Violence and Phenomenology

James Dodd

Violence and Phenomenology

Studies in Philosophy

Robert Bernasconi, *General Editor*

Violence and Phenomenology

James Dodd

Contents

Acknowledgments

Introduction
Reflections on Violence

PHILOSOPHY AND THE PROBLEMS OF VIOLENCE

The following reflections have been written from the conviction that it is of critical importance that we take responsibility for the question whether we have become the dupes of violence. This question is of particular urgency when it takes the form of our need to understand war. Violence is of course not limited to war, nor is the phenomenon of war reducible to its violence, but the question of violence becomes particularly acute when we reflect on the meaning of war, on whatever scale or symmetry. It is a basic fact that in the case of war the danger of becoming the dupes of violence is especially grave. This is compounded by the fact that, when we talk seriously about war, whether to fight a war or to look to the wars of the past to understand our history, there is an all-too common tendency to pass over the task of articulating the problems of violence. In part, this results from the fact that wars themselves, which normalize violence, seem to be premised on taking violence for granted.

There are at least two ways to become the dupes of violence that should be of paramount concern. First, there is the tendency to expect *too much* from violence, to look to violence either to express a decisiveness of purpose, or to provide a proof of authenticity that violence cannot in fact sustain. A weak government that seeks to shore up its authority by an ever more exaggerated use of police violence merely illuminates for all its inability to govern. A strong nation that seeks to use its military superiority to expand its influence invariably finds itself embroiled in the negative consequences of its own ambition. "It happens that those who have force on loan from fate," as Simone Weil expresses it, "count on it too much and are destroyed."[1] Yet it would be a mistake to assume that the potential to employ violence is thereby rendered meaningless, or unpractical.

Second, there is a tendency to come to expect *too little* from violence, to believe that violence will simply whither away, due either to the weight of our moral vigilance or the effectiveness of the political, legal, social, or ethical instruments that we employ in the hope of avoiding the destruction of war. If a nation, fully capable of projecting military force, refrains from

its use out of respect for international law, then such restraint is meaningful only as an affirmation of a given order that draws upon precisely the dormant capability to wage war. Yet it would be a mistake to reduce the legitimacy of international law to the caprice of nations capable of waging war.

There is no clear middle course between these two tendencies of ambiguity, since it is notoriously difficult to settle into a single, stable perspective on these matters. Instead, we find ourselves listing from the Scylla of this "too little" towards the Charybdis of that "too much" and back again. As Georges Sorel expressed it a century ago, and was echoed by Hannah Arendt now more than thirty years ago, "the problems of violence still remain very obscure."[2]

If I allude to Sorel's title to introduce the reflections collected here, it is not in order to follow his lead, but to suggest that it is important to begin with a sound and sophisticated appreciation of the obscurity of the problems of violence. This is especially the case in what follows, for my concern will be to explore the extent to which the ambiguities of violence can be approached as a properly *philosophical* set of questions. That war leads to fundamental questions about human existence may seem to be a given. Few events or experiences force us to question the meaning of human being more deeply than do the traumas of war. Yet if we are to be clear about just what it is that war forces us to face, or what it is that the bewildering experiences of political, social, and moral violence in the past century have forced us to ask about ourselves, then it is important for us not to simply assume that we sufficiently understand the nature of the problem, so as to be able to pronounce philosophy as a useful, much less necessary, modality for its articulation.

It might strike one as a strange point of departure for a reflection on the obscurity of violence to raise the question of its properly philosophical character. Does not virtually any obscurity, not to mention profound questions of human existence, by definition invite philosophical reflection? This already begs the question. For perhaps it is instead the case that the problems of violence are not, in the end, all that obscure, even if they may be difficult to understand. In fact, there are a number of approaches to violence that offer very cogent and compelling explanations of the phenomenon. The so-called "problem" of war, for example, can be formulated as a limited, technical question of military science, where the specialist investigates how to pursue war more effectively by way of the mobilization and concentration of forces. Or the problem could be formulated in terms of a more political science, where one investigates how to employ or to avoid war in the pursuit of a given set of ends or purposes defined by a given public policy. Such approaches thematize the violence of war in terms of its management, broadly construed. They are not limited to the conduct of war proper; for example, the familiar question of what legal or social institutions would be necessary in order to shape human affairs in such a way that would, if not exclude the possibility of war, at least minimize its detrimental effects, is compatible with such approaches as well.

From the perspective of such "technical" approaches, the problems of violence do not accordingly disappear, but they no longer appear to be fundamentally obscure. They need not attract the philosopher, at least if one accepts that violence has been effectively understood by way of a variety of conceptual frameworks that such approaches yield: the "specifications" of the weapons specialist; the efficaciousness of various patterns of "force deployments" and "force projections" studied by the military strategist; the identification of specific "interests" and the subsequent "policies" articulated by the politician; and above all the legal norms and fundamental descriptive concepts developed in international law, such as "aggressor," "defensive war," "intervention" and the like.

If we find ourselves committed to the notion that there are no real problems of war beyond the reach of technical approaches such as these, then whatever philosophy could contribute to the investigation of war would be limited to, and fixed in advance by, the horizons defined by such approaches. There are precedents for such an employment of philosophy that remains strictly within such horizons; they are premised on the idea that philosophy could be, along with human sciences such as history and sociology, an important resource for the elaboration and study of the basic categories employed by military science, international politics, or law. History is one such resource, since it is clear that knowing how and why we have fought past wars is of interest to political life; understanding, for example, the politics, psychology, and social forces that shaped the negotiations at Versailles in 1919 is essential not only for understanding the origins of the Second World War in Europe, but also for understanding many aspects of the wars taking place in the Middle East at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

The importance of such knowledge is clear, even if it is often difficult to predict how such knowledge will be used, or whether it will have any effect at all, positive or negative. Science is not the final arbiter of its meaning. For example, it is not immune to propaganda; much of nineteenth century historiography and philology was employed for various nationalist programs, and early anthropological research was often an important resource for racist political agendas. Even efforts towards the scientific purification of inherited conceptual schemes and research programs—for example, the long struggle of classical cultural anthropology to come to terms with its colonialist heritage—has often proved to have important political resonance.

In any case, the point is that it is clearly possible that the "problems of violence," in the form of the problem of war, could be limited to the questions of politics, and if the need arises to better understand why the political life of a community has the form that it has, then the reflection could be expanded into its historical or sociological dimensions. Such investigations need not, however interesting they may be, necessarily demand from us a philosophical questioning; above all, even if the violence of war proves to be more intractable than the politics or psychology of war, it

would still not be at all obvious that the problems of violence are properly philosophical problems.

Or, to emphasize the same point in a different way, it is not *obvious* that philosophy would be able to claim for itself the violence of war as one of its problems. We still need to ask whether the more technical approaches to war are not overlooking important obscurities that remain intrinsic to violence. This will be one of the central issues in these reflections. For now, I wish only to emphasize that philosophy, in order to be able to speak responsibly and to the point on these matters, must either demonstrate that war and violence can be legitimately counted among its basic questions, or that a philosophically inspired engagement with war and violence contributes positively to an interest in the matter that finds its ultimate articulation elsewhere in political life. Anything else is just idle chatter, which in serious matters is not only worthless, but potentially irresponsible. Examples of philosophers lending false gravitas to misguided or fanciful positions in real debates about war and peace, serving little to no purpose apart from adding to the general hysteria and lack of vision that often welcomes the outbreak of war, are too many not to be disheartening. Sorel, with his crypto-fascist celebration of violence as a foundation for the moral character of the working class, or Henri Bergson, with his metaphysical justification of rabid anti-Prussian invectives at the outbreak of the First World War,[3] are examples that are perhaps better left as objects of study for the intellectual historian or the sociologist of violence. To take them up in an attempt to pursue serious philosophy is surely a hazardous enterprise. They serve as an important reminder to be cautious, to take pains to evade the hubris of believing that, with enough philosophical acumen, one is able to speak meaningfully to any question of human importance.

WAR AND PHILOSOPHY

The difficulty, however, is that, in order to discover the proper domain of philosophical questioning, philosophy must risk this kind of failure. The intellectual failures on the question of war that are associated with Bergson or Max Scheler[4] have not settled the matter of war and philosophy, nor is the time past in which philosophy must again risk posing the problem of war as its own. For despite all the advances and importance of the treatment of war and violence in disciplines such as legal theory and political science, there still remains the possibility, or the suspicion, that war is something *sui generis*, that its violence cannot be understood in terms that are not originally introduced by this violence itself—thus the lingering obscurity of the problems of violence, even at the very heart of its rationalization. If we find ourselves incapable of escaping from this suspicion that the violence of war is the origin of its own sense or meaning, then violence would indeed represent a genuine philosophical problem.

