

War and Peace in Semantic Space of Philosophy: A Methodological Aspect

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Abstract

The main objective of the paper is to explore how to cognize war and peace. In order to reach this objective, the notions of “war” and “peace” are placed within semantic space of philosophy, which has formal logical, existential, ontological, axiological, praxeological, and, finally, epistemological facets. This approach leads the author to the conclusion that war can be studied by empirical sciences’ methods, but peace can be either the subject of philosophical discourses or constructed through “social engineering”. For an effective construction of peace, the study of war is necessary.

Introduction

The issues of war and peace have been central to philosophical discourse for a very long time. For example, Thomas Hobbes argued that the study of war and peace constitutes one of the fundamental tasks of a philosophical speculation. He emphasized that civil war is possible only because people are not aware of the causes of war and peace. Hobbes also underlined that only very few put efforts to study the laws of civil society, which could provide stability and peace (see Hobbes 1964, 56). This topic was also of interest for Tomsk philosophers. Illustratively, “The Marxist-Leninist theory about war and peace” is the title of one of the works by K.P. Yaroshevsky; one of the founders of the Tomsk philosophical school. The book was published in 1934. The actual paper is an attempt to show the problematique of war and peace within the framework of the philosophical theory of cognition, and the author’s main objective can be articulated in line with Kant: “How is it possible to cognize war and peace?”

However, before we will embark upon the issues of the methodology of the study of peace, it is necessary to clarify the subject of our study. That is because in the Russian language the word “mir” has multiple meanings. There are two homonymous words “mir”, and the famous during the Soviet period slogan *Miru – mir!*¹⁾ is an example of the conjoint use of these homonyms. An explanatory dictionary of the Russian language distinguishes seven meanings of the word “mir” as relative to the

Universe or universum and three used to denote the absence of war (Ozshegov and Shvedova 1999, 358).

In Russian philosophical discourse, the word “mir” is most often used to indicate the notion of a “filled space”. Let us, for example, take a look at the titles of some of the well-known in Russia philosophical writings such as the widely used in the system of education anthology of philosophical texts *Mir filosofii* (The World of Philosophy) and *Mir obsheniya* (The World of Communication) authored by Moisei Kogan, etc. Here, “mir” means the “filled space”. Far less often, the word “mir” is used in the Russian philosophical lexicon to signify “the absence of war, of quarrel or violence, or an agreement of warring parties to stop the war”²⁾. But it is precisely this meaning (peace as the absence of war and violence) that we will apply to the subject of this study while attempting to examine the corresponding research methodology.

Having narrowed the understating of peace in this paper, next we have to define the methods of our contemplation. Perhaps, the following famous saying of Paul Natrop can be regarded a methodological departure point in this paper: for a philosopher, the stars exist not in the heavens but in astronomy books. Accordingly, we will study war and peace not as occurrences in the world known through senses but as values, ideas or concepts. In other words, we will attempt to elicit the meaning of notions of “war” and “peace”.

The analysis of the content of the so-called “received view” is often the case with scholarly studies in the areas of sociology and psychology. However, our emphasis is placed on the examination of the Western philosophical discourse. This is another methodological particularity of the actual paper. Since philosophical discourse in general and philosophical problematique in particular can be viewed as consisting of several divisions, we will attempt to distinguish ontological, axiological, praxeological and epistemological facets of notions of war and peace. In addition, we will introduce formal logical and existential semantic dimensions of these notions. Hence, we will have to fill in the following table:

Meaning:	War	Peace
Formal logical		
Existential		
Ontological		
Axiological		
Praxeological		
Epistemological		

1 Formal Logical Aspect

As for the logical aspect of our examination, we will deal primarily with the content and not with the scope of the notions of “war” and “peace”. The meaning of a notion can be disclosed through a logical operation like giving a definition. In the examination of definitions of the notions of “war” and “peace”, it cannot pass without notice that the definition of “peace” is often given in the negative form, i.e. as an opposite to war; or as quarrel, rivalry, violence, etc.³⁾ However, unlike “peace”, the notion of “war” has positive, or direct, definitions. For example, a philosophical dictionary defines war as “an armed struggle between states or nations or between classes within the state”(Frolov 1991, 93).

