

An Alliance of War and Peace: Europe and the Necessity of Diplomacy

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Abstract: This essay seeks to approach the current tensions within the European Union through the lens of the philosophy on perpetual peace. Beginning with Kant's pamphlet *On Perpetual Peace* and his depiction of it as "an infinite process of gradual approximation", the text moves through Hegel's concept of the necessity of war in order to develop an understanding of the emergence of war between modern nation states. Finally, it approaches Derrida's critique of both Hegel and Kant as well as his own understanding of the conditions for peace in Europe, in an attempt to provide an explanation for the tensions haunting the EU during the last two decades.

Keywords: Perpetual Peace, Necessity of War, Kant, Hegel

Every Communist must grasp the truth, "political power grows out of the barrel of a gun."
Mao Tse-Tung

[W]e know that although democracy will flourish and endure in times of peace and security, it has already been destroyed twice now during war
Isocrates

When the European Union was awarded the 2012 Nobel Peace Prize by the Norwegian Nobel Committee, one could have argued that Kant's dreams of an everlasting peace on the European continent, almost 220 years after the publication of his *On Perpetual Peace*, finally had come true. Among the EU's many achievements – attained through hard work and a dedication to "peace and reconciliation, democracy and human rights" – the Nobel Committee listed the Union's role in furthering a resolution to the tensions in the Balkans and its efforts in strengthening and stabilizing democracy in both south and east Europe after the fall of fascism and communism respectively. But the perhaps biggest achievement was, in the words of the Committee, how the institutions of the EU had made sure that "[t]oday war between Germany and France is unthinkable." The EU, taking the form of what Kant called a *foedus pacificum*, had as a league of nations not only ended one war but brought an end to "all wars for good", at least on the European continent.

However, even though one might argue that the peace prize was primarily awarded on the back of achievements past, the new millennium has time and again illustrated the frailty of the European partnership. Beginning with 9/11, tensions in Europe have ever since been on the rise, and the union and its values of democracy, collaboration, and freedom is often described as under attack, from without as much as from within. In an article from 2003, written by Jürgen Habermas and co-signed by Jacques Derrida, we could for instance read:

The gap between continental and Anglo-American countries on the one side, and “the old Europe” and the Central and East European candidates for entry into the European Union on the other side, has grown deeper. [...] The Iraq crisis was only a catalyst. In the Brussels constitutional convention, there is now a visible contrast between the nations that really want a stronger EU, and those with an *understandable* interest in freezing, or at best cosmetically changing, the existing mode of intergovernmental governance. This contradiction can no longer be finessed. The future constitution will grant us a European foreign minister. But what good is a new political office if governments unify in a common policy? A Fischer with a changed job description would remain as powerless as Solana.¹

Since then, the hopes of establishing a mutual understanding between nations inclined to strengthen the power of Brussels and those yearning for more independence seem to have grown increasingly dim. Simultaneously, the constant drawing and redrawing of the line between, on the one hand, the democratic, tolerant and peaceful, and, on the other, the authoritarian, conservative, and potentially violent – both within individual member states as well as in relations between them – has further shaken the foundation of the Union. In such a moment we should, perhaps, return to the intellectual roots of the European project of peace – establishing a line of continuity stretching from Kant and the French Revolution to Habermas and the War on Terror – in order to re-actualise the questions surrounding the relationship between peace, war, and democracy. Hopefully, such an endeavour might aid our understanding of the origins of our current, and seemingly always returning, predicament. Might the incessant return of tensions, as Habermas claims, signal that the legal framework of the joint European democratic project must be strengthened in order to withstand the pressure of anti-democratic and nationalist forces? Or is it rather a sign that the Union has gone too far, stripping the peoples of Europe of their democratic rights to such an extent that autonomy must be reinstated and power returned to the nation states? Or is it simply the fact that democracy, ruled by the will of the masses, by its very nature opens up for the possibility of demagogues and warmongers persuading the people to act against their own best interest?

Peace and Sovereignty

The idea that establishing a confederation for peace constitutes the primary solution to the problem of war is in no sense a modern invention. Neither is the idea that democracy provides the best antidote to war. In a discourse known as *Περὶ εἰρήνης* or *On the Peace*, Athenian orator and

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 1 Habermas & Derrida 2003, 292.

rhetorician Isocrates put forth his proposition to end the so-called Social War between Athens and its allies that plagued the Aegean region during the middle of the fourth century BCE. What he proposed, in a vein similar to Kant's, is not simply a treaty ending one specific war, but a common peace (*κοινή εἰρήνη*) including all Greeks. Since, he continues, in such a situation

we will govern our city with great security, we will be freed from the war, dangers and confusions that now govern our relations with one another [...]. We will see the city take in twice the revenues it does now and be filled with merchants, foreigners, and metics who have deserted it for now. Most importantly, all men will be our allies not by force but by persuasion, and they will not just accept us in secure times because of our power and then leave us when we have troubles but will behave as true allies and friends.²

