

*Sixth Essay:*  
Wars of the Twentieth  
Century and the Twentieth  
Century as War

The first world war provoked a whole range of explanations among us, reflecting the effort of humans to comprehend this immense event, transcending any individual, carried out by humans and yet transcending humankind—a process in some sense cosmic. We sought to fit it into our categories, to come to terms with it as best we could—that is, basically, in terms of nineteenth-century ideas. The second world war provoked nothing of the sort; its direct causes and the course it took were (apparently) only too clear and, most of all, it did not end, mutating instead into something peculiar which looks neither quite like war nor quite like peace, and the revolution which in a way commented on this state did not let anyone catch their breath to speak the word which would “define each thing according to its essence and would tell us about the state of the matter.” Besides, a sort of a conviction spread among us that there must be some true, that is Marxist, explanation of the second world war, something hidden in the conceptual treasuries of the Party which guides the movement of history. No one seemed to mind that in reality there are no such explanations . . .

It is not the task of these lines to provide a critique of the specific formulae forged to account for the first world war. I

would rather point out that all of them, whether they spoke of the conflict of the Slavs and Germans, of an imperialist conflict growing out of the final stage of capitalism, of the result of exaggerated modern subjectivism seeking a violent objectification, or perhaps of a conflict between democracy and theocracy, shared one trait in common: all approached war from the perspective of peace, day, and life, excluding its dark nocturnal side. From this perspective, life, especially historical life, appears as a continuum within which individuals function as the bearers of a general movement which alone matters; death means a change in functions; and war, death organized en masse, is an unpleasant but necessary interlude which we need to accept in the interest of certain goals of life's continuity but in which we can seek nothing "positive." At most, as Hegel said (and Dostoyevsky repeated), it can serve as one of the salutary tremors that civic life needs lest it become sclerotic and fall asleep in its routine. However, the idea that war itself might be something that can explain, that has itself the power of bestowing meaning, is an idea foreign to all philosophies of history and so also to all the explanations of the world war we know.

The explanations of the war of 1914–1918 were always constructed with the help of nineteenth-century ideas, but those are ideas of the day with its interests, ideas of peace. It is not surprising that they proved incapable of explaining the fundamental phenomenon of the twentieth century, so different since that century is an epoch of the night, of war, and of death. Not that we would not need to refer to its antecedents in seeking to understand it. Such antecedent ideas, programs, and goals, however, can only explain the origin of that awesome will which for years drove millions of humans into a fiery furnace and other countless millions into preparations, gigantic and unending, for this monumental *auto-da-fé*. They are no use in explaining the intrinsic content of this century and its deep addiction to war.

As with all European wars, so also the war of 1914–1918 had as its background a definite general human conviction striving violently to manifest itself, to be acted out. This, too,

was an ideological war, though its idea, inconspicuous in its negativity, is hard to locate. Wars such as Napoleon's were still rooted in revolutionary ideas, reflecting the Enlightenment in a special, militarily technicized mode, and the Enlightenment was the common conceptual property of the time as well as a global conviction, the positive idea that the world is ruled by reason. Just as the Thirty Years' War was marked by the common conviction that the split within western Christendom must be definitively resolved, and just as the crusades rested on the conviction of the superiority of western Christianity, based in its inner truthfulness. The shared idea in the background of the first world war was the slowly germinating conviction that there is nothing such as a factual, objective meaning of the world and of things, and that it is up to strength and power to create such meaning within the realm accessible to humans. The preparation for war proceeded in this spirit; the will to preserve the status quo on the one hand, the will to transform it radically on the other. Understandably, derivatives of other, older convictions of Christian origins were also present, democratic ideas of the Enlightenment on the one hand, theocratic-hierarchic ideas on the other; yet when we look at the state of affairs realistically, noting that the democratic states of Europe were also the most vigorous representatives of Europe's imperial idea, their claims to democracy begin to appear as components in their defense of the global status quo. That stands out most clearly in their alliance with the most endangered member of the imperial status quo of the time, which was, naturally, czarist Russia. In any case, it was not for such derivatives that humans went to do battle, those tended far more to affect the unfolding of the course of events and the intensity of the will manifest in them. Only with the entry of America and of the socialist revolution into the course of the war did there appear, on the side both of the Allies and of the opposition, forces opposed to the status quo in whose name the war ended and, by its inconclusive ending laid the foundations for new or renewed conflicts.