It must be emphasized that the above definition of war is not the only. As a rule, in philosophy, the notion of “war” is used in a broader context, namely, as a synonym of such notions as “struggle”, “conflict”, “opposition”, etc. For instance, one of the books written in 1973 by the famous French linguist and philosopher Roland Barthes refers to the «war of languages”. The word “war” is used in a wider meaning not only in philosophy. For example, the name of Cold War was given to a certain period of the US-Soviet relations. However, the fact that the notion of “war” is used either in narrow or broader meaning does not contradict our previous observation, namely, that the definitions of war are most often positive whereas of “peace” are negative.

Perhaps, it is not the linguistic peculiarity of the Russian language but rather the entire course of world history and the development of human consciousness that conditioned the way, in which the notions of “peace” and “war” have been defined. As Karl Marx argued, “war has reached developed forms earlier than peace” (Marx and Engels 1955-1981, 46). Hence, the specific characteristics of the definition of “war” and “peace” can be regarded a historical (or, if you wish, a cultural – historical) property.

Let us now move on to the issue of aspectual peculiarity of the notions

examined. First of all, we have to acknowledge the existence of denotations for such “names” as “war” and “peace”. There is no doubt that a denotation for the notion of war exists: e.g., Turco-Russian wars, 1812 Patriotic War ⁴⁾, 1904-1905 Russian-Japanese war, etc. However, it is more difficult to identify a denotation for the word “peace”. Of course, if by “peace” we mean a “peace treaty” between the parties that formerly fought each other, then it is easy to recognize the denotation. However, that is the case, in which “peace” is used to denote only the last stage, or the final episode, of a particular war. The periods of the absence of “war” (in a narrow meaning of this notion) can be described as “war” in a broader meaning (e.g., cold war, economic war, etc.). Thus, it is possible to argue that “war” is a concrete notion whereas “peace” is an abstract one.

If we attempt to divide notions on absolute and relative, then, without a doubt, the notions we examine in this paper must be treated as relative. This is because their content reflects the relations between two or more subjects. Besides, these relations have conflicting and rather contradictory nature. As history demonstrates, Leo Trotsky’s slogan “Neither war no peace, and dismiss the army!” cannot be put into practice. Summing up the results of our formal logical examination of the notions of “war” and “peace”, let’s fill in the first line in our table.

Meaning:	War	Peace
Formal logical	Positive definitions Existence of denotations Concrete Relative	Negative definitions Absence of denotations Abstract Relative
Contradictory relations between the scopes of the notions		

2 Existential Aspect

Next, we will examine the existential facet of the notions of “war” and “peace”, in particular, their relations with other notions such as “life” and “death”. In common view, the notion of “war” is inseparable from the notion of “death” in the same way as “peace” is inseparable from the notion of “life”. However, the philosophical thought is paradoxical and often contradicts the received opinion (*doxa* = opinion in Greek). One can note that this paradoxical character of philosophy manifests itself already in antique philosophy.

Perhaps, it is Heraclitus of Ephesus who first introduced into the contexture of philosophical speculations the theme of war and peace. According to Diogenes Laërtius,

Heraclitus argued that in contrarities, something leading to birth is called war and contention, and something leading to enfireing⁵⁾ is called consent and peace (see Diogenes Laërtius 1979, 361). In the extant Heraclitus' writings, struggle (πόλεμος)⁶⁾ is regarded the truth (Δίκη) of the world, "the father and the king of all things". In the view of Heraclitus, "[things] counteractive fortify each other (ἀντίξουν συμφέρον) [whereas things] diverging come conjunctly (quoted in Tseller 1996, 54). That is why Heraclitus was keen to speak about Zeus and disapproved Homer for the latter condemned quarrels. Heraclitus considers war and peace the physical (innate, natural) essence. For him, peace is the way to non-being, death, or, more precisely, the return to an undifferentiated state. On the other hand, it is necessary to emphasize that in the ancient Greek philosophy death is not equated to nihility, or non-being. Rather, death means the transition to the other world. As Heraclitus argued, "immortal mortals, mortals immortals, one living the other's death and dying the others", and "there awaits men after death what they neither hope nor think" (quoted in Reale J. and D. Antiseri, 1994, 27). Hence, peace leads not simply to death, but to the other world, or, for Plato, to the genuine being, the world of ideas.