The argument presented here by Isocrates, calling for what we with Derrida and Habermas might call the true self-interest of the people, could just as much have been lifted verbatim from any of the works written by the great Enlightenment thinkers of perpetual peace, ranging from Abbé St Pierre, via Voltaire and Rousseau, to Kant. During the end of the eighteenth century, the revolutionaries claimed that what they had dubbed the “diplomacy of the old courts”, supposedly waging wars and signing peace treaties only to serve the whims of the prince and the coffers of his aristocratic ministers and ambassadors, had to be supplanted by “a new diplomacy” of trade and commerce aimed at increasing tranquillity and wealth for all the peoples of Europe. This opposition between the war-torn old diplomacy and its peaceful new counterpart, reminiscent of Socrates’ famous exposition on how the origins of war could be found in the needs of the luxury state to always expand, can also be found in Isocrates’ speech as he described how the Athenian assembly was divided between two opposing views on the waging of war. The present perils, he claimed, beset the Athenians because the assembly hailed demagogues who urged for war as a means to regain (or at least to withhold) property in other states while, at the same time, the few vying for peace and invoking the need to limit one’s desires and to “be content with what we have at present” were met with silence or even ridicule.³ The Athenians, he continued, seemed to have forgotten what had made them *primum inter pares* among the Greeks; that democracy commanded them to listen to all views and then vote for the one supported by the strongest arguments, not the one which simply satisfied the already established *doxa* of the masses. Thus,

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 2 Isocrates 2004, 20-21.

3 Ibid., 6-7.

in order to secure a long-lasting peace, the Athenians, according to Isocrates, had to start leading the Greeks by example, choosing the path of negotiation and showing their neighbours a peaceful way of working together by finding a solution beneficial for all rather than enforcing their submission through the use of ruthless mercenaries. A democratic legion of Greeks offered, in Isocrates view, the only viable road to a sustainable and prosperous peace.

The argument that a government based in the will and interests of the people – democratic or republican – holds the secret to securing a stable and lasting peace between different political entities thus seems to resonate in everyone from Isocrates via Kant to Habermas, Derrida, and the Norwegian Nobel Prize Committee. Effectively, since the proper procedure to diminish the risks of the outbreak of war boils down to a question concerning the choice of government, the problem of war also appears as one of sovereignty: it is taken for granted that the natural inclination of any sovereign is expansion, and only by turning the waging of wars into a moral or economical risk might the sovereign favour negotiation, limitation, and peace over threats, brute force, and endless expansion. Seen from this perspective, war, as both Isocrates and Plato claim, is inevitable when any land mass is inhabited by several, clearly distinguished, social and political communities. These tensions, as Socrates puts it, arise because humans, when indulge ourselves “in the limitless acquisition of material goods and go beyond the bounds of basic necessities”, are forced “to appropriate part of our neighbors’ land if we are going to have enough for stock and arable farming.”⁴ It thus appears as if we already in antiquity can find a formulation of Kant’s claim, referencing Hobbes’ famous *bellum omnium contra omnes*, that

[p]eoples who have grouped themselves into nation states may be judged in the same way as individual men living in a state of nature, independent of external laws; for they are a standing offence to one another by the very fact that they are neighbours.⁵

Regardless of how one chooses to explain the contingent origins of some specific war (is it because of demagogues and warmongers, the sophists of the court, the desire for luxuries, too much or not enough authority etc.), everyone from Plato, via Hobbes, to Kant nevertheless seem to agree that war is a natural (although not necessarily unavoidable) part of state relations: as long as no overarching authority (legal, ethical, military) forces political entities to co-exist peacefully, someone will sooner or later overstep its existing boundaries and declare war on its neighbours in an attempt to overtake them. But does this mean that the

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4 Plato 2013, 373d-e.

5 Kant 1991, p. 102.

return of tensions in Europe only signals the normal or natural state of affairs in international relations, meaning that the long peace between Germany and France that awarded the EU a Nobel Peace Prize eventually would have to give way to growing tensions and, perhaps, ultimately to war? Is, in other words, war an unavoidable aspect of the nature of sovereignty against which enlightened reason fights a never-ending battle? In order to approach this question, let us first expand on Kant’s understanding of the circumstances of perpetual peace.