In this respect it is important that, if we think of the process of the war and of the will that led to its unexpectedly long

duration in this, the only realistic way, then the side that fought against the status quo and so, appearances to the contrary, must justly be called revolutionary, is Germany after Bismarck. Despite all appearance to the contrary: is this configuration, led by conservative Prussia and its military caste, with its ossified bureaucracy, its incredibly narrow-minded Lutheran orthodoxy, a revolutionary element, the bearer and agent of world revolution? Do not all the facts speak against it, including the social history of the war? If we were impressed by the common conception of revolution, accepted primarily in economic and social theories, in historical materialism, in the socialism of the nineteenth century, which itself understood revolution politically and modeled it after the revolutions of the eighteenth century (notably the French, less so the American), then this thesis could be nothing but a forced paradox. Yet of all the peoples of the world (except for the United States), this Germany, for all its traditional structures, is the configuration that most closely approximated the reality of the new technoscientific age. Even its conservatism basically served a discipline that, contemptuous of equalization and democratization, vehemently and ruthlessly pursued the accumulation of building, organizing, transforming energy. Ernst Jünger's *Der Arbeiter* contains an implicit suspicion of the actual revolutionary nature of the old prewar Germany.<sup>1</sup> It is above all the ever deepening technoscientific aspect of its life. It is the organizing will of its economic leaders, its technocratic representatives forging plans leading inevitably to a conflict with the existing global order. These flow quite naturally into a definite historically prepared mold—did not the war of 1870 show that what had hitherto been the center of western Europe, France, was no longer capable of fulfilling the role of the state unifying the heritage of the Roman West, that Austria, the last vestige of the old empire, could easily fall prey to such plans and that the “concert of Europe” was in this perspective an obsolete political concept?<sup>2</sup> Thus it came quite naturally to seem that this imperial Germany was traditionalistic, merely reviving the claims of the old empire on the new basis of that nationalism which

sustained the war of 1870–1871. Its internal opposition, the socialists, equally naturally saw in it a hotbed of greedy capitalist magnates, subsequently the typical representative of global capitalist imperialism bent on seizing all the riches of the globe and all its productive forces. In reality, they themselves collaborated in organizing the new society of work, discipline, production, and planned construction leading in all respects to the releasing of ever further stores of energy. Long before the war, this Germany had already transformed Europe into an energetic complex. For all the intelligence with which other European countries, France especially, moved in the same direction, their transformation in this respect was more gradual, humanized by their desire for individual life, a tendency which Sieburg captured in his *Gott in Frankreich* still long after the war.<sup>3</sup> The conservative structures of prewar Germany provided a great service in this respect, helping bring the transformation about in a disciplined manner, without great upheavals, so that the masses yielded to it, for all the gnashing of teeth among political leaders, indeed, the political organization of the workers by party bureaucracy soon fell into the same rut and moved in the same direction. The revolution taking place here had its deep driving force in the conspicuous scientification which all prewar experts on Europe and on Germany saw as the chief trait of its life: a scientification which understood science as technology, actually a positivism, which for the most part managed to neutralize even those traditions surviving from the Germany of the first half of the century, the Germany of the fading old empire, traditions of history, theology, philosophy, or even managed to couple them to this new locomotive.

Appearances again to the contrary, the Achilles' heel of this entire effort was its military machine. It was also well on the way toward a managerial mode of work and thought, though here a great deal stood in the way. There was the fascination with tradition and its concepts, schemata, goals. On the one hand there was a great sturdiness and persistence, on the other a domineering rudeness and a total absence of imagination. The war was conducted mechanically, victory won by

organization, tenacity, and order there, wherever the army encountered a lack of these traits in its opponent. Slothful thinking led to flaws in contingency planning, as in the lack of an offensive plan for the eastern front. The “rot” of trench warfare, too, can be credited to the German general staff—though the presuppositions for a war of movement in the form of motor technology already existed by 1914, only the French managed to make partial use of them in the battle of the Marne. All the “ingenuity” was devoted to increasing firepower which, in the end, necessarily favored the defensive.

The instinctive orientation of the war to the West attests one thing—that it was a war against the status quo whose center was the European West. For this purpose it was not enough to defeat Russia, to “be done with it.” It was necessary to strike where there was a threat of competition from other, analogous organizational centers. Hence, perhaps, the fascination with the West, hence the betting on the nonsensical Schlieffen Plan, on submarine warfare, on the “Great Offensive” of 1918.<sup>4</sup> The idea of letting the opponents spend themselves on the defensive somewhere along the Rhine while definitively conquering the East as a basis for the constitution of a macrospace which would not leave sufficient resources for counterattacks either never occurred or did not prevail.