Why would the possibility that the violence of war is the origin of its own sense lead to philosophical reflection? If violence were a phenomenon the significance of which could not be ultimately articulated in terms of the world in which we seek to either instrumentalize or exclude violence, then this could imply that the problem of violence, its questioning, would not make any sense at all in a world in which there were no violence. It could mean that in order for the violence of war to be thought at all, it would require that our very sense of the landscape of the "order of things" be put into question. This, then, would imply the possibility, even perhaps the necessity, for a philosophy of violence.

The issue of whether war and its violence represents the object of a possible philosophical questioning, however, does not turn on this rather abstract topological question of meaning. Even if one could comfortably make the assessment that the violence of war is *sui generis* in the manner just indicated (which one cannot, at least not comfortably), this would not answer the question whether philosophy has the resources to approach such a question at all. Perhaps the only thing we can reasonably expect in advance is that the question of philosophy itself, of its place and limits, would intensify. Just as it is not necessarily the case that all important human questions are philosophical questions, so it is not necessarily the case that philosophy emerges fully formed to engage the obscurities of human existence—that is, whether something like philosophy is possible at all, is never to be assumed. Yet the question as to whether something like "philosophy" must come into play, whatever it may turn out to be as a developing response to such a question (even a failure to respond meaningfully), is something that can become more pressing as an issue in itself.

The idea that the deepening of the question of war leads (at least potentially) to a deepening of the question of philosophy, that reflecting on the ambiguities of the one leads to a crisis in the other, will be an important emergent theme of these reflections. My working thesis will be that if a philosophical engagement with the problem of the violence of war is meaningful at all, then this is only because such an engagement can be meaningfully understood to be at least a part of a broader reflection on the possibility of philosophy itself.

The principal reason why this working thesis holds any promise at all is the fact that it comes to us in a definite historical form, of which there are a number of examples. For the philosophy of the West has been, since the time of the Greeks, to a great extent born from war. There is hardly a significant moment in the history of western philosophy that is not in some way or another shadowed by a war, or shaped and set into motion by what war has revealed to people about themselves. To be sure, this is not to say that philosophy is any more or less a child of war than any other intellectual tradition. Sociology, for example, has been occupied with the problem of war in its various manifestations since Ibn Khaldun in the fourteenth century, and the work of Émile Durkheim and Max Weber proved

essential to answering the call for self-understanding that emerged after the two world wars of the last century, just as in the century before the work of Comte and Marx represented an equally profound engagement with the problems of modernity that had become so acute in the wake of the political and social upheavals following the Napoleonic wars.

Nor is the argument that philosophy is essentially a reaction to war; this is as little the case with philosophy as it is with sociology. It does suggest, however, that Plato would not have been Plato were it were not for the specific problems that arose from the Greek catastrophe of the Peloponnesian War; that Hobbes would not have been Hobbes were it not for the convulsions of the Civil War in England;[5] that a whole generation of American philosophers, including William James, Charles Sanders Peirce, and John Dewey, would have been significantly different were it not for the spiritual and intellectual consequences of the Civil War in the United States.[6] Even a philosopher like René Descartes, and with that Cartesianism as a whole, is difficult to fully understand unless one takes into consideration the profound theological crises of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and their political manifestations that resulted in one of the most destructive wars in European history between 1618 and 1648. The challenge of the particular conception of the human being that Cartesianism represents, as well as the force of many reactions against it (Spinoza, but also Pascal), are to be sure not simply consequences of a long drawn out war, since they involve intellectual trends and debates that had been developing over centuries. Nevertheless, the spiritual moment in which this fundamental perspective of modern philosophy first emerged, and the deep impact it had on the self-understanding of the generations that followed, which far outstripped the impact of arid philosophical debates, is irrevocably associated with the tragedy of the Thirty Years' War.

Nevertheless, one could argue that any connection between war and philosophy is at most a limited historical association, perhaps best left to the intellectual historian; Descartes himself, for example, seems to have been rather unimpressed by the wars that shadowed much of his intellectual career, his focus never wavering from the problems of mathematical physics, even as he pursued a career of soldiering during the first engagements of the Bohemian phase of the war.[7] For how significant, really, are such associations? They do not, of themselves, prove that war is a philosophical problem; war is not a problem for philosophy simply because philosophers have found themselves moved to address the meaning of the wars of their times, or that the reception of their ideas has been influenced by the experience of living in times of war. We need something else to be justified in making more of this association, beyond the simple recognition that philosophy tends to reflect the spiritual condition of any given age.

One possible reason why we may be able to take these associations as significant is the fact that both philosophy and war involve immediately our sense of ourselves, of who we are. This sense may be implicit or explicit;

the important thing is that it is operative. To find ourselves grappling either with the meaning of war, just as when we grapple with the possibility of philosophy, is to have arrived at the point where it has become possible to orient our questioning of the world in terms of the fundamental question of who we are. Both war and philosophy represent unique opportunities for such questioning; they also represent unique opportunities for neglecting the task. In any case, there is an important tendency in Western thought to bring together these two reflections, and with that to lend weight to the associations of war and philosophy.

Still, all this must be approached with caution. The question of selfhood that war and philosophy apparently hold in common tends to invite exaggeration, especially when we feel that we have a good grip on who we are talking about. To illustrate what I mean, we can turn to a thesis that has been recently argued by the military historian Victor Davis Hanson, who argues for a fundamental link between Western (namely Greco-Roman) culture and the ways that Western armies wage war.[8] His argument is a good example of an idea that will be explored below when we turn to Clausewitz, namely, the idea that *who we are* to a great extent determines *how we fight* (and not just who we fight), so it is useful to introduce the problem briefly here.

Keeping true to the perspective of the historian, Hanson essentially focuses the question of *who we are* around the description of a culture, or a set of ideas, beliefs, institutions and practices that determine a certain way of life and pattern of human interaction and organization. He then focuses the problem of *how we fight* around the question of military efficacy, understood in terms of the capacity of a political entity to mobilize and employ its human and material resources in combat, as well as carry out operations large and small to achieve well-defined military objectives. From the perspective of this double focus, Hanson argues that the Greek *polis*, and the social reality and political culture that developed over the centuries from this basic root, was the historical source for the development of a remarkably successful (and brutal) military killing machine.

A striking example of such a machine is the group of ten thousand Greek mercenaries that Xenophon describes in his *Anabasis*, which Hanson discusses at the beginning of his book *Carnage and Culture*. Hired by Cyrus the Younger, a contender to the Persian throne, these veterans from the Peloponnesian war found themselves, after the battle of Cunaxa, stranded 1,500 miles from home, politically and militarily isolated. They vote not to surrender, and manage to fight their way through hostile territory back to Greece—defeating all opposition, in the end losing more soldiers to the elements than to Asian forces. For Hanson, the key to the astonishing military effectiveness of these Greek mercenaries was cultural; that is, the cultural characteristics that defined the Greeks were translated directly into how they fought: "The *Anabasis* makes it clear [. . .] that the Greeks fought much differently than their adversaries and that such unique

Hellenic characteristics of battle—a sense of personal freedom, superior discipline, matchless weapons, egalitarian camaraderie, individual initiative, constant tactical adaptation and flexibility, preference for shock battle of heavy infantry—were themselves the murderous dividends of Hellenic culture at large."[9]

In many ways Hanson's thesis belongs to a tradition that has existed since the Greeks themselves, one that paints a picture of Greek and Greco-inspired armies as marching *poleis*, men bound one to another as free, together aiming towards a common end, fighting against what essentially amounts to armies of slaves bound together only by their chains. This image of the marching citizen has its precise analogue in the romantic depictions of solidarity and brotherhood within the ranks of Napoleonic armies, those "free men" who also enjoyed (at least for a time) remarkable success against the "slaves" of monarchs and other absolutists. This thesis is of course not uncontroversial, even within the limits of military history;[10] philosophically, it is deeply problematic, if we see in it anything more than the development of a set of historical parallels that either do or do not have evidential support. To reduce the problem of *who we are* to a set of cultural traits which are then used to explain, in causal fashion, why we fight the way we do, or behave in general the way we do, fails to engage the problem of what it is to grapple with the question of the meaning of the relation between selfhood and freedom. The problem of freedom, the problem that we are for ourselves, is not the problem of how to understand the consequences of being in the possession of a given cultural trait. Hanson's work is suggestive and often illuminating, but it also invites exaggeration, if we assume that it provides a clear, unambiguous demonstration of any connection between who we are and how we fight.[11]