As already mentioned, the advent of modernity resurrected the claim that the will of the people offers the best possible basis of government for anyone hoping for a long-lasting peace. Kant for instance writes:

If, as is inevitably the case under this [the republican] constitution, the consent of the citizens is required to decide whether or not war should be declared, it is very natural that they will have a great hesitation in embarking on so dangerous an enterprise. For this would mean calling down on themselves all the miseries of war from their own resources, such as doing the fighting themselves, supplying the costs of the war with their own resources, painfully making good the ensuing devastation, and, as the crowning evil, having to take upon themselves a burden of debt which will embitter peace itself and which can never be paid off on account of the constant threat of new wars.⁶

The people, when freed from the grip of the self-interested aristocracy and their unpredictable monarch, was believed to be the best guarantor for peace, since the ultimate price of war is paid in their own blood. However, in the second edition of his *On Perpetual Peace*, Kant adds to this hope a caveat: the predilection for peace found in the people in no way completely dispels the problem of sovereignty. When attempting to dissolve the apparent “antinomy between politics and morality” in the sphere of international law, Kant for instance encounters this limitation when returning to his “transcendental formula of public right”. The fundamental claim that he puts forth against those who claim that war is inevitable is that it may be avoided if all states followed this maxim of publicness, since the intention to go to war in order to gain some profit would be severely damaged if these plans were proclaimed publicly. It is thus here, in this attempt to prove that wars could be prevented if everyone was forced to explicitly announce their justification for war, that Kant’s understanding of peace and sovereignty comes upon its own limit. While, as he points out, a small state, threatened by the growing power of its neighbour, would have its plans halted if it publicly announced its

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6 Ibid., p. 108-109.

intention of committing a pre-emptive strike in order to save its own independence (since it would give the more powerful neighbour time to counter-act), not every intention to go to war would be hindered by being publicly proclaimed. Sidestepping the question if Kant, through this argument, actually succeeds in dissolving the antinomies between politics and morality by referring to his formula of public right, he nevertheless acknowledges at least one situation in which his formula definitely would fail: when the power of one sovereign completely outweighs its neighbours, publicly announcing every intention to go to war will not harm the intended outcome in any way. Wars, in other words, can be declared (and won) without breaking the formula that “[a]ll actions affecting the rights of other human beings are wrong if their maxim is not compatible with their being made public.”⁷ As a solution to this dilemma, Kant claims that for international right to be made possible in the first place, it must, *a priori*, be based in “a federative association of states whose sole intention is to eliminate war”.⁸ Thus, in the same way as the citizen’s public right must be preceded by the state, international right must be preceded by the existence of a federation. The issue, however, is that such a position takes for granted what it is supposed to prove, namely the possibility of ever establishing a perpetual peace, since the international right supposed to secure it already assumes the existence of a federation established with the sole aim of securing peace. Although never explicitly acknowledging this issue, Kant nevertheless ultimately forsakes his goal to end all wars. In the last paragraph of his second edition, he instead opts for perpetual peace as “an infinite process of gradual approximation [...], a task which, as solutions are gradually found, constantly draws nearer fulfilment, for we may hope that the periods within which equal amounts of progress are made will become progressively shorter.”⁹

War, in other words, seems to not only be natural but also necessary, at least as long as we do not live under a global authority backed by an immense power capable of dissolving every conflict through the threat of violence. The tensions now haunting the Europe Union thus ultimately appears as an unavoidable effect of the impossible coincidence of individual sovereignty and external peace that Hobbes pointed out in his famous section on everyone’s war against everyone:

[I]n all times, Kings, and Persons of Sovereign authority, because of their Independency, are in continual jealousies, and in the state and posture of Gladiators; having their weapons pointing, and their eyes fixed on one another; [...]. But because they uphold

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7 Ibid., p. 126.

8 Ibid., p. 129.

9 Ibid., p. 130.

thereby, the Industry of their Subjects; there does not follow from it, that misery, which accompanies the Liberty of particular men.¹⁰