The first world war is the decisive event in the history of the twentieth century. It determined its entire character. It was this war that demonstrated that the transformation of the world into a laboratory for releasing reserves of energy accumulated over billions of years can be achieved only by means of wars. Thus it represented a definitive breakthrough of the conception of being that was born in the sixteenth century with the rise of mechanical natural science. Now it swept aside all the “conventions” that inhibited this release of energy—a transvaluation of all values under the sign of power.

Why must the energetic transformation of the world take on the form of war? Because war, acute confrontation, is the most intensive means for the rapid release of accumulated forces. Conflict is the great instrument which, mythologically

speaking, Force used in its transition from potency to actuality. In this process humans as well as individual peoples serve merely as tools. Is not precisely here the root of the cosmic sense of warfare which Teilhard de Chardin captured so powerfully?

The front is not simply a flaming line where the accumulated energies of hostile masses are released and mutually neutralized. It is also the locus of a distinctive Life shared only by those who dare step right up to it and only for as long as they dare remain there.<sup>5</sup>

It seems to me that one could show that the Front is not simply a line of fire, the interface of people attacking each other, but that it is also in some way the "crest of the wave" that bears the world of humans toward its new destiny . . . it seems that there one finds oneself at the extreme limit of what has happened and what is to be done.<sup>6</sup>

Teilhard's mysticism of matter and life bears the stamp of combat experience.

It is the forces of the day which for four years sent millions of humans into hellfire, and the front line is the place which for four years hypnotized all the activity of the industrial age which a participant of the front, Ernst Jünger, called the age of the worker and of total mobilization.<sup>7</sup> These forces themselves never die, only exhaust themselves, indifferent whether they are destroying or organizing. Fundamentally, their "impulse" is rather to organize, to get on with the task from which the war only distracts them. "War aims" is an inaccurate expression: they are the aims of peace, though, of course, of a *pax teutonica* or a *pax americana* or whatever. Yet humankind was forced to live for four years at the front and, Teilhard says, whoever lived through the front has become a different person. Different in what sense?

The descriptions of the experience of the front vary and reflect different considerations. For our purposes, we shall select those of Jünger and Teilhard de Chardin.

Both Jünger and Teilhard emphasize the upheaval by the front line, which is not an immediate trauma but a fundamental transformation of human existence: war in the form of the front line marks humans forever. A second common trait: the front line is horrifying and everyone in the trenches is eager for

rotation (even according to the standards of the general staffs, surely not overly sensitive, it is not possible to last longer than nine days), yet in the depth of that experience there is something deeply and mysteriously positive. It is not the fascination of the abyss and the romance of adventure; it is no perversion of natural sentiments. The person on the front line is gradually overcome by an overwhelming sense of meaningfulness which would be hard to put into words. It is a feeling capable of persisting for many years. According to Jünger, it persists through the return of the peaceful, particularistic, national, and chauvinistic mentality, with the question neither resolved nor silenced.

It has, understandably, its phases and degrees of intensity. Those degrees of intensity play an important role in the history of later times. The first phase, which few can transcend, is the experience of meaninglessness and unbearable horror. The front line is absurdity *par excellence*. What we had only suspected here becomes reality: all that humans hold most precious is ruthlessly torn to shreds. The only meaning is that of a proof that a world capable of producing something like that must disappear. It is a visible proof that the world is perfectly ripe for perishing. We will follow, body and soul, anyone who can earnestly promise to make this impossible in the future, all the more radically the more removed his promise is from the present-day social realities that had led to something like this. This type of experience and its consequences, this type of active revulsion immortalized by Barbusse,<sup>8</sup> lies at the root of the great phenomenon of *fighting for peace*. This phenomenon acquired its first historically significant and historically underestimated form in the negotiations surrounding the peace of Brest-Litovsk and burgeoned especially during and after the second world war. The determination to put an end to the entire reality that makes something like that possible indicates that here, too, humans glimpse something "eschatological," something like the end of all of the values of the day. Yet no sooner is it glimpsed than this "other" is again caught up, sequestered by the context of the day. No sooner do humans



confront the shaken world than they are not only grasped by its forces but also mobilized for a new battle. The meaninglessness of life and war up to now bestows meaning on a new war, the war against war. Those who refused the front line which had been forced upon them, themselves force themselves to another front line for future years, no less hard and cruel. The war against war seems to make use of new experiences, seemingly acts eschatologically, yet in reality bends eschatology back to the "mundane" level, the level of the day, and uses in the service of the day what belonged to the night and to eternity. It is the demonic of the day which poses as the all in all and manages to trivialize and drain dry even what lies beyond its limits.