If we evade this pitfall of exaggerating clarity and insight and keep reflecting, the general argument that there is a connection between culture and warfare can within limits be in fact quite persuasive. This is particularly the case when reflecting on the origins of Greek philosophy, insofar as the question of war proves to be important in framing an investigation into the nature of the Greek *polis*. Historians are still arguing whether the development of egalitarianism within the context of the early *polis* led to the development of hoplite warfare, or whether a "hoplite revolution" took place in which social and political structures were subsequently adapted to reflect the changing social reality facilitated by the adoption of mass military techniques. In any case, there appears to be something of a consensus that the early experience of the *polis* is inseparably bound, both materially and symbolically, to hoplite warfare. This association is so strong, that some even forgo entirely the "either/or" of influence, and simply identify hoplite unity with the unity of the *polis* as such—an idea that already seems to be found in Thucydides, when he reports Nicias in Sicily saying to the Athenian army in retreat: "Reflect that you yourselves, wherever you settle down, are a city already."[12]

It is clear that the question of the relation between selfhood and freedom is at play in this bond between hoplite warfare and the *polis*. The conviction, powerful in the ideology of ancient political life, is that there is something fundamental about free being that finds its way into expression through the peculiar intensification of the experience of war that results from the employment of mass tactics and shock battle. This idea that freedom reveals itself when we stand apart and above ordinary life, with its intensification of self and of one's being with others, in short as something that takes the form of an *exceptional existence*—all this is wrapped up in the image of an organized formation of soldiers facing death shoulder to shoulder, all equally aware that if the bond is broken, if the ranks falter or fail to act in unison, then all is lost. This image had significant political resonance even well beyond the disappearance of the practice of pure hoplite warfare, and its power was not lost on ancient philosophers. Xenophon the mercenary was a student of Socrates, and not the only ancient philosopher associated with hoplite warfare; Socrates himself is represented in Plato's dialogues as a kind of superhuman hoplite—impervious to the elements, cool in the face of danger, never breaking ranks. This image of Socrates seems to have some historical basis in Socrates' bravery and fortitude in effecting an orderly retreat during the battle of Potidea, where he is reported to have fought back to back with Alcibiades, saving his life.[13]

Nevertheless, there is also a deep suspicion in Plato about the ultimate value of this kind of experience—Alcibiades, after all, was a criminal who bore great responsibility for the crisis of Athenian democracy after the war, an association that Plato clearly wants to be operative when, in his dialogues, he refers to Socrates' military career and the ties it fostered. The assessment of Plato's attitude to war is beyond the scope of my remarks here,[14] though I would emphasize that with the single example of Plato we are already forced to pass beyond the simple question of who bears what "cultural trait." Perhaps we can say that both Socrates and Alcibiades shared the trait of Greek "individualism," but could the difference be any greater? Instead, we must realize that where philosophy comes into the picture is when ideas are experienced not as patterns that allow us to describe relations among citizens, but instead as deeply problematic, as points of departure not for explanation but questioning and doubt.

And in fact, the real historical association that is relevant to reflecting on the origins of Platonic philosophy is not the cultural conception of the hoplite citizen as a feature of the Greek *polis*, but rather what we could perhaps call the crisis of hoplite ideology in the wake of the Peloponnesian War. In fact, hoplite warfare proper was already complicated during the Persian Wars. If we think of hoplite warfare as more than the use of the phalanx as a military tactic, instead representing the general organization of the polity as a fighting unit grounded in a form of "civic militarism" that closely identifies waging war with citizenship, then it is probable that such warfare thrives only in conditions of small scale conflicts between individual *poleis*.

The wars with Persia, which required fighting in coalitions with other groups, the extensive use of mercenaries, irregular or guerrilla units, [15] as well as the development of large navies, represented the first phase of the erosion of exclusively hoplite warfare in Greece; whereas the cataclysm of the twenty-seven year Peloponnesian War brought the final dissolution of the dominance of the hoplite as a material or symbolic force in Greek political life. Even Xenophon's Ten Thousand were no longer a proper citizen militia, but mercenaries using hoplite tactics; Athens itself was an imperial power that relied heavily on its navy to project force. They both belonged to a political universe that lacked the conceptual framework to understand the consequences of the war, caught somewhere between the promise of free political existence and the severe political failures of overextended empire. Plato, therefore, should be understood in terms of a context in which the very ideas of "citizen" and "community" were in crisis—more, where the sense of that profound connection between freedom and selfhood that had once been expressed by the very idea of the polis had been rendered deeply problematic. If the Platonic corpus documents the rediscovery of the origin of philosophy in ancient Athens, it is a discovery that found an important catalyst in the political ambiguities of the times.

The historical association of the emergence of a philosophical perspective with the spiritual crisis of war leads us to ask the question of whether there is a more basic unity that runs through both. For if both of these experiences—the assumption of risk, of standing together in danger that is basic to the combat experience, and the struggle with the question of the self, in dialogue standing together to face the risk of an uncertain result—manifestly define in basic ways the primordial experience of freedom, then is there not the possibility that, on some fundamental level, philosophy and war are the same event?[16] This becomes even more suggestive, if we recognize that these "experiences" are inherently unstable, that they never settle into definite forms. Thus if both war and philosophy draw their essence from problematic freedom, then can we not say that what divides them is inessential? War and philosophy as merely associated on the one side, or war and philosophy as identical on the other; perhaps we have here another case of expecting either "too little" or "too much."

A POTENTIAL OBJECTION: THE STUPIDITY OF VIOLENCE PRINCIPLE

The question of a deeper kinship of philosophy and war poses a challenge to the much more widely accepted contention that the proper place of philosophical reflection on such matters lies in the direction of providing frameworks within which wars could be judged to be either *justified* or *unjustified*. The work of Michael Walzer, Sydney Bailey and others to develop conceptions of just war (whether *jus ad bellum* or *jus in bellum*)

for modern legal theory and politics is perhaps the most developed form of such an approach, one that has an intellectual history dating back to at least Cicero.[17]

The question that the reflections below are concerned with, however, is to what extent war and its violence can be understood as a *constitutive event*, one that philosophy, given that an association with war belongs so to speak to the problem of its genesis, is perhaps in a unique position to articulate. A basic obstacle to any such notion of war as constitutive, or to any argument that war itself could in some sense be an origin of sense, can be articulated in terms of the acceptance of what I would like to call the "stupidity of violence principle." My intent is not to argue against this principle; I believe it to be not only compelling intellectually, but also expressive of a basic sentiment of humanity, one that is perhaps the real force behind its general acceptance. It is, however, an important natural obstacle for these reflections, and needs to be highlighted in order to open the question of its possible limitations.

In its barest form, the stupidity of violence principle states that violence is and can be only a mere *means*. As a mere means, pure violence remains trapped, according to the principle, within the confines of a very narrow dimension of reality defined by the application of means. Violence as such is thus blind; when taken for itself it is ultimately without direction. This becomes immediately apparent when the pursuit of increased violence eclipses or supplants the pursuit of a well-articulated purpose or end, as for example in the military stalemate of trench warfare in the First World War, where the technical mechanisms of mobilization and force concentration dominated war strategy.[18] Violence, from this perspective, can neither be, nor result in anything *lasting* when pursued for its own sake. War itself, insofar as we understand it in terms of mass organized violence—that sum of battles on every level, from the aerial bombardment and the artillery barrage to the killing of one soldier by another and the mass rape of a civilian population, collectively representing the specific unfolding of the practices of violence—can thus never be something taken for itself as a substantive fabrication of a genuinely lasting human reality. The practices of violence, however traumatic and extreme, fade into indefinite superficialities unless supported by a meaningful cause or end. To be sure, the stupidity of violence does not detract from the seriousness of the consequences of violence, the damage it inflicts—the shredded flesh, the famine and disease, the pain both physical and spiritual, and the shocking number of corpses that it leaves in its wake. Yet these consequences cohere into recognizable forms more readily when seen in terms of that set of relations to things and persons—in short, the lives—of those who fight and are effected by fighting and death, than they do when we project them against some putative reality of violence taken for itself.[19]

Another way to express the principle is to present it in terms of the claim that violence and death are found at an extremity that only relates to the

concrete by way of our perception of the absence and mutilation born by the world in the form of their aftermath. The only connection between these scars and violence "itself" lies in the simple, well-defined progression from a cause to its effect. To be sure, this is not nothing; more, it is not nothing from more than one perspective. The connection of any such given scar to the event of violence from which it arose can even be measured, and with that conceived in terms of the logic of an economy of "killing," as a function of number of combatants eliminated in a given period of time at a certain cost. In this way violence, which again according to the principle is a mere means, readily lends itself to being articulated in a purely technical manner, where we can fix very precisely how to develop those mechanisms, machines, or programs of violence that can kill more efficiently. Such technologies can range from the use of lower caliber assault rifles to produce more casualties (the slower a projectile enters the flesh, the more damage it does) to the use of time-management techniques in torture camps that potentially allow for the processing of larger numbers of individuals using fewer resources. The stupidity of violence is thus related to its potential to be thoroughly rationalized through its reduction to the construction of such systems or machinations. The stupidity of violence does not exclude its complexity, nor the sophistication of the physical and moral technologies that we use to employ it. Rather, violence is stupid, in that it involves *nothing more significant* than what can be captured and organized in a technical fashion.

