to lose their force the more often we look at them, the work of memory must constantly struggle against the tendency to turn into a hollow routine that does not reach the deeper layers of affectivity and moral conscience. The longer the social and political order is successful in protecting its members from the experience of political violence, the more the notion of suffering of war or totalitarian rule becomes abstract. As the fear of the repetition of past catastrophes dissipates, the value of peace is no longer appreciated as before, and the attractiveness of radical ideas and the longing for "great politics" (Nietzsche; cf. Drochon 2017) rises when the precautions that secure a peaceful existence are more and more felt as restrictions to the possibilities of human existence.

Thus, Jan Patočka has spoken of *boredom* as a major threat to the modern techno-scientific civilization that has discovered the universal participation in material wealth as a means of pacification (Patočka 2010, 134f.). The pathic auto-affectation of the flesh wears off. Fascism, arguably the quintessential political ideology of boredom, lures individuals to fancy themselves as beasts that are caged and cut from their primordial nature and power. Other, less primitive ideologies such as the political theology of Carl Schmitt, might deplore the liberal-pacifistic forbiddance of the danger in the face of the enemy as the denial of a spiritual level of existence and the ultimate proof of faith.¹² The dissatisfaction with the politics of categorical security and pain-prevention, the metaphysically or theologically founded critique of its shallowness has multiple forms of ideological articulation. In a circle of *thymotic* and *anti-thymotic* dynamics, the promise of meaning now connects with war – until this promise is disappointed again to a costly price.

There is not only an element of an otherwise intact ethical system that is changed, but the whole system changes due to the circumstance that the very fundamental certainties lose their validity. The change from the liberalism of fear to an ideology of heroism and violence is nothing but the moral reconstitution of the subject. Consequently, the overcoming of liberalism and liberal humanism has been pursued as the overcoming of the "last man" (Nietzsche 1969, 45f.).¹³ The last man has, according to Nietzsche, lost, together with the possibility to experience the gravest forms of ills and evils, also the highest forms of happiness and virtue. It is the prom-

¹² Unsurprisingly, such a criticism can be found in Putin's philosopher of choice, Iwan Iljin, who in his book *Resistance to Evil By Force* attacks Tolstoj as a quintessential thinker of pathic pacifism. Cf. Iljin 2018, 127-142.

¹³ Francis Fukuyama famously took up this idea from Nietzsche in the final chapters of *The End of History*; Fukuyama 2006, 300-339.

ise to win back the latter by allowing the former that the revolt against the liberalism of fear makes.

It thus cannot be the negative aspect of fear alone, the progressive prevention of the bad – violence, suffering, humiliation – that binds subjects to liberal democracy as a political mode of life. The stability of the latter also demands positive values and goods that are experienced and achieved in it. The problem here is that liberalism, as it has been argued at the beginning of this essay, is agnostic in relation to the question of the good life. It can only provide basic and general preconditions for the realization of individual or collective conceptions of the good: physical integrity and a certain measure of material security, the liberty of decision to individually pursue a certain idea of the good. By not imposing any great collective endeavors such as wars on the individuals, the liberal order leaves the task to turn one's biological lifetime into a meaningful, goal-oriented, development of the individual.

This task, however, may ask too much of many individuals. The feeling of overburdening by the challenge to give meaning to the life and the time that is secured for the subjects can become a wider cultural trend, a collective phenomenon with social and political repercussions (cf. Nahoum-Grappe 1995). Crises of meaning can become serious social crises if the ways and means by which individuals seek to give meanings to their lives are standardized, yet at the same time inoperative, that is to say disappointing. This is the case if modes of work and consumption are common that lead to satisfaction that, as they are repeatedly experienced, become the subject of tedium or *ennui*. Even greater collective crises of empty lifetime can occur when in modern welfare states, people are liberated from the struggle for survival, yet are deprived of their habitual means to fill their time with activity due to joblessness and material deprivation, that no lon-

ger allow the participation in the standard activities that fill out one's time.

Such crises of meaning and time can turn into a dangerous breeding ground for a politics of monumental meaning. It is this void that nationalist, revolutionist, and other sorts of ideologies regularly try to play on. It is very much compatible with the liberalism of fear that individuals seek the thrill of danger and risk because of the tediousness of a life that is secured and cared for by the institutions of modern society. Peculiarly, often the only way to experience the value of something that is at one's disposal cannot be appreciated anymore unless it is endangered; this is the reason why people put their existence in danger in activities such as extreme sports, audacious business ventures, gambling, extramarital affairs or hooliganism. The pacified liberal society is permeated by energies that it struggles to channel into more or less harmless activities (Fukuyama 2006, 313-339; Hirschman 1977). The longing for the thrill becomes socially and politically dangerous if it is transferred from the individual to the collective sphere; if politics is the medium by which such a longing for the "dangerous life" (cf. Nietzsche 2001, 161) is lived out.