So in 1917, with the intrusion of the radical revolutionaries into the first Russian revolution, actually, of the first Russian collapse, a new war begins, perpendicular to the one fought hitherto against the status quo: a new struggle that is supposed to uproot the status quo on both sides, according to a different conception of peace than the Germans had in mind. Still, it was the German attack on the status quo which created the preconditions, made possible and radically supported this new attack, and thereafter the strategy of war becomes one of waiting and expecting a mutual weakening, even destruction of two opponents chained to this life and death struggle. The exhaustion of the one and the victory of the other will be a merely tactical moment in a different battle; victory will be an illusion preparing a future defeat, defeat will be the ferment of battles to come. A victorious peace is an illusion in which the victor morally disintegrates. The war evidently goes, for in the land of the revolution the same destruction of all conventions is at work at full speed. It is the same disregard for life, the same poison of suspicion, slander, and demagoguery that had become common in the days when the front line dominated all, using as a means of combat not only firepower but all the weaknesses of the opponent, all the possibilities of driving the other to an internal collapse so that (at least temporarily and seemingly) the victors would achieve their goal. What triumphs, though, in this ruthless struggle is again Force, using peace as a means of

combat, so that peace itself becomes a part of war, that deceptive stage which defeats the adversary without a shot—luring the opponents to slow down their mobilization while the other opponent, actual or potential, remains alert, maintaining a mighty, agonizing momentum purchased at the expense of lives, liberties, and destruction. Force, however, triumphs here as well by creating a new powerful form of reciprocal tension, a tension on two simultaneous levels, with a power to mobilize which had hitherto been muted by the defective organization of one of the participants; that participant now becomes the organizational realm par excellence, unhampered by those muting factors represented in the rest of the world by respect for tradition, for former ways of comprehending being which now appear as outworn superstitions and a means of manipulating others.

The ineffectual attempts of the European West to turn the war eastward led directly to its renewed flare-up in the West. The war neither died nor slept, only changed for a time into smoldering embers, for the insufficiently defeated, insufficiently destroyed Germany remained capable of replaying the entire drama of 1914 with an even more absurd military machine, even greater lack of an overall plan, even more impromptu acts of violence and fostering of hate, even more inconceivable acts of revenge and *ressentiment*. With that, it gave its defeated first world war opponent an opening for a revenge on a truly global scale: for that opponent had in the meantime switched from peace to war footing and could hold out where once it had weakened. The West, having sought to channel force in that direction, in the end had to pay with its own destruction and blood for the victory of this competitor, heedless of being at the same time in a continuous war with that competitor. So what Germany had begun, the transformation of the global *status quo*, finally came about, though not in favor of Germany but of its weaker opponent from the first world war. This whole new constellation, this pathetic maneuvering, could not but bring on the definitive collapse of Europe. At the dawn of the Age of Energy, Europe—western Europe, grown from the

heritage of the western Roman Empire—achieved the signs of global dominance. Europe was everything. After the first war, that Europe yielded place to *its successor*, nurtured on the realization of what Europe had longed for and never achieved, liberty—in favor of the United States. Now Europe entirely vacated its global position, lost its empires, its prestige, lost its self-confidence and self-understanding. Its feeble partner in the first war proved a capable heir, for in the discipline of a prolonged mobilization, of first a smoldering and then a burning war, it transmuted itself anew into what it has traditionally been and is, the successor of eastern Rome, ruling both human bodies and their souls.<sup>9</sup>

How do the day, life, peace, govern all individuals, their bodies and souls? By means of death; by threatening life. From the perspective of the day life is, for all individuals, everything, the highest value that exists for them. For the forces of the day, conversely, death does not exist, they function as if there was no death, or, as noted, they plan death impersonally and statistically, as if it were merely a reassignment of roles. Thus in the will to war, day and life rule with the help of death. The will to war counts on generations yet unborn, conceiving its plans from their viewpoint. So peace rules in the will to war. Those who cannot break free of the rule of peace, of the day, of life in a mode that excludes death and closes its eyes before it, can never free themselves of war.

The grandiose, profound experience of the front with its line of fire consists in its evocation of the night in all its urgency and undeniability. Peace and the day necessarily rule by sending humans to death in order to assure *others* a day in the future in the form of progress, of a free and increasing expansion, of possibilities they lack today. Of those whom it sacrifices it demands, by contrast, *endurance* in the face of death. That indicates a dark awareness that life is not everything, that it can sacrifice itself. That self-sacrifice, that surrender, is what is called for. It is called for as something relative, related to peace and to the day. The front-line experience, however, is an *absolute* one. Here, as Teilhard shows, the participants are assaulted by *an*

*absolute freedom*, freedom from *all* the interests of peace, of life, of the day. That means: the sacrifice of the sacrificed loses its relative significance, it is no longer the cost we pay for a program of development, progress, intensification, and extension of life's possibilities, rather, it is significant *solely in itself*.