The very idea of violence as a pure means, purely available for rationalization, is based on a rejection of the idea of violence as a source, an origin of meaning. For the rationalization in question does not pretend to bring into view what is essential to those lives that are impacted by war and its violence. It does not pretend to be the rationalization of war as a total human event, only of war in its narrow, reductive representation as the employment of means, or of the material potential for the practices of violence. The questions we find ourselves grappling with before, during, and after our wars lie outside the narrow purview of the stupidity of violence, which is essentially blind to anything but the narrow roles defined by the structural correlation between resource expenditure and damage yield, or any other arbitrarily chosen set of values. Likewise, the morality of war does not find, according to this principle, any chance of being expressed, so long as we only follow along the passage of the event of violence that has been so tightly reduced to this line of cause to effect. It is both necessary and sufficient for a moral reflection to begin with the damage, or with an understanding of the results of a cause, and from there to ask for a motive and with that a justification; to be concerned with violence as such as a possible origin of any significant sense that would contribute to defining the parameters of moral reflection would, according to the stupidity of violence principle, simply confuse the problem.

It is thus the other side of this stupidity, so to speak, that seems to beckon us with a thicker subject matter for properly philosophical reflection. Here

we can perhaps use the stupidity of violence principle to specify more precisely the perspective of just war theory, Walzer's *Just and Unjust Wars* being a good case in point.

Though Walzer by no means accepts international law *tout court*, his arguments are nevertheless parasitic, one could say, on international law as a given positive legal framework. The framework of international law has its own vocabulary and set of principles that derive their legitimacy ultimately from the fact of their having been accepted, more or less, by the international community. Walzer essentially allows positivistic international law to set his agenda, even as he criticizes its specifics from the point of view of what he takes to be another shared framework—our implicit sense of right and wrong, and with that our common capacity to identify moral questions and interests in the conduct of war. The philosophical efforts in *Just and Unjust Wars* are accordingly oriented around bringing what Walzer takes to be the implicit moral significance of certain legal concepts to the fore, and his specific arguments either support given legal principles or arrive at specific conclusions that are intended to fill in gaps where the legal framework functions in such a way that certain cases have been left undecided or indeterminate, for whatever historical or political reason. The result is that philosophy is here pursued in a limited, though extremely precise and cogent manner; philosophy pursued in this key neither poses its own unique problems, nor attempts to penetrate to problems that have not been in some form already embodied in a legal tradition that seeks to mediate relations between political entities that, from time to time, are faced with the task of making judgments about right and justice in the case of war.

Walzer's approach is remarkably consistent, both because of the overwhelming legitimacy of positivistic legality as well as, I would argue, an implicit acceptance of some permutation of the stupidity of violence principle. The meaning of the violence of war for Walzer essentially amounts to the fact of its employment as a means by a given political agent; and it is relevant at all, only as something to be judged by its consequences alone. For a means is always defined relative to something else; a pure means is something that, outside of such a relative determination, can only be "senseless."

It is important to understand that this perspective on violence is not equivalent to the assertion that violence is "irrational," that it has no place in the rational order of things. Instead, to accept the stupidity of violence principle is to accept that violence can be trapped within the amber of the totality of relations that constitute the human world. Because of this basic fact, we can say that violence is something "understood," even if in pure violence there is nothing to be understood. There is no contradiction in this, for if violence is only a means, and thereby receives its significance only from the outside, then the only question at hand is in what historical, sociological, psychological, medical, or whatever context it is to receive its sense. To identify the external origin of the meaning of violence is just to make it into a proper *object of knowledge*, though a relative object of a particular kind.

It is clear that an approach such as Walzer's is fruitful—one could even say that, today, the "reality of war" is by no means obscure, that we understand very well just what violence is, either from a philosophical-moral perspective such as Walzer's, or from a wide variety of systematic interpretative approaches. The purpose of the reflections that follow is not to challenge the cogency of the stupidity of violence principle, nor the manner in which war and violence have been made objects of knowledge in the social sciences and moral philosophy. The intention is rather to probe, as it were, in a different direction, in order to ask whether something is being left unthought in the way that the intersection between life and violence tends to be conceived.

That the issue can be formulated in terms of the sense or meaning of violence, or better, in terms of the origin of its sense, leads us to the specifically *phenomenological* character of the following reflections.

PHENOMENOLOGICAL PHILOSOPHY AND THE QUESTION OF VIOLENCE

The reflections pursued below will be primarily philosophical, but they assume an important historical context. A key, if often neglected aspect of the heritage of classical phenomenology, as it is encountered in the writings of the philosophers such as Edmund Husserl, Max Scheler, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, is a deep engagement with the question of the spiritual significance of the two world wars of the twentieth century and their aftermath. I would argue that the question of the meaning of the wars of the past century was not a mere occasional problem, but was in fact of decisive importance for classical phenomenological philosophy, even if there are relatively few specific texts that deal directly with the war itself.[20] This engagement with the problem of war reflects the Platonic moment sketched above, insofar as the spiritual significance of war is understood in terms of the manner in which selfhood (in authors such as Husserl and Patočka, the selfhood represented by the very idea of "Europe" and European culture itself) is put into question, and with that the very possibility of philosophy.

This historical point will not be the focus of what follows, however. My chief purpose will be to wrest from the phenomenological tradition a more robust and developed philosophical reflection on the problems of violence. This also means that my concern with phenomenology in what follows is not purely methodological in nature. To embark on what might be called a "phenomenology of violence," where phenomenology would be employed as a descriptive method for analyzing the complex levels of sense at play in the phenomenon of violence, would not address the problem of philosophy, as least not directly. For again the issue here is whether violence is a properly philosophical question at all; if phenomenology were taken up

simply as a method of analysis, and not an attempt to realize a properly philosophical perspective, it would be insufficient to bring us to any insight about the philosophical importance of violence. Methods of analysis systematize and, in some cases, increase our knowledge about a given subject matter, but systematic thinking alone does not enable us to judge what is of philosophical significance. Thus it is not phenomenology as a method, but rather as a specific manner in which one can find one's way into philosophy that is of importance here. [21]

Why phenomenology? At the heart of phenomenological philosophy is the conviction that all genuine philosophical problems are problems of sense, or meaning. The promise, then, that phenomenology represents is the possibility of shedding some light on the question of the *sense* of violence. The basic thesis will be that the sense of violence, when pursued and not cordoned off in accordance with some form of the stupidity of violence principle, takes a fundamentally *problematic* form. Violence has sense for us, in the manner in which problematicity itself has sense for us, or to the extent to which we are beings attuned to the presence of the problematic or the obscure. That the sense of violence is problematic is perhaps not a surprising or original thesis; but it is important to reflect on the manner in which the problematicity of violence unfolds and finds its place in our lives. This is necessary in order to better understand why our expectations with respect to violence waver between the poles of "too much" and "too little." The phenomenological point will be that the problematic sense of violence straddles, in a fluid and anarchic way, the divide between sense and non-sense, between clarity and obscurity; it is thus not simply a question of cause and effect, of where violence comes from and where it is going, but how violence manifests itself within a human situation or world.

Violence is situated in a world of sense, but in a manner that seems to hold it apart from all sense. This anarchy undermines our capacity to hold it in place. In the face of violence, it is as if our experience were somehow incapable of articulating its meaning, as if we always come up short, revealing the depth of the absence of sense at the heart of the experience of violence itself. This is in part the reason why the success of the social sciences in discovering and understanding violence is so important to us—it contrasts radically with the utter bafflement that accompanies violence in lived experience. What baffles is in part how varied our response can be: violence can appear as an almost ephemeral superficiality, or a deeply shocking and disrupting catastrophe, or the most clear and simple answer to an otherwise impossibly opaque situation. In all cases it eludes our grasp—whether as empty, impossible to accept, or a foregone conclusion. We experience violence in an ever shifting set of ambiguities; and we are shaken by the implications of violence that we do not directly experience, but which have shaped the world in which we find ourselves. The phenomenological task is to explore the sense of violence and war from within a radical thematic

of lived experience itself, where violence shows itself at its most unstable and protean.