However, is there not a risk that such a perspective leans too heavily on what appears as an ahistorical trait of sovereignty, what Hobbes calls the continual jealousies between sovereigns? Furthermore, another difficulty with this perspective is that the current tensions in the EU cannot simply be reduced to the contradictions between nation state, but rather we see how it confronts us with a complex relationship between external and internal tensions, that is, between war and civil strife. Adopting the Kantian perspective, the risk is thus not only that we might end up naturalizing external war, making it an unavoidable part of sovereignty, we might also end up obfuscating the relationship between civil strife and external war. Kant himself can be seen as illustrating this as he turns the struggle for power within a nation state into a mirror image of the battle between multiple sovereigns: the effect of this move is that he effectively renders any attempt to seize power illegal since the revolting party (in Kant’s case the revolutionaries) attempt to establish their sovereignty on false pretences (namely breaking the maxim of the transcendental formula of public right when using force as a way of overthrowing sovereignty). Considering our contemporary issues, the case of the European Union has shown that the split underlying tensions cannot not simply be located on the level of the state, as if it was a question of different sovereigns with contradictory wills finding it hard to reach an agreement. Rather, the tension is just as much internal to each of the member states, dividing not only states but also their respective populace into some variety of the opposition between, on the one hand, globalist, liberal, individualist and, on the other, nationalist, conservative, and traditionalist. But if tensions are only an effect of the struggle for sovereignty, is it simply a coincidence that the same contingent causes appear as the origins of a split appearing on all levels within the Union? The issue here, when taking sovereignty as the origin of inter-state tension, is that we also risk taking the cohesion of that sovereignty for granted, leaving us to conclude that civil strife and inter-state war have little, if anything, to do with each other. Such a position is, for instance, clearly present in Habermas and Derrida’s call for a “European identity”. Here, the contradictions within the EU are only played out on the level of nation states, which is why a common European identity is not only intended to battle the “destructive power” of nationalism, but just as much continue the pacification of class conflict achieved by the welfare state. In other words, civil strife only appears as an indexation of the division separating the European nation states.

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10 Hobbes 1988, p. 187-188.

War and the Modern Nation State

In order to offer another perspective and to further historicize the understanding of war, let us first turn to Hobbes who, in the quote above, points us to an important development that might distinguish a properly modern understand of war between nation states from how, for instance, war between ancient Greek city states was discussed by Plato and Isocrates. While the latter point out that war is an ultimately destructive activity when seen from the perspective of the citizen (diminishing trade, draining the coffers of the state etc.), Hobbes seems to claim the opposite: the prosperity of the citizen is guaranteed by the continued bellicose stance of sovereigns. Another proponent of the thesis of the necessity of war highlighting its relationship to the inner workings of the state was Hegel, who, in his critique of Kant's ideas on perpetual peace, claimed that

[i]n existence [*Dasein*] this *negative* relation [*Beziehung*] of the state to itself thus appears as the relation of *another* to *another*, as if the negative were something *eternal*. The existence [*Existenz*] of this negative relation therefore assumes the shape of an event, of an involvement with contingent occurrences coming *from without*.¹¹

For Hegel, it is not simply the case that the sovereign must remain hostile to its neighbours in order to uphold their industriousness, but rather that, in the image of the external threat, the state is met with its own immanent negativity. As Žižek often emphasizes:

Hegel's point here concerns the primacy of "self-contradiction" over external obstacle (or enemy). We are not finite and self-inconsistent because our activity is always thwarted by external obstacles; we are thwarted by external obstacles because we are finite and inconsistent.¹²

Although Hegel is often mentioned together with Machiavelli and Hobbes as one of the precursors of modern Realism, his theory of the necessity of war differs significantly from the perspectives presented hitherto. As we have seen, the necessity of war is often understood as an ahistorical effect originating from the nature of sovereignty, more precisely from the inevitable desire of the sovereign to overstep existing boundaries (regardless of if this force emanates from the citizens' want for more luxuries, the ministers' need to appear relevant or the princes' desire to increase their domains). However, this means that although war is a necessary occurrence among political entities existing in proximity to

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11 Hegel 1991, § 323.

12 Žižek 2012, p. 200.

each other, every actual instance of war is the outcome of some specific contingency: a shift in the balance of forces, the lack or abundance of some commodity, the whims of a particular ruler. Hegel opposes precisely this explanation, pointing out how war

should not be regarded as an absolute evil [*Übel*] and as a purely external contingency whose cause [*Grund*] is therefore in itself contingent, whether this cause lies in the passions of rulers or nations [*Völker*], in injustices etc., or in anything else which is not as it should be. Whatever is by nature contingent is subject to contingencies, and this fate is therefore itself a necessity.¹³

So, it is not simply that war is the necessary outcome of the lack of an overarching authority, and thus that the antidote to war might lie in an infinite labour of counteracting this lack by reducing the contingent risks leading to tension, either through taking legal measures against war or through the establishment of diplomatic federations. Instead, Hegel claims that also the contingencies leading to specific historical wars are the effects of necessary processes. Thus, Kant's infinite labour of drawing nearer to (but never fully reaching) perpetual peace is dismissed by Hegel as another instance of bad infinity, since a properly perpetual peace remains impossible. Hegel continues:

Thus, Kant proposed a league of sovereigns to settle disputes between states [...]. But the state is an individual, and negation is an essential component of individuality. Thus, even if a number of states join together as a family, this league, in its individuality, must generate opposition and create an enemy. Not only do peoples emerge from wars with added strength, but nations [*Nationen*] troubled by civil dissension gain internal peace as a result of wars with their external enemies. Admittedly, war makes property insecure, but this *real* insecurity is no more than a necessary movement.¹⁴

Within Political Science, the difference between Hegel and someone like Kant (i.e. the difference between Realism and Idealism) on the topic of war and peace is usually treated as purely philosophical, ultimately based in two opposed views on the ideal nature of states and the ways in which they formally relate to each other. Against this, it is however possible to claim that Hegel's understanding of the necessity of war constitutes a proper break within the theory of war, differentiating him just as much from Isocrates and Plato as from Kant. To make such a claim, Hegel's

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13 Hegel 1991, § 324.