This absolute freedom is the understanding that here something has already been achieved, something that is not the means to anything else, a stepping stone to . . . , but rather something above and beyond which there can be nothing. This is the culmination, this self-surrender which can call humans away from their vocations, talents, possibilities, their future. To be capable of that, to be chosen and called for it in a world that uses conflict to mobilize force so that it comes to appear as a totally objectified and objectifying cauldron of energy, also means to *overcome force*. The motives of the day which had evoked the will to war are consumed in the furnace of the front line, if that experience is intense enough that it will not yield again to the forces of the day. Peace transformed into a will to war could objectify and externalize humans as long as they were ruled by the day, by the hope of everydayness, of a profession, of a career, simply possibilities for which they must fear and which feel threatened. Now, however, comes the upheaval, shaking that peace and its planning, its programs and its ideas of progress indifferent to mortality. All everydayness, all visions of future life pale before the simple peak on which humans find themselves standing. In face of that, all the ideas of socialism, of progress, of democratic spontaneity, of independence and freedom appear impoverished, neither viable nor tangible. They achieve their full meaning not in themselves but only where they are derived from that peak and lead back to it in turn. Where they lead humans to bring about such a transformation of their whole lives, their entire existence. Where they mean not the content of everydayness but an image of the cosmic and the universal to which humans attain by the absolute sacrifice of themselves and of their day.

Thus the *night* comes suddenly to be an absolute obstacle on the path of the day to the bad infinity of tomorrows. In

coming upon us as an *insurmountable* possibility, the *seemingly* transindividual possibilities of the day are shunted aside, while this sacrifice presents itself as the authentic transindividuality.

A second consequence: the enemy is no longer the absolute adversary in the way of the will to peace; he is not here only to be eliminated. The adversary is a fellow participant in the same situation, fellow discoverer of absolute freedom with whom agreement is possible in difference, a fellow participant in the upheaval of the day, of peace, and of life lacking all peaks. Here we encounter the abysmal realm of the "prayer for the enemy," the phenomenon of "loving those who hate us"—the solidarity of the shaken for all their contradiction and conflict.

Thus the most profound discovery of the front line is that life leans out into the night, into struggle and death, that it cannot do without this component of life which, from the point of view of the day, appears as a mere nonexistence; the transformation of the meaning of life which here trips on *nothingness*, on a boundary over which it cannot step, along which everything is transformed. Thus in the experience of a front line cannoneer, as an important contemporary psychologist describes it,<sup>10</sup> the topographic character of the landscape changes so that abruptly *there is an end to it* and the ruins no longer are *what they had been*, villages and so on, but have become what they can be at the given moment, shelters and reference points, so the landscape of life's fundamental meanings had been transformed, *it has acquired an end* beyond which there can be nothing further, higher, more desirable.

Why has this grandiose experience, alone capable of leading humankind out of war into a true peace, not had a decisive effect on the history of the twentieth century, even though humans have been exposed to it twice for four years, and were truly touched and transformed thereby? Why has it not unfolded its saving potential? Why has it not played and is not playing in our lives a role somehow analogous to that of the fight for peace after the great war of the twentieth century?

To that the answer is not easy. It is even more difficult because humankind is so permeated and fascinated by the

experience of war that the outlines of the history of our time can only be understood in its terms. The second war eliminated the distinction between the front line and the home front; aerial warfare was capable of striking anywhere with equal cruelty. The nuclear reality is making the attainments of the last hot conflict potentially definitive as long as they are backed by a strong and intelligent enough imperial will. For some time there was talk about the Hiroshima complex—it was no more than a concise summary of the war experience, the experience of the front line, in the spectacular intensity of a destructive end of the world. Here even the humblest participants could not avoid the eschatological impression of that event. And the effect on history? Thus far the visible impact we could attribute to this fundamental transformation and conversion, not comparable with anything else (as Teilhard puts it) has been nil. We continue to be fascinated by force, allow it to lead us along its paths, fascinating and deceiving us, making us its dupes. Where we believe we have mastered it and can depend on it for security, we are in reality in a state of demobilization and are losing the war which cunningly changed its visage but has not ceased. Life would so much like just to live at last, but it is precisely life itself which gives birth to war and cannot break free of it with its own resources. Whither do such perspectives lead? War as the means of releasing Force cannot end. It is vain to seek safety in our enclosed region when there are no self-enclosed regions, when Force and technoscience open up the entire world to their effect so that every event echoes throughout the globe. The perspective of peace, life, and the day has no end, it is the perspective of endless conflict born in ever new, ever the same, forms.