Yet, at the same time, if the philosophical argument is to be made as to the importance of such a phenomenological description, it is clear that the description itself will not suffice. Again, we must resist relying on phenomenology as a mere method; what is at stake in violence, whether philosophically or morally, cannot simply be read off the face of the phenomena of violence. Moreover, if we accept the philosophical assertion at the core of phenomenology, that there is a deep relation between sense and phenomenality, then to a great extent violence is marked by a peculiar refusal of phenomenality itself. This again implies the necessity for caution in ascribing too much value to phenomenological description. What brings us to the problems of violence is not something that can be clearly articulated simply in terms of the phenomenon alone; though a turn to phenomenality, and above all to the problem of subjectivity such a turn entails, will show themselves to be essential points of orientation as these reflections develop.

OUTLINE: FROM SCHMITT'S TO PATOČKA'S CHALLENGE

One consequence of the limitations just sketched is that one should not rely on classical phenomenology alone, as a tradition and a discourse, if the intent is to pose the problem of violence in a philosophically adequate fashion. This is not in the end so much of a question of limitation on the part of phenomenology; somber evocations of "tradition" are more often than not empty gestures of autonomy. Phenomenological philosophy has always been in dialogue with other philosophical perspectives, other experiments of thinking, and this is perhaps in no better evidence than when the first generations of phenomenological philosophers faced the task of making sense of the spiritual condition of the age in the wake of the wars of the twentieth century. I intend to take advantage of some of these implicit dialogues, both actual and possible, by systematically bringing to bear other formulations of the problem of violence from outside of phenomenology, in order to provide a means for highlighting and fixing the outlines of the reflections as they emerge.

The first step will be a preliminary articulation of the problem of constitutive violence through a consideration of the writings of Carl von Clausewitz and Carl Schmitt, with a particular focus on the line of thinking found in Schmitt's *The Concept of the Political*.[22] (Chapter One) The conception of constitutive violence that emerges from reading these texts in dialogue, and which at the end of Chapter One will be formulated under the heading of "Schmitt's challenge," will be clear enough for us to be able to take seriously the problem of pure violence conceived as an originary source of meaning. The specific thesis of Schmitt's that we will consider is his contention that the consciousness of the possibility of acute confrontation, in

the specific form of *combat*, is constitutive of the political tension charac-teristic of those human relations that are illuminated within the horizon of this possibility. "Schmitt's challenge," I will suggest, can be seen as a radi-calization of an aspect of violence and war that Clausewitz tended to leave unresolved as an *ambiguity*—namely, the ambiguity of war that can be understood either as an employable means to a given political end (instru-mental violence), or as a moment in which a the political will of the nation as such comes into being (existential violence).

The discussion in Chapter One will also be marked, however, by a grow-ing sense that the conception of constitutive violence articulated in Schmitt's challenge suffers from fundamental ambiguities that ultimately call for a more direct analysis of the phenomenon of violence as such. This is above all the case, since Schmitt's theoretical use of violence ultimately turns on an appreciation of its disruptive character, which in turn plays an important role in his theory of the state of exception. Yet what violence is a disruption of, what one seeks in such disruption, and what in general the sense of spe-cifically *violent* disruption is, remains unclear throughout, if nevertheless suggestive. A more explicit reflection on violence will be framed by again drawing from outside the phenomenological tradition proper, namely from Hannah Arendt's political thought, in order to attempt to articulate a fuller perspective on the multiple dimensionality of violence as it manifests itself in the human condition. (Chapter Two)

Arendt, as we will see, argues for a version of the stupidity of violence principle, thus for a sharp delimitation of the field in which violence can be said to be genuinely operative. Namely, her argument is that, when taken as pure, violence can only be instrumental, even if its employment or use constitutes an action. This delimitation of Arendt's, which finds its must succinct expression in *On Violence*, will be critically assessed, or rather problematized, through a dialogue with Sartre's discussion of violence in his *Notebooks for an Ethics*.[23] This confrontation between Arendt and Sartre will uncover a sense in which violence can be understood as radically non-instrumental, insofar as it represents a negation or break with instru-mentality as such—yet in such a way that does not necessarily undermine Arendt's arguments, or even the stupidity of violence principle as a prin-ciple. The resulting ambiguity of violence—the sense of which reveals itself to be both instrumental and non-instrumental, stupid and with depth—will lead to the phenomenological insight of the necessity for a more robust reflection on the *subjectivity* of violence. That is, the thesis will be that it is the self-distortive potential of a temporal subjectivity that lies at the origin of the fundamentally anarchic relation of violence to sense and non-sense.

We will also learn from Sartre to recognize a distinctively *nihilistic* char-acter of violence at the heart of its subjectivity. To be sure, given Sartre's understanding of subjectivity or consciousness as itself a "nothingness," this can be taken to be a consequence of the emphasis on the problem of subjectivity in his thought. Yet it will also turn out to be deeply problematic:

the extent to which the subject allows us to illuminate the nihilism of violence, and the extent to which the nihilism of violence allows us to illuminate the question of the presencing of subjectivity, quickly raises concerns whether Sartre's ontology is sufficient to pose the problem in an adequate manner. Towards the development of a more adequate conception of both the subjectivity and the nihilism of violence, I will turn in Chapter Three to an important exchange between Ernst Jünger and Martin Heidegger on the question of the essence of nihilism.[24] The result of this discussion will indicate that nihilism, at least as it comes to be understood in this exchange between Jünger and Heidegger, may in fact point to a sense in which violence is not at all constitutive, but in fact necessarily *disappears* as a uniquely constitutive phenomenon of selfhood, to the extent that in nihilism the problematicity of selfhood as such disappears. The nihilism of violence, in other words, points to a peculiarly structured null point of sense that is characteristic of the radical subjectivity that is definitive of nihilism for both Jünger and Heidegger. In a nihilistic age violence demarcates not the sense of subjective life, but the closure of such life with respect to any and all possibility of it being genuinely experienced in a problematic fashion.

In Chapter Four, these growing doubts on the very viability of the thesis of constitutive violence when challenged by its association with nihilism will be pursued through a reflection on Jan Patčoka's *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, with a particular emphasis on the last two essays, "Is Technological Civilization Decadent, and Why?" and "The Wars of the Twentieth Century and the Twentieth Century as War."[25] Patočka's argument in these essays is of interest here, because he basically accepts the premise of a self-closure of nihilism in the form of technological civilization, in which for him the very modality of violence as an exception is incorporated or folded back into the service of human existence. Thus there is an important sense for Patočka in which the "exceptional" character of violence, basic to the constitutive notion of violence at the heart of Schmitt's challenge, is negated by the fulfillment of its nihilism. Yet at the same time, Patočka still wants to argue that the subsequent economization and normalization of violence in technological civilization is disrupted by a logic of sacrifice that does not allow violence to be fully assimilated into the reality of modern life.

The result is that in Patočka one finds a much more sophisticated formulation of the constitutive violence thesis than is the case with Schmitt's challenge. Its sophistication will be apparent in light of the struggle with the inadequacies of the Schmitt-inspired notion of the constitutive sense of violence that runs through the first three stages of these reflections. More, it will also become clear in Patočka just what it is in violence that could be seen as belonging specifically to philosophy: the peak of violence at the heart of modern war, the intensification of force that defines its front line, is articulated by Patočka as the potential site for the beginning of a

philosophical life uniquely suited for our times, a life that he describes as shaping itself from out of the hidden strength implicit in what he calls the "solidarity of the shaken."

Patočka will also take the issue directly to the question of the essence of responsible selfhood in a unique manner. The last set of reflections (Conclusion) will develop a critique of Patočka's conception of sacrifice as revolving around the moment of an exception that takes the form of violence, though in such a way that takes seriously the idea that the very nature of responsibility is impossible to understand outside of the figure of violence. This will result in a more refined formulation of what can be called "Patočka's challenge," which can be expressed in this way: if responsible selfhood is to be something *more* than an understanding of the duties, obligations, and commitments that make up the structure of a moral, social, or political *role*, if the acceptance of a responsible life is to be something more than being informed of and held accountable for the duties implicit in one's role—then it is only in our relation to the *disruption*, and not merely to the *continuity* of our existence that responsible being has its origin.