It should be pointed out as well that when Heraclitus of Ephesus links war to life, he understands war in a broader sense, i.e. as a "struggle". War as an armed opposition of people is only one type of this struggle. Still, the basis of war (in a narrow sense) can be rooted in the dialectics of life related to the struggle of the opposites. "The *whole* is the tension of incombable... Possibly, human freedom can be preserved and broad the experience of its being beyond measure in case the tension is insoluble" (Jaspers 1994, 352). According to Karl Jaspers, even if to presume that economical and political contradictions have been resolved, "one question would remains unanswered, namely, is there something like dark and blind will for war in human being: aspiration for the other, for breaking up with a day-to-day existence, with the stability of circumstances, something like the will to destruction and sacrifice, foggy enthusiasm aiming at the creation of a new world; or outlying from the reality knightly thirst for struggle, the will to self-affirmation attempting to prove to what it is capable and preferring the freely chosen death to the passive awaiting of the death at the end of a senseless existence" (Ibid., 345-346)

Arthur Schopenhauer also links the existence of wars to the will for life. From

his point of view, *principium individuationis* is the form of objectification of the world will: “The will equally exhibits itself in countless individuals and in everyone amongst them in every whit in two aspects, namely, the will and the representations. Thus, whereas every individual is a direct self-given as the will at large and the representation at large, the others are given to him first of all as his representations. Therefore, his own essence and his preservation are more important than all the others placed together” (Schopenhauer 1993, 431)

In relations with our preceding discussion, it is interesting to consider the matter in terms of semiotics and etymology. In the Russian language, we come across of rather paradoxical link between the meaning of “peace” and “death”. There is a widely used expression *Mir prakhu ego!* (Russian equivalent of *Paix à tes cendres!* in French and *May he rest in peace!* in English). One of the semantic meanings of the Russian word “mir” can be related to the word “pokoi” (absence of movement and quietude). And “pokoinik”, the Russian word for a dead man, originates in the word “pokoi”.

Thus, the notion of “war” is connotatively linked to life, or existence, as at the edge of being and not-being whereas peace is linked to death as the absolute rest. According to Fiodor Dostoevsky, “there is being only when it is threatened by non-being”. Similarly to Dostoevsky, Martin Heidegger argued that “life is being-to-death”. Hardly there is anyone who can deny that war is also “being-to-death”, since “[life is given]; but this is war as well. And, therefore, death” (Derrida 1998, 173)

Meaning:	War	Peace
Existential	Life, existence	Death, rest

3 Ontological Aspect

Perhaps, the paradoxical results of our examination of war and peace from the existential perspective can be explained by referring to ontology, or kind of “implantation” of these notions in the world structure. In *The Republic*, Plato describes “polemos” as a result of the soul’s spoiling and advocates the presence of the class of warriors-guards in an ideal state. But what is the spoiling of the soul? According to Plato, the lucre is the spoiling:

The things I mentioned earlier and the way of life I described won’t satisfy some people, it seems, but couches, tables, and other furniture will have to be added, and, of course, all

sorts of delicacies, perfumed oils, incense, hetaeras and pastries. We mustn't provide them only with the necessities we mentioned at first, such as houses, clothes, and shoes, but painting and embroidery must be begun, and gold, ivory, and the like acquired. Isn't that so?

- *Then our next step will be war, Glaucon, won't it?*

- *It will*

- *We won't say yet whether the effects of war are good or bad but only that we've now found the origins of war. It comes from those same desires that are most of all responsible for the bad things that happen to cities and the individuals in them (the Republic, Book II)*

Hence, according to Plato, even an ideal state in the real world is forced to fight. That is why the state needs the strata of warriors-guards performing the functions of modern-day army and police.

In the world of ideas there is no change, and, consequently, there is no war. The world of eidos is a holistic one. It does not have duality and contradictions, and, as a result, there is no making. This is the absolute world, or “the God’s Kingdom”

In the world of senses – transitional state between being and non-being, or metaxy – war cannot be escaped. As Jacques Derrida argued, “the possibility of war breaks the ideality in the ideal description of an ideal state, in the proper space of this fiction or this representation” (Derrida 1998, 190). The sensible world consists of contradictions; it is a *double* world. That is because war is objectivity, whereas peace is an idea. Hence, in the European thought, war is becoming a property of the sensible world, but peace is regarded an unachievable idea or an ideal, which is necessary to aspire nevertheless.