The gigantic work of economic renewal, the unheard-of, even undreamed-of social achievement which blossomed in a Europe excluded from world history, shows that this continent has opted for demobilization because it has no other option. That contributes to the deepening of the gap between the *blessed haves* and those who are dying of hunger on a planet rich in energy—thus intensifying the *state of war*. Helplessness,

the inability to win in a war conceived from the point of view of peace, are clearly evident among the erstwhile masters of the world. To shift matters to economics is a short-term, short-sighted deception because it is a part of demobilization even where it mobilizes armies of workers, researchers, and engineers: ultimately, all are subject to the crack of the whip. The recent energy crisis made that especially evident.

In the new relations of nuclear armaments and constant threat of global destruction, the war can shift from hot to cold or smoldering. This smoldering war is no less cruel, often it is more cruel than a hot one in which front lines scar entire continents. We have shown how war takes "peace" into itself in the form of demobilization. On the other hand, a permanent mobilization is a fate the world finds hard to bear, hard to look at in the face, hard to face its consequences, even when they are quite clear. Those who here *will* to keep their will whole, uncorroded, find themselves forced to separate truth and the public realm, have forced upon them a state of war, dictatorship from within and from without, secret diplomacy, lying, and cynical propaganda. It might be pointed out that the extreme means of mobilization, where systematic terror was reflected in show trials and in the destruction of entire groups and strata, in the slow liquidation in forced labor and concentration camps, has been gradually abolished: the question, though, is whether this abolition represents a true demobilization or, on the contrary, a war that establishes itself as permanent by "peaceful" means. War is here showing its "peaceful" face, the face of cynical demoralization, appealing to the will to live and to have. Humanity is becoming a victim of the war already launched, that is, of peace and the day; peace, the day rely on death as the means of maximal human unfreedom, as shackles humans refuse to see but which is present as *vis a tergo*,<sup>11</sup> as the terror that drives humans even into fire—death, chaining humans to life and rendering them most manipulable.

For the same reason, though, there might also be a certain prospect of reaching the ground of true peace from the war engendered by peace. The first presupposition is Teilhard's

front line experience, formulated no less sharply though less mystically by Jünger: the positive aspect of the front line, the front line not as an enslavement to life but as an immense *liberation* from precisely such servitude. Currently war has assumed the form of that half peace wherein opponents mobilize and count on the demobilization of the other. Even this war has its front line and its way of burning, destroying persons, robbing them of hope, dealing with them as with material for Force being released. The front line is the resistance to such “demoralizing,” terrorizing, and deceptive motifs of the day. It is the revelation of their real nature, it is a protest paid for in blood which does not flow but rots in jails, in obscurity, in life plans and possibilities wasted—and which will flow again once the Force finds it advantageous. It is to comprehend that here is where the true drama is being acted out; freedom does not begin only “afterwards,” after the struggle is concluded, but rather has its place precisely within it—that is the salient point, the highest peak from which we can gain a perspective on the battlefield. Those who are exposed to the pressure of the Force are free, far more free than those who are sitting on the sidelines, anxiously watching whether and when their turn will come.

How can the “front-line experience” acquire the form which would make it a factor of history? Why is it not becoming that? Because in the form described so powerfully by Teilhard and Jünger, it is the experience of all individuals projected individually each to their summit from which they cannot but retreat back to everydayness where they will inevitably be seized again by war in the form of Force’s plan for peace. The means by which this state is overcome is the *solidarity of the shaken*; the solidarity of those who are capable of understanding what life and death are all about, and so what history is about. That history is the conflict of *mere life*, barren and chained by fear, with *life at the peak*, life that does not plan for the ordinary days of a future but sees clearly that the everyday, its life and its “peace,” have an end. Only one who is able to grasp this, who is capable of conversion, of *metanoia*, is a



spiritual person. A person of spirit, however, always understands, and that understanding is no mere observation of facts, it is not "objective knowledge" even though even a free person must also master objective knowledge and integrate it with what matters and what is subordinate.

