Foreword

War and the Human Condition

War remains one of the most persistent and theoretically challenging phenomena in human history. Its analysis raises questions that cannot be adequately addressed in a single explanatory framework. Biological dispositions, forms of social organization, collective identities, political institutions, embodied vulnerability, normative systems and individual responsibility all contribute, at different levels to the emergence and experience of armed conflict. A philosophical inquiry into war must therefore distinguish these levels while also examining the ways in which they interact.

The urgency of such an inquiry is particularly evident in the contemporary international context. The Russian Federation's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, launched in February 2022, has brought high intensity interstate warfare back to Europe and has once again confronted European societies with questions that had too often been regarded as belonging primarily to the past: territorial aggression, the destruction of civilian life and infrastructure, mass displacement, the mobilization of collective identities and the moral obligations arising from resistance to aggression. The scale and violence of the Russian aggression against Ukraine have made these questions especially immediate. The Russo-Ukrainian War also forms the direct context of one of the contributions in this Special Issue, which examines the moral dilemmas generated by mobilization, survival, civic duty and military draft evasion.

More generally, contemporary conflicts clarify that war cannot be treated merely as a residual phenomenon belonging to an earlier stage of political development. Its persistence requires renewed reflection not only on the immediate causes and political circumstances of particular conflicts, but also on the biological, anthropological, ontological, relational, and ethical conditions through which organized violence becomes possible and acquires specifically human forms.

The contributions gathered in this Special Issue approach war from four distinct but interconnected perspectives. They move from the biological and anthropological conditions of aggression to the ontology of violence and collective identity, from the embodied and relational effects of political violence to the ethical problems of responsibility and survival under wartime conditions. This arrangement is not intended to establish a linear causal sequence, nor to reduce different approaches to a single explanatory model. Rather, it reflects the conviction that war can only be adequately understood by distinguishing different levels of analysis and examining their possible relations.

The opening contribution by Mariano L. Bianca addresses war from a biological, anthropological and historical perspective. Bianca interprets war as a constitutive phenomenon of *Homo sapiens* and

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relates its persistence to a set of biological and neurophysiological characteristics of the species, including innate aggressiveness, emotional intensity and the organization of the human brain. At the same time, he identifies four principal modalities of war: economic, ecological-territorial, socio-cultural and psychological.

A central issue raised by Bianca concerns the relationship between aggression and war. His analysis emphasizes the biological and phylogenetic dimensions of human aggressiveness, while describing warfare as an increasingly complex and organized form of violence associated with the development of social organization, political power, strategic planning, and technological capacities. This perspective brings into focus a distinction fundamental to the broader philosophical discussion developed in this issue: by itself, the existence of phylogenetically – rooted aggressive dispositions does not provide a sufficient explanation of warfare.

Aggression and war belong to different explanatory levels. Aggressive dispositions may be part of the biological inheritance of the human species, but organized warfare presupposes forms of collective coordination, social hierarchy, political objectives, symbolic representation, technological capacity, and normative legitimation. Thus, the significance of the biological dimension does not lie in deriving war directly or deterministically from aggressiveness. Rather, it lies in identifying one of the conditions under which historically specific forms of collective violence become possible.

This distinction is particularly important because it avoids two symmetrical forms of reductionism. On the one hand, war cannot be adequately explained as the simple manifestation of an innate aggressive drive. On the other, an account that regarded aggression as entirely produced by culture would neglect the evolutionary and biological dimensions of human behaviour. The relevant question is therefore how phylogenetically rooted dispositions are mediated, intensified, inhibited, redirected, and organized through cultural, social, and political structures.

The transition from biological disposition to the constitution of collective conflict is approached from a different direction by Sergii P. Shevtsov. In *The Ontology of War as the Spatial Expansion of Identity*, Shevtsov begins with Clausewitz's conception of war as an act of violence and develops an ontology of violence based on the concepts of force, social space, and identity. Violence, on this account, is not simply an exceptional disruption of an otherwise non-violent social order. It is defined more specifically as the application of force through which the actor's social space is expanded at the expense of that of another subject.