Let’s draw a line under our ontological conceptualization of the notions in question: “war” is immanent and phenomenal whereas “peace” is transcendental and noumenal; war is concerned with movement, change and making, and, consequently, with time and space; peace is concerned with constancy, tranquility and eternity.

“War” is natural (T.Hobbes), innate state of the world, but “peace” is something artificial that require external efforts for its appearance, or making.

Meaning:	War	Peace
Ontological	Immanent, phenomenal, timely and topologically localized, natural	Transcendental, noumenal, eternal, artificial

The above table may discourage some readers, because it is “obvious” that peace exists. However, as we have mentioned before, in philosophy, the notion of “war” is

most often used in a broader sense, e.g., as a “struggle”. Therefore, the following question inevitably arises: “How to understand the intervals between particular wars?”

4 Axiological Aspect

In one of his interviews, Michel Foucault refers to Clausewitz’ claim that war is the continuation of politics by other means (Foucault 2002, 150). Nevertheless, from the axiological perspective, the majority of western philosophers consider war the absolute evil whereas peace the absolute good. There are few exceptions though, like Frederick Nietzsche’s values reassessment (including the reassessment of the meaning of the notion of “the good”) and the ideas expressed by some of German philosophers during the Hitler’s epoch.

The above axiological assessment does not contradict the ontological status of the notions in question. The absolute good is impossible and does not exist in the world of senses. Neither does “peace”. The world as universum is the arena of struggle between the good and the evil. Even Jesus, the absolute good on the earth, had to say: “Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man’s enemies will be the members of his household (Matthew 10:34).

In history of philosophy, in addition to the absolute assessments of war and peace, there were attempts to give relative assessments as well. For example, commenting Hegel’s principle of specificity of the truth, Nikolai Chernyshevsky argued that it is impossible to give a univocal answer to the question: “Is war malign or benign?” According to Chernyshevsky, “...[w]e need to know with what kind of war we are dealing with; all depends on circumstances, time, and place” (Chernyshevsky 1950, 669). Vladimir Solovyov expresses similar view in his *Three conversions*. Solovyov puts the following words into the mouth of one of the characters: “Yes’ is that war is not the absolute evil and that peace is not the absolute good. Or, simply speaking, possibly, there is a *benign war* and possibly there is a *malign peace*” (Solovyov 1990, 651).

However, as we already mentioned, from the moral perspective, the majority of European philosophers considered war the absolute evil whereas peace the absolute

good.

Meaning:	War	Peace
Axiological	The evil	The good

5 Praxeological Aspect

As for praxeological, or activity aspect of the notions of “war” and “peace”, it is easy to notice the links between war and the mean, and between peace and the goal. There is a struggle for peace. And, very often, this is the struggle by the means of war (French “combatants de la paix”, “soldats de la paix”). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Matthew 5:9), and in modern Russian language, the word “peacemakers” is associated with the man in uniform and bearing arms (“blue helmets”).

Speaking of the praxeological aspect of the meaning of the notions in question, it is necessary to underline the deficiency of philosophical studies of the aspect. One of the reasons is that praxeology as a distinctive part of philosophical studies was born relatively late, only in the first part of the 20th century. But already the early scholars of praxeological studies pointed out the above-mentioned particularity of the notions of “war” and “peace”. As the founder of praxeology Tadeusz Kotarbinsky once argued, «war cannot be just because it is impossible to fight just even if you fight for the justice».

The praxeological meaning of war as the mean and of peace as the goal manifests itself more clearly and in relief in a political discourse. For example, the United Nations Resolution No. 688 (April 1991) acknowledged the right for intervention, which can be exercised in case there is a threat to “international security”. Starting with Alexander the Great, all of the grand conquerors declared the achievement of a just, new, and eternal peace the major goal of their wars.

The language of modern cinematography is indicative of a similar trend. Almost always, there is a goodie, who “rescues the world” by the violent means. And the more he kills or resorts to violence, the more is the value of his “feat”.

Before moving on to the examination of the epistemological aspect of the notions in question, let’s sum up the results that we have already obtained.