14 Ibid.

dialectics must be read, following Žižek, as “a theory of the break between tradition and modernity,” through which a rift is introduced in nature just as much as in humanity, making them both forever unstable.¹⁵ This is also why a conception of the necessity of war that avoids the pitfalls of essentialism cannot be but a modern invention, since it depends on the failure of nature as much as that of the human. Reading Hegel’s concept of the necessity of war as the first properly modern understanding of the return of war could, therefore, offer us a perspective on the tensions that haunt our present which would be capable of taking into account the specificities of the modern democratic nation state.

The difference between Hegel and Kant can, thus, be expressed as one between foregrounding self-contradiction or external opposition rather than an opposition between Realism and Idealism. What follows from this depiction is, furthermore, that this difference indexes a change, or rather a break or rift, opened up by the birth of modernity. As we have seen, at the heart of the question of war Kant places the problem of sovereignty, perfectly captured by his attack on Absolute Monarchy and its diplomatic corps:

[U]nder a constitution where the subject is not a citizen, and which is therefore not republican, it is the simplest thing in the world to go to war. For the head of state is not a fellow citizen, but the owner of the state, and a war will not force him to make the slightest sacrifice so far as his banquets, hunts, pleasure palaces and court festivals are concerned. He can thus decide on war, without any significant reason, as a kind of amusement, and unconcernedly leave it to the diplomatic corps (who are always ready for such purposes) to justify the war for the sake of propriety.¹⁶

However, what modernity brings with it is not simply the possibility to point out the illegitimacy of one specific king (that he only goes to war on the basis of some personal whim). In other words, the claim that the king is a king only because the servant believes in him is simply not enough. Instead, the difference between traditional and modern sovereignty should be expressed as the difference between pointing out a false king and expressing the falsity of monarchy as such. While the former retains a stability through preserving the nature of “kingness” as such, the latter locates the antagonism in the notion itself, showing us that a true king is no longer a king but only someone required “to say ‘yes’ and to dot the ‘i.’”¹⁷ Hence, the dispelling of “false consciousness” involved in pointing out that this or that historical ruler is illegitimate is only bound to repeat

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¹⁵ Žižek 2016, p. 3.

¹⁶ Kant 1991, p. 100.

¹⁷ Hegel 199, § 280.

itself if it is not paired with another destabilisation of the sovereign’s nature. In the seventeenth seminar, Lacan names the deciding factor behind this historical transformation:

Something changed in the master’s discourse at a certain point in history. We are not going to break our backs finding out if it was because of Luther, or Calvin, or some unknown traffic of ships around Genoa, or in the Mediterranean Sea, or anywhere else, for the important point is that on a certain day surplus *jouissance* became calculable, could be counted, totalized. This is where what is called the accumulation of capital begins.¹⁸

Lacan here points to an effect on the sovereign brought about by the start of accumulation of capital: when surplus-value became calculable, it also inaugurated, as already Marx and Engels pointed out, the process of deterioration of all “feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations”. At the core of this transformation we find the concept of labour, which, for Hegel, constitutes the cement keeping modern societies together:

In Athens, the law obliged every citizen to give an account of his means of support; the view nowadays is that this is a purely private matter. On the one hand, it is true that every individual has an independent existence [ist jedes Individuum für sich]; but on the other, the individual is also a member of the system of civil society, and just as every human being has a right to demand a livelihood from society, so also must society protect him against himself. It is not just starvation which is at stake here; the wider viewpoint is the need to prevent a rabble from emerging. Since civil society is obliged to feed its members, it also has the right to urge them to provide for their own livelihood.¹⁹

Here, Hegel’s properly modern understanding of the state shows itself: the rabble, the immanent negation of the state, is not simply the name for a contingent appearance of discontent within this state, but rather a necessary potentiality born out of inescapable emergence of poverty in civil society. Although poverty, in its subjective aspects, always arises out of the arbitrary effect of some contingent circumstance, Hegel still shows how it, at the same time and as an effect of the fact that civil society keeps “*expanding its population and industry*”, also necessarily appears in all modern societies. The reason behind this, he explains, is that, on the one hand, wealth is accumulated in fewer hands while, on the other, not only the specialization but also the limitation of work in the state makes it

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¹⁸ Lacan 2007, p. 177.