This conception enables Shevtsov to interpret war as a particular transformation of social space. Identity and social space are closely connected: subjects constitute themselves through relations,

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practices, values, boundaries, and forms of interaction with others, while their activity simultaneously modifies the social space in which these relations acquire meaning. Violence becomes distinct from the neutral application of force when the expansion of one subject's space entails the reduction and incorporation of the space of another.

War can consequently be interpreted as an attempt by a collective subject to resolve a discrepancy between its representation of itself and its realization in the external social world. When such an attempt requires the reduction or incorporation of another subject's social space, expansion takes the form of aggression and war. The notion of space employed here is therefore not merely territorial. It also encompasses the political, symbolic, institutional, and social relations through which collective identities are constituted and their boundaries established.

Shevtsov makes an important distinction between associational forms and corporate subjects. In an associational form, collective space remains derivative of the social spaces of the individuals who compose it. A corporate subject, by contrast, develops a relatively autonomous social space that may acquire priority over the individual spaces of its members. Such collective structures also tend towards forms of centring and coordination capable of orientating their activity.

From this perspective, external expansion may become a particularly attractive means of reaffirming collective identity and preserving the position of the centre. Shevtsov does not regard war as strictly inevitable. Rather, his concluding analysis suggests that the structure of collective identity and the organization of social space affect the ways in which expansion may occur. Decentration does not guarantee the avoidance of war, but it may preserve the possibility of forms of expansion that do not require the reduction of another subject's social space.

The contribution by Dámaris D. Hernández and Francisco J. Serrano-Bosquet shifts the analysis from collective identity and social space to the body as both a site and a medium of political violence. Their article, *Horror, Mutilation, and the Relational Constitution of Political Violence*, examines mutilation not simply as an extreme form of bodily injury, but as a form of violence with political effects that extend beyond the immediate victim.

The authors develop what they describe as a relational-naturalist framework. The embodied subject is understood as situated at the intersection of biological, social, symbolic, and territorial relations. Within this framework, mutilation acquires political significance because its effects are not exhausted by the destruction inflicted upon an individual body. Violence directed at the body can simultaneously address a wider network of spectators and become intelligible in relations of fear, vulnerability, domination and recognition.

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Hernández and Serrano-Bosquet identify three conditions of what they call political-relational violence: its intended effect extends beyond the immediate victim towards a relational network; the violent act is made legible or visible as a sign; and it contains a surplus of violence exceeding what would be required merely to eliminate the victim. It is this surplus, in particular, that allows bodily destruction to acquire a communicative and political function.

Drawing on Adriana Cavarero's phenomenology of horror and on empirical research concerning responses to images of mutilation, the authors argue that the relevant affective response cannot simply be reduced to disgust. Horror emerges from the perception of the collapse of embodied integrity in another and thereby confronts the spectator with a vulnerability that is both individual and shared.

The political significance of mutilation therefore lies partly in its capacity to extend the effects of violence beyond the physical event itself. The mutilated body becomes a medium through which fear, vulnerability and domination can affect networks of spectatorship. The authors nevertheless maintain an important methodological distinction: empirical evidence concerning individual responses to mutilation does not by itself demonstrate the propagation of those responses through social networks. The latter remains a broader philosophical hypothesis requiring further empirical investigation.

The final contribution, by Svitlana Balinchenko, moves from the ontology and embodied experience of violence to the moral conditions under which individuals make decisions during war. Situated in the conceptual framework of biopolitics and necropolitics, her article examines survival, civic responsibility, free riding, moral luck, and blameworthiness in the context of the Russo-Ukrainian War and, more specifically, through modified versions of the Thirsty Traveller thought experiment.