The solidarity of the shaken—shaken in their faith in the day, in "life" and "peace"—acquires a special significance, especially in the time of the releasing of Force. Force released is that without which "day" and "peace," human life defined by a world of exponential growth, cannot exist. The solidarity of the shaken is the solidarity of those who understand. Understanding, though, must in the present circumstances involve not only the basic level, that of slavery and of freedom with respect to life, but needs also to entail an understanding of the significance of science and technology, of that Force we are releasing. All the forces on whose basis alone can humans live in our time are potentially in the hands of those who so understand. The solidarity of the shaken can say "no" to the measures of mobilization which make the state of war permanent. It will not offer positive programs but will speak, like Socrates' *daimonion*, in warnings and prohibitions. It can and must create a spiritual authority, become a spiritual power that could drive the warring world to some restraint, rendering some acts and measures impossible.

The solidarity of the shaken is built up in persecution and uncertainty: that is its front line, quiet, without fanfare or sensation even there where this aspect of the ruling Force seeks to seize it. It does not fear being unpopular but rather seeks it out and calls out quietly, wordlessly. Humankind will not attain peace by devoting and surrendering itself to the criteria of everydayness and of its promises. All who betray this solidarity must realize that they are sustaining war and are the parasites on the sidelines who live off the blood of others. The sacrifices of the front line of the shaken powerfully support this awareness. To reach the point when all who are capable of understanding would feel inwardly uncomfortable about their comfortable position, that is a meaning that can be reached

beyond the human peak of resistance to Force, its very overcoming. To achieve thereby that the component of the spirit, the "technical intelligentsia," primarily researchers and those who apply research, inventors and engineers, would feel a waft of this solidarity and would act accordingly. To shake the everydayness of the fact-crunchers and routine minds, to make them aware that their place is on the side of *the front* and not on the side of even the most pleasing slogans of the day which in reality call to war, whether they invoke the nation, the state, classless society, world unity, or whatever other appeals, discreditable and discredited by the factual ruthlessness of the Force, there may be.

At the dawn of history, Heraclitus of Ephesus formulated his idea of war as that divine law which sustains all human life. He did not mean thereby war as the expansion of "life" but as the preponderance of the Night, of the will to the freedom of risk in the *aristeia*,<sup>12</sup> holding one's own at the limit of human possibilities which the best choose when they opt for lasting fame in the memory of mortals in exchange for an ephemeral prolongation of a comfortable life.<sup>13</sup> This war is the father of the laws of the *polis* as of all else: it shows some to be slaves and others to be free; yet even free human life still has a peak above it.<sup>14</sup> War can show that among the free some are capable of becoming gods, of touching the divinity of that which forms the ultimate unity and mystery of being. Those, though, are the ones who understand that *polemos* is nothing one-sided, that it does not divide but unites, that adversaries are only seemingly whole, that in reality they belong to each other in the common shaking of the everyday, that they have thus touched that which lasts in everything and forever because it is the source of all being and is thus divine. That is the same sentiment, the same vision which Teilhard sees before him when he experiences the superhuman divine at the front line. And Jünger writes at one place that the combatants in an attack become two parts of a single force, fusing into a single body, and adds: "Into a single body—an odd comparison. Whoever understands it affirms both self and the enemy, lives at once in

the whole and in the part. That person then can think the gods who lets these colored threads slip between their fingers—with a smiling face.”<sup>15</sup>—Is it an accident that two of the most profound thinkers of the front-line experience, so different in other respects, arrive independently at comparisons which revive Heraclitus’ vision of being as *polemos*? Or does something open up to us therein of the meaning of the history of western humanity which will not be denied and which today is becoming the meaning of human history as such?

Kierkegaard's "stages on life's way." see Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, trans. Walter Lowrie (New York: Doubleday, 1959), vol. 2, pp. 159–338. [Ed.]

15. Durkheim, *op. cit.*, pp. 305–6. [trans. by Ed.]

16. (a) The "wars of liberation" refer to a series of conflicts between 1809 and Napoleon's eventual defeat in 1814 wherein, among other problems, Napoleon faced a brutal British-backed guerrilla insurgency in Spain, war with Austria, not to mention total disaster in Russia; (b) the year 1848 saw a series of revolutionary crises in France, Italy, Austria, and Prussia, most of which were brutally repressed. [Ed.]

17. This is a reference to a relatively outdated slang expression—as in "that was really *happening*." [Ed.]

18. See Ernst Jünger, *Die Totale Mobilmachung*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, Zweite Abteilung, vol. 7, essays 1: *Betrachtungen zur Zeit* (Stuttgart: Klett-Kotta, 1980). [Ed.]

19. See Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860), trans. S.G. Middlemore (New York: Harper and Rowe, 1958). [Ed.]