Yet Patočka's challenge, as will also be the case with Schmitt's, is deeply problematic. My purpose here is only to engage it in an attempt to understand what it may imply—both in its promise and danger. These reflections will be, in the end, inconclusive, though not dismissive of the seriousness of the question. Above all, they are offered in the spirit of the firm belief that in discussion and dialogue, in together grappling, in speech, with what inspires and threatens us, we can find the resources that will enable us to take responsibility for the question whether we have become the dupes of violence, and thus to navigate between the "too little" and the "too much" in a manner fully conscious of the seriousness of the problems of violence.

1 Schmitt's Challenge
(Clausewitz, Schmitt)

THE AMBIGUITY OF WAR AND POLITICS

It is sometimes the fate of writers that the breadth and theoretical sophistication of their thought is obscured by the literary legacy of an otherwise felicitous turn of phrase. This is certainly the case with Carl von Clausewitz, whose formula "war is the pursuit of politics by other means" is cited whenever the discussion turns to the origins and purposes of war. Yet despite the ubiquity of his formula, Clausewitz' monumental *On War*[1] rarely receives the reading it deserves, and above all the question of just what this famous phrase might mean is all too often insufficiently pursued—as if all the intentions of its author were as plain as day. Still, modern Clausewitz scholarship has managed to dispel much of the distortions and myths that have plagued a sufficient understanding of Clausewitz (the history of which alone is worthy of a separate study), and the result is that it has become difficult (once again) to ignore his relevance.[2] Above all, it has become clear that the assumption that Clausewitz is relevant only for discussions of large wars between armies organized by states, or only as an early proponent of total war who saw in the figure of the decisive battle the defining essence of military conflict, or as an outdated theorist who lay undue stress on the moral character or "genius" of commanders, must necessarily fall apart upon any attentive reading of *On War*. Clausewitz has a great deal to teach us both about the wars we have faced and those which we now face in the twenty-first century: small, irregular wars, including that whole range of so-called "asymmetrical conflicts" between traditional centers of power and shifting, non-territorial, ideologically or religiously driven factions.

For the purposes of these reflections, the sophisticated picture of Clausewitz' thought that has emerged during the decades since the end of the Second World War (beginning with the bold two-volume study of Raymond Aron, *Penser la guerre*[3]) is of interest to us, and for two reasons. First, anticipating the themes that will drive the discussion of Carl Schmitt later in this chapter, Clausewitz is important as a theorist who emphasizes the *violence* of war simultaneously with its *political character*. The second has to do with an interesting ambiguity that emerges in the course of

Clausewitz' attempt to articulate a coherent theory of war. The ambiguity has to do with the sense in which war, as an instrument of politics, in certain cases *fuses* with politics itself. This ambiguity has its proximate cause in Clausewitz' insistence that not only should we place the decision to go to war in the realm of the political, but that we also need to understand how the pursuit of war aims in the course of the conflict is internally determined by political factors. As we will see below, how it is that, from peace, we go to war, and likewise how, from war, we move towards a peace, involves for Clausewitz a complex relationship between motivations expressed by political decisions on the one hand, and the instrumental nature of military action on the other, a relationship that never allows us to fully abstract the one from the other when dealing with a concrete case. This means that, in those cases in which the policy and its instrument appear to fuse, the *necessity* of an apparently pure military reasoning in fact expresses the logic of an essentially *political* self-consciousness. I will argue below that, in the course of his argument, Clausewitz approaches, but does not articulate, the possibility that politics in these situations of fusion is deeply dependent on the violence of war, to the point at which violence is constitutive of political consciousness itself; or, in other words, the ambiguity of the instrumentality of war points towards the idea that violence can be seen as *existentially constitutive of the political*, instead of being limited to its instrumentality relative to an otherwise independently substantive political agency.

This ambiguity of the political instrumentality of war will provide us with a theoretical point of departure for our discussion of the concept of the political in the early writings of Carl Schmitt. As indicated already in the Introduction, Schmitt's discussion will be developed into a particularly clear and challenging form that the argument for the constitutive character of violence can take. Schmitt's challenge will, in effect, represent a striking, if also deeply problematic resolution of the Clausewitzian ambiguity of the political instrumentality of war. In contrast to Clausewitz, Schmitt will favor a radical development of the originary character of violence with respect to the political, and with that a radically different perspective on the assessment of the significance of war in human affairs.

CLAUSEWITZ: "INSTRUMENTAL" VS. "EXISTENTIAL" WAR

First let us consider a point of method. Clausewitz' theoretical efforts in *On War* should not be taken as a systematization or codification of a set of principles that, in one form or another, have been settled as unequivocally established in an empirical fashion. Although he is no stranger to historical scholarship,[4] Clausewitz does not begin *On War* with a summary of the history of warfare in order to adduce a set of principles or derive a system of laws. On the other hand, *On War* is not limited to exercises in philosophical construction (despite the apparent similarity to the structure of Kant's

exposition of his transcendental logic, with its progression from a "doctrine of elements" to the complexities of judgment in a "doctrine of principles"[5]), but is in fact consciously situated in a specific historical moment. This raises difficulties. Book One, which bears the title "On the Nature of War," pursues an abstract delimitation of the concept of war that is supplemented and modified by reflections on concrete experiences that draw directly from Clausewitz' service as a Prussian officer (see especially the seventh chapter, "On Friction in War"); the result is the distinct impression that the analysis ultimately depends on a common set of nineteenth century assumptions about what constitutes the phenomenon of war. One could perhaps point to this almost unavoidable impression as the inspiration behind modern attempts to demonstrate that modern wars must be, in some basic way, an exception to the Clausewitzian paradigm, at the very least due to the vast technological differences that separate the wars of the twentieth century (or the twenty-first, for that matter) from the wars of the early nineteenth century.[6]

Nevertheless, it should be stressed that Clausewitz proceeds in such a way that assumes the historical relativity of *any* serious discussion of war.[7] In fact, his real aim in *On War*, one could argue, is neither to provide a universal definition of war, nor to articulate the local lessons of a particular war. The aim of Clausewitz is more to reflect on the consequences of a particular experience in which war has uniquely revealed itself as *transitional* in character, thus as something intrinsically unstable as to its form. This reflects his historical situation, in that the form of warfare that emerged in Europe in the wake of the Wars of Austrian Succession represents for Clausewitz a fundamental modification of the basic character of war as it was understood prior to 1793, one comparable to the manner in which the initial formation of sovereign states led to a radical modification of medieval warfare. If Clausewitz struggles to articulate the question of war in abstract terms, it is in part because for him the key theoretical issue is not so much how to grasp the particularities of these modifications, as to grasp war in general as something that cannot be reduced to a set of technical algorithms that would be indifferent to the historical moment, above all when it is precisely a moment of transition.

This insight had direct practical implications during the long period when *On War* was being conceived and written. Clausewitz was a Prussian officer who, as a follower of Gerhard von Scharnhorst and August von Gneisenau during the politically complicated reform years of 1807–1809, insisted that the cataclysmic Prussian defeats in late 1806, which had culminated in the battle of Jena-Auerstädt (in which the young Clausewitz was himself taken prisoner by the French), could not ultimately be understood as a tactical failure to effectively employ principles of combat as so many instruments that should be as available to the Prussians as they were to the French.[8] The defeat was not, in other words, an academic question of *Kriegskunst*. Rather, the French Revolution itself, as the formation of new political relations that defined the French nation not only as a newly organized

political entity, but a newly organized fighting collectivity as well, had a significant impact on just what could be counted, on the side of the French, as "available means" to be deployed against the combined forces of Prussia and Russia. Thus, against the perspective of the conservative factions in the Prussian military class, the failure of Prussia and the success of France were for Clausewitz not the effects of a simple "military" miscalculation on the part of the Prussians, but had its origin in a *difference of political form* that led directly to a radicalization of the means of combat on the side of the French:

> The French had, with their revolutionary means, freed the old instrument of war from its old diplomatic and financial bonds; it now strode along with its raw violence, rolled forward with a terrible mass of forces, and one saw nothing but the wreckage of the old art of war on the one side and fantastic success on the other.[9]

The significance of Napoleon's revolutionary armies for Clausewitz lay in the idea that they represented a unique form of the political will of the people being brought to bear on the conduct of the war. With Napoleon, war was no longer simply the affair of princes and their military technicians, nor a simple question of the maneuvers of power between states in the mold of the *Kabinettenkriege* of the eighteenth century; now the reality of war, and with that the challenges of war, is shaped by the potential power that has been brought to bear by the revolutionary mobilization of a nation into full participation in combat. To be sure, this participatory element does not at all imply for Clausewitz the democratization of war; and in his mature position, developed in the 1820's and articulated in Books One and Eight of *On War*, the trinity of *Volk*, *Feldherrn* and *Regierung* (people, commander, and regime) does not at all imply equal weight among the three. Clausewitz instead remains in decisive ways politically conservative, in that for him the political decision ultimately remains in the hands of the monarch or government, and the conduct and fortunes of war are ultimately reflections of the intelligence and capabilities of the generals. In the Napoleonic era war had indeed become more of a mass phenomenon than it had ever been before, but it remained for Clausewitz highly mediated. But still, this represents a conservatism of a new type, in that it recognizes that the shape of war has been irrevocably transformed with the introduction of the "people" as a mass political phenomenon, and that the question of the involvement of the citizen constitutes a key element of the situation that conditions both the power and fortunes of the sovereign, as well as the opportunities and tactics of the generals.