¹⁹ Hegel 1991, § 240.

harder for this growing population to sustain their own livelihood. Hegel continues:

When a large mass of people sinks below the level of a certain standard of living – which automatically regulates itself at the level necessary for a member of the society in question – that feeling of right, integrity [*Rechtlichkeit*], and honour which comes from supporting oneself by one's own activity and work is lost. This leads to the creation of a *rabble*, which in turn makes it much easier for disproportionate wealth to be concentrated in a few hands.²⁰

As such, the *rabble* “is the Hegelian name for the emergence of an indeterminacy which decomposes the state”, appearing in the contradiction between property (citizen) and non-property (poor), negating the state's supposed totality and, through this process, revealing this inner inconsistency or self-contradiction.²¹ In other words: the modern state necessarily produces the poor, which in turn, because they cannot sustain themselves, run the risk of turning into a rabble since their sense of belonging, created out of the act of partaking in the ethical life of the state through labour, is denied them. As Frank Ruda has illustrated, the fact that Hegel fails to acknowledge that this necessary development calls for a sublation of the modern nation state does not belittle the fact that he nevertheless captured how the capitalist system brings with it an unavoidable process of decay and deterioration. It is this shift, referenced by Lacan in his comment regarding the change of the Master's discourse, that makes possible Hegel's concept of the necessity of war. Returning to Hegel's point that “war makes property insecure” – an insecurity which in itself is a necessary part of the movement of property – we can see how the move from internal contradiction in the negation of the state (rabble) to external opposition between states (war) is a way to ensure the “*security of the life and property* of the individual”.²² Without this movement, life and property in modernity would suffer from the rot [*Fäulnis*] of the rabble, potentially destroying property itself in the horrors of civil war or revolution. As such, “nations troubled by civil dissension gain internal peace as a result of wars with their external enemies.”²³ In other words, in order to protect property from itself, from its own contradictions, it must pass through the insecurity of war exposing it to the risk of being lost as spoils.

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20 Hegel 1991, § 244.

21 Ruda 2013, p.164.

22 Hegel 1991, § 324.

23 Ibid.

With the rise of calculable surplus-value, all spheres, including that of the Master, came under threat of commodification. Here, modernity's brake with the pre-modern division of the universe into two spheres – the high, eternal, and heavenly realm and the low, finite, and corrupted world – in favour of the one limitless and immanent field of modern science is, in other words, intimately linked not only to the capitalist mode of production but to the inescapable repetition of the rise of tensions within the modern state system. In this transformation, moving from two separated into one unified sphere, lack itself was inscribed within the world, making it calculable (as surplus value) but also rendering this sphere unstable since modern science in general, and Newtonian physics in particular, “had expelled every divine shadow from the heavens.”²⁴ This meant that the sphere of modern science (and capitalism), on one hand, could continue on indefinitely (since it never would experience any contradictions, nothing remained outside its grasp, everything could become a commodity) while, on the other, it was put under the constant threat of disintegration since negation and contradiction, instead of appearing between two spheres, returned from within, from the Real. Hence, as Samo Tomšič puts it, this counting of surplus needed to be counteracted: “In order to account for the existence of the subject, capitalism produces a system of economic, political and juridical fictions, which strive to conceal the politically subversive and destabilising non-identity that constitutes the subject, and more importantly, which strive to disavow the impossibility of the integral commodification of the subject.”²⁵ So, while the Master no longer could be considered as the “essence”, part of another world and thus the guarantor for the stability (but also the fear) of the subject, it “had inwardly fallen into dissolution, trembled in its depths”, meaning that everything “fixed within it had been shaken loose”.²⁶ This is what separates not only Hegel but also Kant, as modern thinkers, from someone like Isocrates, the formers accepting the unescapable instability of the modern system of state (making way for the necessity of war). Simultaneously, Kant denies the necessary conclusion of this situation (the impossibility of a perpetual peace) in favour of the spuriousness of the “infinite process of gradual approximation”, illustrating how the system offers an ideological position with a semblance of stability, a fetish for the subject to hold on to just as it descends into the void. The same could also be said about the traditional realist position in modern Political Science. Although it accepts the infinite and inescapably undecidable character of the field of international relations, it simultaneously grounds this undecidability in the complete certainty of the so-called *balance of power* as the naturalization of the

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24 Lacan 2007, p. 12.

25 Tomšič 2015, p. 235-236.

26 Hegel 1991, § 194.

capitalist world view. The hope is that what appears as an external two might be subsumed under a new stable One as we move from war to peace.