The central question concerns the extent to which circumstances beyond an agent's control may mitigate or justify morally problematic survival strategies. Wartime decisions take place under conditions of uncertainty, coercion, fear, and unequal exposure to risk. At the same time, an individual decision concerning personal survival may affect the survival and resilience of others. Balinchenko therefore focuses on the limits of moral luck as a justification for choices made in circumstances in which individual survival and civic responsibility may come into conflict.

Her modifications of the *Thirsty Traveller* introduce two elements that are especially significant in wartime contexts. The first is the agent's awareness of the risks. The traveller is no longer merely an uninformed victim of circumstances but an agent who must act under conditions in which different options entail different probabilities of death.

The second modification introduces a third party whose survival may depend upon the traveller's actions. This addition transforms survival from a purely individual matter into a relational problem of

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responsibility. The moral significance of an action can no longer be assessed exclusively in terms of the risk taken by the agent, since the consequences of that action may alter the prospects of survival of other subjects.

This structure is applied to military draft evasion under wartime conditions. The attempt to preserve one's own life can be understood as a survival strategy, yet it may also redistribute risks toward other members of the political community, particularly where collective resistance depends upon individual participation. Balinchenko therefore proposes a dual form of moral assessment: a deictic dimension, which considers the agent's relation to others whose survival may depend on their action, and a stochastic dimension, concerned with the uncertain, indirect and potentially cumulative consequences of individual choices.

Taken together, the four contributions do not constitute a unified theory of war, nor should they be read as different stages of a single causal explanation. Rather, their significance lies in the distinct explanatory dimensions they bring into view. Bianca addresses the biological and anthropological conditions of aggression and conflict. Shevtsov examines the ontological structure of violence through social space and collective identity. Hernández and Serrano-Bosquet investigate the embodied and relational effects of political violence. Balinchenko analyses the moral problems that arise when individual survival, civic duty, and responsibility toward others intersect under wartime conditions.

Their juxtaposition also reveals the limits of reductionist accounts. The phylogenetic roots of aggression do not by themselves explain organized warfare. Collective identities cannot be understood independently of the social and symbolic structures through which they are constituted and contested. Political violence cannot be reduced to its immediate physical effects upon the victim, because its significance may extend through relations of spectatorship, fear, communication, and domination. Nor can individual wartime decisions be evaluated solely in terms of personal intention when their consequences are embedded in networks of dependence and collective vulnerability.

War thus appears as a genuinely multilevel phenomenon. Biological dispositions, social structures, collective identities, political organization, symbolic representations, embodied vulnerability, and moral agency belong to analytically distinct domains, yet they interact in historically specific configurations. A philosophically adequate account of war must therefore resist biological reductionism and explanations that treat violence as exclusively socially or culturally constructed.

The contributions collected in this Special Issue invite precisely such an approach. They examine different points at which aggression becomes socially organized, identity becomes politically expansive, bodily violence acquires relational and communicative effects, and survival becomes

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morally interconnected with the fate of others. By bringing these perspectives together, the issue seeks to contribute to a philosophical understanding of war attentive to its biological conditions, ontological structures, political forms, embodied manifestations, and ethical consequences.

Such an understanding is especially necessary at a time when war is not merely an object of historical or theoretical reflection, but an ongoing reality. The Russian aggression in Ukraine provides an especially immediate reminder that territorial expansion, collective identity, civilian vulnerability, resistance and responsibility remain fundamental questions of contemporary political life. The task of philosophy is not to collapse these questions into a single explanatory scheme, but to clarify the different levels at which they arise and the conceptual relations through which they may be understood.

The involvement of Ukrainian scholars in this Special Issue is particularly meaningful, as their intellectual work unfolds against the immediate reality of war. Their contributions remind us that the philosophical questions examined here are inseparable from the experiences of those who confront violence, vulnerability, and the struggle for survival.

We would like to thank all the authors for their contributions and the reviewers for their careful and constructive work. We hope that this Special Issue will contribute to the continuing philosophical discussion of war and violence and to a more differentiated understanding of the biological, ontological, political, relational and ethical dimensions of human conflict.

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