Clausewitz likens the interaction of *people*, *commander*, and *regime* to the mutual influence and competition of three magnets that, together, suspend war between them as an object held in their intertwined grasp of force.[10] What Napoleon really represents is a moment in the development of

the modern state in which these three sources of repulsion and attraction, so to speak, come into their own as distinct principles. This bears directly on the role of violence in war, as the description of what Clausewitz calls "this paradoxical trinity" makes clear:

> As a total phenomenon its dominant tendencies always make war a paradoxical trinity—composed of primordial violence, hatred, and enmity, which are to be regarded as a blind natural force; of the play of chance and probability within which the creative spirit is free to roam; and of its element of subordination, as an instrument of policy, which makes it subject to reason alone.[11]

The people thus represent the "blind natural force" of "violence, hatred, and enmity," poised in magnetic tension between the commander as the artist of play in the field of chance and the regime as the subordination or instrumentalization of war in the determination of purpose, or politics in the specific sense of "policy." What is of importance for our purposes here is how the development, or calibration of this constellation of influences in the Napoleonic wars results, for Clausewitz, in the increased potential for *escalation* in war. Clausewitz' perspective suggests that the intensification of citizen involvement in war, with its distinct forms of mass violence and hatred, coupled with the political potential for articulating the crisis of war in terms of the existence of the state, establishes the conditions under which escalation can overcome other, countervailing motivations towards moderation (*Mäßigung*). It is important to stress that in Clausewitz it is not simply because of an unleashing of an imputed violence and boundless irrational hatred of the "people" that such escalation becomes possible; the other two factors are equally important, whether we consider the commander's utilization of mass skirmishing on a tactical level, or the policies pursued by Napoleon in his pursuit of Empire and Revolution on a strategic and political level. The result is that all the old molds that had once prevented the free play, so to speak, of these three magnets have been broken; warfare after Napoleon is, through a peculiar necessity of the historical development of modern states, marked by a more robust tendency towards the escalation or intensification of war.[12] This is precisely the historical circumstance that motivates us, Clausewitz argues, to reflect on the idea of a "pure" or "absolute" war, or war that seems to have overcome every boundary to the "full discharge" of violence and achieved a unique state of perfection:

> This is its usual appearance [namely, war mediated by "real" forces of inertia or opposition], and one might wonder whether there is any truth at all in our concept of the absolute character of war were it not for the fact that with our own eyes we have seen warfare achieve this state of absolute perfection. After the short prelude of the French Revolution, Bonaparte brought it swiftly and ruthlessly to that point. War, in his

hands, was waged without respite until the enemy succumbed, and the counterblows were struck with almost equal energy. Surely it is both natural and inescapable that this phenomenon should cause us to turn again to the pure concept of war with all its rigorous implications.[13]

This description of the phenomenon of escalation as arising from the complexity of the relation between people, commander, and regime allows us to begin to formulate the ambiguity of the instrumental character of war in Clausewitz outlined at the beginning of this chapter.

Towards this end, let us begin by emphasizing two aspects of Clausewitz' analysis. The first is something we have already alluded to: Clausewitz' insistence on the polysemic nature of the relative intensity of the conflict. Escalation, and with that the movement of the event of war in general, is not something that is determined by any one of the "magnetic poles" shaping the situation. The point of Clausewitz' famous thesis that war is an instrument of policy is to emphasize the dependency of war on something outside of itself for its logic, and more, that this dependency is constituted in a complex field of influence defined by the trinity of people, commander, and regime. The point is not, therefore, to argue for a simple identity between war and policy; for any logic of policy will always result from the tension with the other forces that have war in their grasp as well. More, the logic articulated in policy, even as it provides a logic "for" war, will remain in tension with war itself, not only because of the other two forces (the people and the commander in the field), but also because of the nature of the object itself suspended in the center of this complex field of force. Clausewitz employs an illuminating metaphor for describing this tension: war, he says, has its own *grammar* (forms that fix the specific gestures of violence into recognizable patterns, such as "attack," "defense," "maneuver," and which are articulated in the art of command), but it does not have its *own logic*. What he has in mind here is the fact that the course of war from disruption to a new peace is not determined by the art of war, by its grammar, but by a logic that is not its own. War is always referred to something outside of itself in order to provide its unity of sense, specifically the purpose behind forcing an exception to peace in order to regain peace in a new form, and it is precisely this idea of a *unity of purpose*, defined by a new form of peace, that provides the "whole" in which war is rational.[14]

Yet Clausewitz' point is in fact stronger than this, which brings us to the second aspect of his analysis that I wish to stress. Namely, Clausewitz wants to argue that, even when war presses itself upon us, when it seems as if there could not possibly be any other choice than the escalation of violence, when all "politics," narrowly construed as the weighing of choices against other choices, seems to disappear in the pressing necessity of an overwhelming emergency—*even here* the political is present, even here the grammar of defense and attack never usurps the function of policy to provide for the logic of the war. The tension between grammar and logic

remains: war is never a self-starting, self-developing, self-concluding phenomenon. The basic premise of this argument is articulated succinctly in the following passage from the *Verstreute kleine Schriften*:

> We should thus not be led astray into thinking of war as a mere act of violence and destruction, and derive with logical consistency out of this simple concept a string of consequences that have nothing more to do with the phenomena of the real world. We must instead come back to war as a political act that is not in itself completely determined by its own law, a true political instrument that does not itself act but is directed by a hand. This hand is policy [*die Politik*].[15]

This is in its essentials a basic thesis that Clausewitz develops in Book I of *On War.* However, we again come up against the peculiar abstractness of the latter text, where the thesis is presented as the result of a thought experiment that actually begins with a representation of war that is at first *abstracted* from politics.[16] This abstraction yields a "pure" concept of war, one that takes as its point of departure the simplest model of a contest between two parties (*Zweikampf*). And it is important to note that it is in this abstract formulation that *violence* appears in a specifically structural function, and it is in this abstract context (and for Clausewitz *only* in this abstract context) that violence can be called upon to *define* war. Here is the definition: "War is [thus] an act of force [*Gewalt*] to compel our enemy to do our will."[17] The "logic" of this model—and here we should emphasize Clausewitz' warning that this logic is not the logic of the matter, but only that of concepts in abstraction from the real world in which the unfolding of war always stops well short of manifesting any equivalence with this abstract pattern—is precisely *the logic of escalation*, or the movement towards the extreme. We compel our opponent through a violence that tends towards the extreme, or brings the extreme into play. Clausewitz goes on to delimit the horizon of escalation by defining it in terms of three axes in accordance with which three extremities are triangulated towards which escalation unfolds: (1) the extreme of violence itself; (2) the extreme of the total defeat of the enemy; and finally (3) the extreme represented by the total commitment of all available resources.[18]

In the abstract, the question of compulsion for Clausewitz in effect defines the question of peace: for the compulsion in question is precisely the act of forcing the will of another to accept those conditions under which peace is going to be re-established. This is precisely an abstract delimitation of the role of the political, for politics for Clausewitz expresses not only the power to make war but equally, and perhaps more importantly, the power *to make peace*. However, as we have already seen, this "logic" cannot be simply accepted as a logic of the matter, even if it is not irrelevant. On the one hand, this model that maps out the space of extremities in which agents pursue war and peace remains only an abstract regularity that may

close a thought, but it does not govern the real world (" [. . .] so würde ein solcher Federstrich ein bloßes Büchergesetz sein und keines für die wirkliche Welt"[19]). On the other hand, again in appreciation of the significance of the Napoleonic transformation of war, it must be taken into account, for however abstract, it allows for a marking off of the revolutionary or potential for extremes of the style of warfare that emerged in Clausewitz' Europe in the wake of the French Revolution. It defines, in short, the ideal limit of how far policy can go in war in its pursuit of a politically projected peace.