Peace and Mediation

So, the Kantian perpetual peace hides a hope for a stable Master capable of one day overcoming the contradictions leading to war. It is here, at least at a first glance, that also Derrida's critique of the Hegelian understanding of war hits its mark, the fact that "the master has to live on in order to cash in and enjoy the benefits of the death risk he has risked."²⁷ The fact that war is exclusively a question of the sovereign, the one with "direct and sole responsibility for the command of the armed forces, for the conduct of relations with other states through ambassadors etc.", and that every war must be waged in a way so it will not endanger "the possibility of peace" (by respecting ambassadors, international institutions etc.), shows that Hegel's incapability to perceive the rabble's call for the sublation of the state is a blindness destined to save it. Against this, Derrida seems to propose that the total annihilation of nuclear war has turned these practices impossible since no benefits will remain to be enjoyed. However, although properly describing the Hegelian movement from internal to external contradiction, Derrida's critique nevertheless misses its mark. Instead it, as well as Derrida and Habermas' joint statement for the future of European politics, reminds us of Lacan's famous quip from the seventeenth seminar: "What you aspire to as revolutionaries is a master. You will get one."²⁸

When condemning Hegel as another expression of the Master's dream "to capitalize (on) what is gained from the risk, from war and from death itself", Derrida concludes that the fact that nothingness is the necessary driving force behind war also entails that nothing stands to be gained from it. In other words, that the prize promised to the Master as he emerges on the other side of war is nothing but a fantasy destined to cover over nothingness itself and the fact that there is nothing to gain for no one. However, the externalization and destruction of the rabble's negativity in war is, as we have seen, not simply a bourgeois fantasy, it is a description of the necessary precondition of the system's existence, allowing for it to continue the counting of negativity in the form of surplus-value by expelling the negativity that threatens to overthrow it. The problem is thus not that Hegel – in a world where the nuclear threat is unavoidable although perhaps no longer imminent – would represent the fantasy of the rewards handed out after the apocalypse. His concept of the necessity of war should not be read as a simple endorsement of the current system, but rather as an indexation of its supposed all-

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27 Derrida 1984, p. 30.

28 Lacan 2007, p. 207.

encompassing nature. If our presumptions about the modern dialectic between war and peace are right – its necessary movement, being the effect of an antagonism internal to the modern nation state as it was born out of the French revolution – we should be reminded about Hegel's own words from the lectures on *Philosophy of History*, that "this nodus, this problem is that with which history is now occupied, and whose solution it has to work out in the future."²⁹ This nodus, the impossibility of the state's totality which makes war unavoidable, is what he names the rabble.

Thus, what Derrida offers us is not the path beyond this system. Instead, his apocalypse without apocalypse appears just a transformation of the image of the traditional Master (risking his life for future gains) into the fantasy of the Master as diplomatico-bureaucratic mediator. In the final paragraph of his meditation on nuclear war, directly following this critique of Hegel, he writes:

[A]ll wars are waged in the name of the name, beginning with the war between God and the sons of Shem who wanted to "make a name for themselves" and transmit it by constructing the tower of Babel. This is so, but "deterrence" had come into play among God and the Shem, the warring adversaries, and the conflict was temporarily interrupted: tradition, translation, transference have had a long respite. Absolute knowledge too. Neither God nor the sons of Shem [...] knew absolutely that they were confronting each other in the name of the name, and of nothing else, thus nothing. That is why they stopped and moved on to a long compromise. We have absolute knowledge and we run the risk, precisely because of that, of not stopping. Unless it is the other way around: God and the sons of Shem having understood that a name wasn't worth it – and this would be absolute knowledge – they preferred to spend a little more time together, the time of a long colloquy with warriors in love with life, busy writing in all languages in order to make the conversation last, even if they didn't understand each other too well.³⁰

Regardless of which of these two interpretations we follow, they both remain predicated on the assumption that the moment of war can be postponed, either through knowing that all wars are ultimately useless (thus avoiding it) or by not knowing this but (in contrast to the supposed certainty of the nuclear age) approaching this lack of knowledge with caution. Instead of the ever-expanding Master we thus get a Master which appears as a form of mediator, limiting not only himself but also other Masters in order to allow for warriors and people to, as he puts it, write, love, and translate. By knowing that there is nothing to gain from

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29 Hegel 2007, p. 452.

