

INTRODUCTION

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The recent war in Ukraine has reminded Europe and all the West, if a reminder was ever needed, that the death and destruction of war are always closer to home than you realize. Events we may have naively felt were part of the past—such as war in Europe or the present danger of nuclear war—have now resurfaced as inescapably real and genuine threats of present-day life.

Philosophy since its near inception with Plato has always, in one sense, entailed a strong opposition to war. In the opening pages of Plato's *Republic*, which sets the frame for the entire book, and for Plato's philosophy in general, Socrates and Glaucon are going back into the city after having attended a religious festival (a place from which they might have expected to find wisdom), when suddenly Polemarchus sends his slave over to stop Socrates and to make Socrates stay put, so that Polemarchus can engage him. When Polemarchus catches up to Socrates, Polemarchus tells Socrates that the group Polemarchus is with is larger in number than the group Socrates is with. Socrates had better stop and not hurry back to town, Polemarchus tells him, because, if he does not, Polemarchus and his group will simply overpower Socrates, using force to make Socrates obey. But Socrates quickly reminds Polemarchus that there is another option besides using force, which is to convince the person through the use of reason. But convincing someone by reason, they all come to realize, only works if the person is willing to listen.

Philosophy takes place through reason, language, and dialogue. War, by contrast, employs brute force, violence, and irrational will. *Force versus reason*—that is the fundamental contrast. One is oppressive, the other is not; it is participatory, liberating. War involves physical force; it seeks destruction and death. It creates a nightmare world. Philosophy stands fast as the universal call for a reasonable world. Philosophy favors life, shared meanings and values, stressing the importance of dialogue and harmonious human interaction. The true philosopher

does listen; they are open to being convinced by the other, if the reasons are good. Philosophy is a power against force, a power *different* than force, *other* than force, and the mere existence and practice of philosophy, as the ineluctable power of reason, is a standing refutation of war, and the irrefutable proof of another possibility.

But if philosophy has nearly always in some sense been opposed to war, philosophers themselves have not always practiced their vocation in this respect. If war is something inescapably real, as the Russian war against Ukraine certainly is, then perhaps the explanation for the few numbers of philosophers who address war (let alone address it as a fundamental concern within their philosophy) is that philosophers have historically focused on the ideal overmuch, with their philosopher's proverbial head in the clouds rather than seeing the ground right before them where they walk. Theory dominates over practice; the ideal over the real; and the urgent, profoundly important issue of war is elided.

We know that Pragmatism is different; that it is one of the most important and influential traditions at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth helping philosophy to get out of its idealist rut. It has called on traditional philosophy to face reality and, what is more, to engage reality, and to engage it, moreover, with what philosophy especially has at its disposal: creative intelligence. As a philosophical tradition, Pragmatism aims to address our everyday problems.

Pragmatism is uniquely situated, therefore, to address the problem of war. And pragmatism has been before where we are now: there is a long and instructive heritage of pragmatist philosophers confronting war, including William James' opposition to the American invasion of the Philippines; John Dewey's careful responses to both World Wars (especially World War I), and his campaign for "the Outlawry of War;" and W. E. B. Dubois' uncovering of the daily war of white supremacists against African Americans and others. Above all, Jane Addams showed us pragmatism in action, as Marily Fisher reminds us, especially concerning the problem of war. Addams even won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931 for her efforts.

And so, the question naturally arises: How can Pragmatism help us today? What are the Pragmatists saying today about war, about present-day wars and the threats of war? What is their teaching today regarding our wars today? The Russian invasion of the Ukrainian nation, and the subsequent war in Ukraine, virtually call out for a response from all philosophies engaged in life and the world. The present war demands a response from pragmatist philosophy in particular. What insights does Pragmatism offer us?

When it comes to answering this question, however, we encounter an unexpected difficulty, almost a paradox. Never were there more pragmatists existing than there are today, academically speaking, and yet never have pragmatists been more silent on the real problems of the day, including, quite noticeably, the terrible problem of war. The call for papers for this special issue of *Pragmatism Today*, whose topic is “Pragmatism and War,” yielded too few responses, even during the period when the Russian-Ukraine war is raging; and, in raging, cries out for a response especially from Pragmatists, as we have seen.

While there are, no doubt, many possible explanations for this very limited response, nonetheless it remains a possibility—I would argue a distinct possibility—that Pragmatists today are shirking their responsibility as pragmatists. For it is not simply this volume of *Pragmatism Today*—which is, after all, only a finite and limited venue—in which we can notice a lack of the pragmatist’s response to the problem of war, but also, we can see from a survey of the literature just how little bona fide pragmatists in these times respond to war, offer solutions to what is surely one of the most pressing problems today.

My suspicion—which, of course, it would be improper for me to try to prove in this venue—is that the larger number of pragmatists today are, as I mentioned, academics. While I would not go so far as to maintain that academics kills the spirit of philosophy, as Schopenhauer

and Nietzsche say, I would argue that academics can stifle the philosophical spirit. For the professionalized nature of the disciplines carries requirements of its own—as, for example, to publish or perish, or to get good evaluations from students, etc.,—which are not necessarily the requirements demanded by the discipline itself. It can so happen, therefore, that in the mad rush to succeed in the Academic World, Pragmatist professors will spin their wheels explaining in detail how pragmatists should respond to the world’s ills, rather than, as pragmatists, responding to the world’s ills themselves. Of course, to be a professor or a scholar of pragmatism does not mean that you must be a pragmatist; however, it can often happen that a scholar who toils immensely on a Philosophy—that is, the reason they have so much invested in that Philosophy—is because they do themselves believe in it. Then, too, the obvious place to find Pragmatist Philosophers is in academia, in the form of professors and scholars.

Two pragmatists who do not shirk their responsibility as pragmatists, and who do address the problem of war, are to be found within this special issue of *Pragmatism Today*. The insights these two philosophers gain by bringing Pragmatism to bear on the problem of war in our times—insights about both Pragmatism and War—are, in each case, highly instructive. John Lachs, in the first essay, extends his own special version of pragmatism, which he calls “Stoic Pragmatism,” to the problem of why human beings fight wars. Lachs finds that we need optimism in our approach to life, and to war, but also “cold realism.” Lach presents his pragmatism as a new and much-needed philosophy for us to live by. In the second essay, Albert Dikovich examines the Russian-Ukrainian War through the lens of pragmatism. He finds that pragmatism, like phenomenology, is a philosophy that bids us to be sympathetic and open to the experience of others, including to their feelings of unwonted pain, and in this way, pragmatism can help us to perceive what is wrong with war. Ukraine, but not Russia, Dikovich says, is pragmatic, and so democratic, rather than authoritarian, as

Russia is. Ukraine, and not Russia, represents morality in this war, a viable way forward for human beings and for the prosecution of war.

What we see in these two essays is pragmatism today regenerating itself—coming to life despite the death-effect of academic philosophy—and responding to some of

the real problems we face today. We find philosophy fulfilling its mission as philosophy, bringing creative reason to bear in opposition to force, opening new possibilities to humankind's otherwise perennial, mistaken choice of force, aggression, and war.