20. This is a reference, of course, to Martin Heidegger. [Ed.]

## Sixth Essay: Wars of the Twentieth Century and the Twentieth Century as War

1. Ernst Jünger, *Der Arbeiter: Herrschaft und Gestalt*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, Zweite Abteilung, vol. 8, essays 2: *Der Arbeiter* (Stuttgart: Klett Cotta, 1981). [Ed.]

2. (a) Patočka is here referring to the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71), which opened the way for final German unification under Bismarck. As for the Hapsburgs, they had serious problems keeping the Austrian empire together after the revolutions of 1848; things got worse when they were defeated by Prussia in 1866, leading to the dual monarchy with Hungary in an attempt to cement their loyalty. (b) The "concert of Europe" refers to an agreement made at the Congress of Vienna by the great powers that defeated Napoleon in 1814 (Russia, Austria,

Prussia, Great Britain) to hold a series of “congresses” to discuss, and coordinate, their respective foreign policies. (c) After the Crimean War in 1856, when Austria, by remaining neutral, also wound up losing much of its credibility, the concert of Europe as a viable political concept was largely dead. [Ed.]

3. F. Sieburg, *Gott in Frankreich?* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1929). [Ed.]

4. (a) The plan named for Count Alfred von Schlieffen, chief of German General Staff from 1891–1906, to fight a two-front war: the idea was to outflank the French by swinging a large army through Belgium, surrounding the enemy and winning a quick victory, then concentrate troops on the Eastern Front against Russia. (b) The “Great Offensive” of 1918, which took place after Russia pulled out of the war and before the Americans were able to build up a significant force on the continent, was the famous gamble taken by the Germans in the hope of crushing the Western allies in a single sweep; it managed in the end only to weaken their forces, which eventually fell to the American-backed allies. [Ed.]

5. Pierre Têilhard de Chardin, “La nostalgie du front,” in *Ecrits du temps de la guerre* (Paris: Grasset, 1965), p. 210. [trans. by Ed.]

6. *Ibid.*, p. 201. [trans. by Ed.]

7. See Jünger, *Die totale Mobilmachung*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, Zweite Abteilung, vol. 7, essays 1: *Betrachtungen zur Zeit* (Stuttgart: Klett Cotta, 1980). [Ed.]

8. Henri Barbusse, *Light*, trans. Fitzwater Wray (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1919). [Ed.]

9. Patočka is speaking here, of course, about Bolshevik Russia. [Ed.]

10. Patočka is here making reference to Kurt Lewin; see. “Kriegslandschaft,” in *Zeitschrift für angewandte Psychologie* XII (1917), pp. 440–47. [Ed.]

11. *vis a tergo*: lit., “force from behind.” [Ed.]

12. “*aristeia*”: great, heroic actions or deeds. Historically, the books of the *Iliad* were often called “*aristeia*,” i.e., the

account of the heroic deeds of the principle characters of the chapter. [Ed.]

13. Heraclitus DK 22 B29. [Ed.]

14. Heraclitus DK 22 B80: "It is necessary to know that war is common and right is strife and that all things happen by strife and necessit." (trans. KRS, p. 193). And: Heraclitus DK 22 B53: "War is the father of all and king of all, and some he shows as gods, others as men; some he makes slaves, others free" (trans. KRS, p. 193). [Ed.]

15. Ernst Jünger, "Der Kampf als inneres Erlebnis (1922)," in *Sämtliche Werke*, Zweite Abteilung, vol. 7: essays 1: *Betrachtungen zur Zeit* (Stuttgart: Klett Cotta, 1980). [Ed.]

### Author's "Glosses"

1. The reference is to Plato's *Laches*. However, it is Nicias, not Socrates, who proposes this definition of courage, and it is by no means clear at the end of the dialogue that it has been accepted by Socrates as a complete, or adequate, definition. See in particular 194c–201c4. [Ed.]

2. This argument is made in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, ed. C. J. Arthur (New York: International Publishers, 1986), p. 47. [Ed.]

3. Not only in Hegel, but also in the "dialectics" pursued by Fichte, Schelling, and others in the early German Idealist movement around 1800. [Ed.]

4. Nadezschda Mandelscham, *Das Jahrhundert der Wölfe: Eine Autobiographie* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 1971). [Ed.]

5. Marx and Engels, *op cit.* [Ed.]

6. See G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover, 1956), pp. 18–19.

7. "General thesis" refers to Husserl's concept of the "general thesis of the natural standpoint," i.e., the implicit, naively held thesis that things and the world in general are pregiven, "already-there," their order already established and continuously existing. The "*epochē*," or "bracketing," is the method by