30 Derrida 1984, p. 31.

war (or by being cautious faced with one's ignorance about possible gains), the Masters can thus proceed in ways which allows for their subjects to prosper. It is, in other words, a dream of a permanent state of diplomacy as endless capitalism without contradictions in which every tension and possible war is eternally postponed by mediation and care. In Habermas and Derrida's joint text on the war in Iraq, this figure of the mediating Master is even more clearly expressed in the hopes for a new European identity as the way to save the not only the collaboration but peace as well. In a time when "the driving forces" of marketisation are exhausted, the Union, it is claimed, needs to develop a "European identity", a "consciousness of a shared political fate." However, they continue, "only the core European nations are ready to endow the EU with certain qualities of a state."³¹ Hence, only if Europe's giants retreat from the policy of only following their economic interest, realizing that their greater interest lies in "strengthened cooperation, can the Union realize its full potential as a force of peace:

Taking a leading role does not mean excluding. The avant-gardist core of Europe must not wall itself off into a new Small Europe. It must – as it has so often – be the locomotive. It is from their own self-interest, to be sure, that the more closely-cooperating member states of the EU will old the door open. And the probability that the invited states will pass through that door will increase the more capable the core of Europe becomes of effective action externally, and the sooner it can prove that in a complex global society, it is not just division that counts, but also the soft power of negotiating agendas, relations, and economic advantages.³²

This hope, that war could be eternally postponed by the mediating Master, clearly remains within the Kantian horizon, understanding the origins of tensions not as an effect of internal negation but as arising from an external opposition (here from the difference in perceived self-interest causing a divide separating "continental and Anglo-American Europe" from "Old", Central, and Eastern Europe). Thus, are we not, employing Badiou's Maoist terminology, faced with an understanding of war which once again coincides with the formula the "two fuse into one"?³³ That is to say, that peace is to be achieved only through the synthesis of existing contradictions, regardless of if it entails offering a new all-encompassing identity or in realizing that our unity lies in our impossibility of reaching complete identity. By turning this around and following Badiou's favoured formula of the "One divides into two", can

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31 Habermas & Derrida 2003, p. 292.

32 Ibid., p. 293.

33 Badiou 2007, p. 60.

we not, however, capture the insight regarding war that Hegel himself remained blind too. Here, Mao's points on war in his reflections on the relationship between principal and non-principal contradiction offers an illustrative example:

In a semi-colonial country such as China, the relationship between the principal contradiction and the non-principal contradictions presents a complicated picture. When imperialism launches a war of aggression against such a country, all its various classes, except for some traitors, can temporarily unite in a national war against imperialism. At such a time, the contradiction between imperialism and the country concerned becomes the principal contradiction, while all the contradictions among the various classes within the country (including what was the principal contradiction, between the feudal system and the great masses of the people) are temporary relegated to a secondary and subordinate position.³⁴

The point here is that the revolutionary forces, in order to save the possibility to dissolve the proper primary contradiction between the feudal system and the masses had to join forces with the representatives of this system when faced with the imperialist threat of Japan, in turn making the latter contradiction, between imperialist and the colonised, into the primary concern. However, this did not entail that the original contradiction – the first one dividing into two – is solved simply because peace is achieved. Instead, it is not only that the latter contradiction, between imperialist and colonized, becomes primary as a result of the threat it poses to the solution of the original. Its sole reason for appearing, as Mao points out, is as a way to save the supposed One of the state from the negation that threatens it. War and diplomacy are, thus, not radically opposed, but rather two steps of the necessary movement of property, first being risked in its in-itself through going to war before (after the real, immanent, threat is dissolved) bringing it back into itself and returning to the state by negotiating a truce. Herein lies Hegel's failure, as he defines war in the terms of an "event, of an involvement with contingent occurrences coming *from without*." But it is not "the state's *own* highest moment – its actual infinity as the ideality of everything finite within it."³⁵ Rather, it is just a movement it must pass through in order to save itself. Perhaps we might, departing from this, claim that in some sense Mao's understanding of the situation during the Sino-Japanese war also holds true for the situation in Europe. With a European left divided between, on the one hand, rejecting the neo-liberal system of the

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34 Mao 1967, p. 331.

35 Hegel, 1991, § 323.

EU and returning to a modern version of “socialism in one country” and, on the other, a vision of a new Europe of radical equality, it also remains caught in a choice between siding with Scylla (chauvinist national-populism) or Charybdis (globalist neo-liberalism). Whatever side is picked in this battle, the thesis of the necessity of war should teach us that the solution is not to engage in diplomacy and mediation as a way of ending tensions and bring back peace to the continent. Instead, the apparent contradiction between nationalism and globalism should be approached as nothing more than a mirage so that out of its solution the proper contradiction, signified by the rabble, may emerge. Otherwise, the present war between nationalism and liberalism will only remain another way of saving “the ethical health of nations” from the internal rot, “just as the movement of the winds preserves the sea from stagnation which a lasting calm would produce.”³⁶

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 36 Hegel 1991, § 324.