The liberalism of fear may live on resources that it cannot produce (cf. Böckenförde 1967, 92f.), that are only the product of its antagonist, the politics of violence and great meaning and that dissipate over time. Let us assume that somewhere in the future and after terrible bloodshed Fukuyama's prediction, and Kant's hope will become true at last and, the world will organize itself in a global alliance of peaceful republics: The search for peaceful ways of giving life, once it is liberated from suffering and humiliation, a positive content for it would still be a necessity for the liberalism of fear, if it wants to rest on stable axioms, and if it wants to arrive at a historical *Terminus*. It could no longer content itself with

the fact that the ability to search for a meaningful life outside of the mechanisms of consumerism and of the modern culture of labor is the prerogative of a rather small elite. It thus would have to outgrow its fixation on the negative, the liberalism of shared fear would have to develop into a liberalism of shared thriving. Yet it is the fundamental conviction of liberalism that the thriving of individuals is not a competency of the political order.

4. Final Conclusions

It is a speculative, nevertheless legitimate question if events in the recent past, such as the growing tide of populism and nationalism, the radicalization of parts of the middle class during the COVID-19 pandemic, an unheard-of event such as the storm on the capitol, and finally this war motivated by shrill ideological reasons, are symptoms of a collective desire for a great event to interrupt the status quo and to engage in a monumental struggle of any kind. It could well be that a society such as the Russian that has been subjected to the Communist regime of heroic, revolutionary time was especially predisposed to replace the individualistic time regime of liberalism for an ideology that enforces a great collective endeavor such as a war. Hence, Putin's regime wants to offer an alternative ethical and cultural content of life and politics after Russian society's disappointment with Western liberalism, meaning the inability of the masses to fully participate in the way of life that has been displayed to it by the mediums of consumerist production of needs and the frustrating and unattractive perspective of being stuck in the state of a developing country.

As Putin has thrown down the gauntlet to the West, the latter relearns the language of heroism and monumental meaning and to retake the business of cold *Realpolitik* and war. However, this process is ambivalent. Western countries strictly limit their military support to the supply of weapons and

know-how, and even here they seem to limit themselves to deliver just enough to enable Ukraine to continue its resistance, but not enough to win the war, since this would provoke the Russian opponent to directly intervene against Ukraine's allies. This means that in a prolonged war of attrition, not only the country is continuously ravaged by Russian bombardment, but also an inevitable brutalization of the population takes place. The longer this takes, the more hate and nationalist fervor will imbue the society and spread its political seed, the more difficult it will be for the country to ever become a "core" part of Europe – the central demand of the Orange revolution and the Maidan-movement. There is a considerable risk that the Ukrainians, once they would have successfully defended themselves and Europe from Russian aggression, would quickly turn from heroes to mere barbarian *foederati* that the centers of wealth and power need for their protection, but whom they regard at the same time as profoundly alien to themselves and whom they thus exclude from their inner circle.

Meanwhile, on the Russian side too, despite all the talk of sacrifice for the motherland, the Russian recruitment strategy shows that Putin's regime tries to enable the most important parts of his political clientele to experience the war from the comfortable position of the bystander and claqueur. Russia is heavily extracting fighting men from the fringes of its territory and its wider sphere of influence: It's in the poorer and remote parts of the country here the recruitment is the most intense (cf. Rastorgujwa 2022). Afghan, Syrian, Serbian mercenaries fill up the Russian ranks, prisoners and of course Chechen units are sent to take the brunt of the most violent fighting. In the Russian occupied parts of the Donetsk Oblast, the shortage of manpower even leads to the recruitment of individuals with mental and physical illnesses

(Stepanenko et al. 2022). Increasingly extensive recruitment efforts are disguised to the population with the talk of merely “partial mobilizations” for the so-called “special military operation”. Putin seems to acknowledge that the post-heroic mindset is also rooted in Russian society, especially in the metropolises, and he seems to be eager not to trouble it too abruptly.

For the moment, Europe has to learn to live up to the authoritarianism’s means to prepare its population for war and violence. The brutal *law of the world* appears in the guise of the Russian invader and calls into question its moral foundations and its very idea of historical rationality. It is of course a manmade world in the which the Russian leader wants to drag democratic Europe, assuming that the latter will not withstand due to its decadent inability to generate monumental meaning. Yet so far, the sense of blatant injustice and the solidarity of democracies have enabled Ukraine to survive.

It is doubtful whether Russia will return to the path towards Western “normality”. Yet the liberalism of fear has no alternative than to hold on to the perspective of a future common ground between the warring sides of the present. If this war that is supported by a large part of Russia’s population will eventually cause the fall of Putin and his system, as some still argue (cf. Kasparov/Khodorkovsky 2022), then the prevention of the horrors to be repeated has to emerge as a common project. This project might, however, conflict with the consequent pursuit of justice and demands a certain forbearance concerning those guilty of having started the violence. For the establishment of a common flesh of the political after the war, the general exhaustion, and the common grief about what has happened will have to suffice as the starting point, rather than the total victory of justice.

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