Meaning:	War	Peace
Formal logical	Positive definitions, Existence of denotations Concrete Relative	Negative definitions Absence of denotations Abstract Relative
	Contradictory relations between the scopes of the notions	
Existential	Life, existence	Death, rest
Ontological	Immanent, phenomenal, timely and topologically localized, natural	Transcendental, noumenal, eternal, artificial
Axiological	The evil	The good
Praxeological	The mean, the method	The aim

6 Epistemological Aspect

Since war has such properties as the existence of denotations, phenomenality and immanence, localization in time and space, it is said that war can be the subject of a study by the methods of empirical sciences. In retrospective, in the early years of the methodology of an empirical examination (Frensis Bekon), the link between this methodology and war and violence can be identified at the semantic level: in the Middle Ages, examination also meant interrogation with torture.

Speaking of history of war studies, it is important to remember that the science of warfare is thousands years old. Although the knowledge accumulated by this science had been used for peaceful purposes, in general it is the science of how to conduct the war. On the other hand, war is studied by civilian sciences. For example, in his review of sociological theories, Pitirim Sorokin introduced the chapter entitled “Sociological explanation of the struggle for survival and sociology of war” (Sorokin P. *Contemporary Sociological Theories*. New York and London, 1928). The subtitles of the chapter are of our particular interest. They deal with such issues as the uncertainty of the notion of “struggle for survival” in biological sciences and sociology; types of the “struggle for survival”; social role and consequences of war and struggle, including social selection made by war; the impact of war in the area of human physiology, demography, economics; war as the way to strengthen social solidarity; moral consequences of war; war and “internal social mobility” of society; war and changes in public opinion; causes of war, etc. (listed in Golovnin 1992, 140)

Conclusion

Peace can be “studied” by purely speculative, philosophical methods (i.e., without the need to examine the empirical reality) because it has such properties as the absence of empirical denotation, transcendence, noumenality, purposive representation, etc. However, peace can also be the subject of a construction process, i.e. “studied” by the methods of “social engineering”, or “social technologies”, advocated by Karl Popper (Popper 1992).

Because of the *innate* character of war, it can be described by the language of natural sciences, or by the phenomenal language of spontaneous processes, conditions of habitat, and with the use of scientific terminology and logic. *Artificiality* of peace requires the use of teleological terminology: aims, projects, norms, techniques, etc. In Russia, it is G.P. Shedrovitsky who first explicitly pointed out at the difference of methodological approaches in studies of artificial and inartificial as one of the principles of systematic ontology.

It is necessary to emphasize that there is no any sophisticated methodology of “peace” construction yet. There are many attempts at “peace” construction, but they are either utopian or related to the up-to-the-minute political tasks. From our point of view, in order to give a scientific shape to the peace construction, it is necessary to act in the same way as in the case of the technical disciplines. In other words, it is necessary first to examine the innate processes, and only then, with the use of new knowledge, to construct an artificial product. As concern the topic of the present paper, this means that for an effective construction of peace, study of war is a must.

To study war does not mean to propagate it. Quite often, a rabid pacifist makes the examination of war more difficult by describing the horrors of war. As a former professor of the Williams College in Massachusetts and first-hand witness of the First World War Jean Norton argued, if our society would be wise, then we would think in the following way: war is the sickness of the human race, one of the sicknesses like plague or yellow fever, which can be prevented or wiped out from the earth in case the sanitary measures are in place. What, then, are these measures? How to discover them, to test, and to use? In understanding the sickness, what are the details of its manifestation, spread over, and distribution of embryos?” (see Golovnin 1992, 143).

Finally, it is necessary to emphasize that the topic of the present paper and the

issues discussed require, of course, a more thorough examination. However, because of the space constrains, we had to simplify our explanations and acuminate the arguments.

NOTES

- 1). "Peace to the world!" in English
- 2). In philosophical dictionaries published in Russia after the demise of the Soviet Union, no definition of "peace" is given. But in Soviet-time dictionaries, "peace" is most often defined as "the state of relations between nations and countries characterized by the respect of the basic commonly accepted international norms of interrelationships without the use of armed forces or without the threat of their use" (Frolov 1991, 261)
- 3). Attempts to positively define peace can be found, as a rule, in religious (Christianity, Buddhism) or utopian literature.
- 4). The name used in Russia for Napoleon's invasion during the Napoleonic wars - *note by eds. of the English language version of the joint publication*
- 5). Here, «enfireing» means the transformation of the world into the primary state, i.e. into fire and chaos
- 6). In Russian philosophical tradition, the ancient Greek word "polemos" is often translated as "war" since in Ancient Greek, "polemos" was used to denote particular wars. The word "polemic" in Russian originates in this Greek word.

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