This leads to the idea that the more radicalized the politics behind the drive to war, or the more revolutionary (or perhaps counter-revolutionary) the motives that define the political ends of the conflict, then the more war potentially approximates this abstract *Gestalt* of a pure instrumental violence. The more purpose is found in escalation, the closer the abstract possibilities of the extreme map onto the concrete logic of the political end. And it is with this idea of the real possibility of an approximation of the two, of real historical circumstances that can drive real war towards absolute war, that one can begin to catch sight of an important ambiguity that lies implicit already in Clausewitz' abstract model. For could we not ask: what sense does it make to think of the "logic of escalation" that Clausewitz outlines in terms of a *political* logic? Why could it not be precisely a question of a purely *instrumental* logic, despite the fact that Clausewitz denies such a logic exists in the passage quoted above? And what of a third possibility, namely that the logic of escalation could, in some sense, prove to be *both*—that is, the logic of a proper *politics* that nevertheless chooses to define itself in accordance with the grammar of *war*, or the escalation towards the extreme?[20]

Clausewitz himself does not call attention to this ambiguity, but it nevertheless comes into view in the course of his argument. It comes into view when one realizes that not only is it the case that the more radicalized the politics, the more extreme the instrument, but also that the more the instrument is employed to its extreme, the *less political* this employment appears to be—or at least "political" in Clausewitz's sense of a rationally articulated policy. Namely, the more a radicalized politics embraces the extremes of war, the more war loses its purely instrumental face, or sense of being governed by a policy that defines it from outside the grammar that forms the basic structural lines of the momentum of escalation. This problem is expressed poignantly by Clausewitz in the following lines from the passage in the *Verstreute kleine Schriften* that we began citing above:

> The more politics involves profound interests encompassing the whole and its existence, the more the question of being and non-being is posed on both sides, then the more politics is confused with hostility, the more the former leads to the latter, the more war becomes simple, the more it has to do with the mere concept of violence and destruction, the more it corresponds to all of the requirements that one can develop

logically from the concept, the more all of its elements have the coherence of a *necessity*. Such a war appears wholly *unpolitical*, and for that reason one has taken it to be the norm [*Normalkrieg*].[21]

War, normally determined by political interest, appears unpolitical precisely when it is pursued for the sake of an existential interest. The ambiguity in question comes into sharper relief if we go on to ask a question that Clausewitz does not ask, and which will bear directly on the discussion of Schmitt below: namely, could this *unpolitical appearance* of war nevertheless have a distinctly *political origin*, or better: could the apparent unpolitical character of the necessity of the situation of war have its origin in a need, even a dependency, of politics on having just such an appearance? If so, then an essential aspect of the "instrumentality" of war would be, in a convoluted but not altogether unexpected sense, the very "existential" character of the political interest itself—one that would find useful, even crucially important, the illusion that we are not fighting for political ends but for our very existence, that war is the *suspension* of politics which unfolds in accordance with a strict logic of *necessity*. Policy is not mere policy, but (in such wars) hardened by an inner steel of necessity that turns on the question of the very existence of the polity. What would be the nature of such a dependency? Would it not have to imply a peculiar reversal—namely, where the political would find, perhaps not its logic, but its necessity in something outside of itself, namely in its assumption of the task of war?

Yet Clausewitz effectively evades this question and, as it were, refuses to see this ambiguity. He does not entertain the idea of an instrumental violence that does not universally submit to the principle of its subordination to policy, and with that opens the way to asking whether in war there may be a political motivation to appear unpolitical. He is adamant that the unpolitical appearance of war in extreme cases is *only* an appearance, a kind of optical illusion generated by the intensity of war—it involves not so much the tendency for an instrument to appear somehow independent of the will that employs it (the "hand of politics"), as it does the inevitable distortion that arises from the escalation of violence itself. Clausewitz' point will always be that the tendency towards escalation, towards the assumption of an ever increasing violence approaching the outer limit of the annihilation of the enemy, does not represent a difference in kind with respect to the pursuit of other political interests, but is ultimately governed by the same principles.[22]

Let us look closer at what this entails. The evasion here on the part of Clausewitz is not so simple; above all one should be cautious in taking the notion of "instrumentality" at issue here for granted. For Clausewitz, it is not as if politics amounts to a set of decisions that simply set the war making potential of a polity into motion as an otherwise independently functioning instrumental complex—as if the function of the politician in

war were simply to set the dogs loose on the field, where all subsequent decisions become purely military and not political. Clausewitz has a more organic conception of the relation between politics and war even if, on the other hand, he is working with a rather limited notion of politics, for what he usually has in mind is just the military and diplomatic policies pursued by regimes, despite some suggestive passages that point to something potentially more theoretically complex.[23] Clausewitz wants to argue that the pursuit of the conduct of the war always remains a *question of policy*; and the dynamic he has in view always holds open potential political revision of the aims of the war when assessing the situation from out of an interest for peace. This is the case even when it seems that peace is impossible unless it takes the form of a victory defined by one (or all) of the extremes, or when all calculation seems to have been absorbed into the momentum of the intensification of violence towards that end ("the total defeat of the enemy"). Thus even where violence seems to take the place of policy, there is for Clausewitz *at most* a peculiar fusion of the two, in which the momentum of escalation represents ultimately the exercise of a *unity of decision.*

The relation between the political and the instrument of violence in Clausewitz is thus more subtle than it may seem; more, it is powerful enough to approach an answer to the question of the dependency of the political on violence, despite his evasion of the ambiguity suggested above. This can be elucidated by considering Clausewitz' reflections in *On War* on what genuinely amounts to the "beginning" of a war. Clausewitz defends the peculiar thesis that a war proper does not begin with an *attack*, but with a *defense.* The idea is that defense is on the one hand a decision, and with that a posture that has a political character; but it is also a decision that is coextensive or fused with an act of war itself, one that in an important sense constitutes the reality of the decision to defend. The reality of the decision to defend is thus uniquely summed up in an act of violence; it is a violence that is, so to speak, looking for a fight—which is not the case in attack, for in principle the attacker could achieve his end even if there were no fight at all.[24] It is thus in defense that the state uniquely commits itself to the fight, and more, *holds itself to it,* immediately inviting an escalation, refusing a forced peace in the name of war. The partitions of Poland-Lithuania in the late eighteenth century, for example, involved an attack, a compulsion of the will with a force of arms; but it failed to become a war in Clausewitz' "philosophical" sense when resistance failed to lead to an escalation of violence by overcoming countervailing political tendencies suing for peace at the cost of Commonwealth territory. Defense is the beginning of war in that it fashions (or, as it may be, fails to crystallize) what Clausewitz would describe as the *purpose* for the war, which again is always in its essence political—policy comes into being at all only in its capacity to define the purpose *ad bellum*, which then serves as the ground for the definition of the specific aims pursued *in bellum*.[25]

On the one hand, the point is to again argue that the *force of the situation*—the demands of the moment in the emergency of being attacked—is dependent upon policy, here that of the decision to engage in defensive violence, in order to take the specific form of a "war." Thus to appeal to the force of the situation itself, shorn of any political principle, would for Clausewitz distort the reality, casting the very look of our decisions into something that they are not, namely into examples of acts that spring fully formed from necessity and compulsion. On the other hand, there are cases, for example in the situation of being faced with an attack and the pressing political crisis it represents, where political agency and war seem to have a common origin, in that the political subject itself makes its choices in the face of the possibility of its existential negation.

Clausewitz undoubtedly offers a very nuanced description of the pressures that shape political activity in times of war, and his aim is to assess such pressures in light of the fact that they often tend to lead to both the potential misunderstanding of the nature of war on a theoretical level but, more importantly, to misunderstanding and miscalculation in the actual conduct of war itself. Clausewitz is endlessly fascinated by how the pursuit of military and political objectives can be frustrated, impeded, bogged down, delayed, interrupted, and generally bent out of shape, both temporally and spatially, by the contingencies that make up the actual event of war—phenomena he ranges under the general description of "friction." The question posed above—namely, whether or not one could discern in the fusion of policy and instrumental violence in the extremity of conflict an ambiguity with respect to the nature of policy or political decision itself—is an attempt to show how these reflections can perhaps be extended. For just what the means/ends relationship amounts to in Clausewitz' analysis (that is, just what it means that war is a means employed for political ends) becomes difficult to ascertain at that moment when one recognizes that the instrumentality embodied by war has its origin in the various shapes, so to speak, that political agency assumes in order to be able to choose war or peace, defense or capitulation, existence or annihilation.

Another way to express this point is to again recall Clausewitz' argument that the Napoleonic experience had initiated a new era of radical warfare, where warfare more clearly than before is an expression of the capacity of a political community to instrumentalize the very form of its organization and life for combat, where *Kriegskunst* draws equally from the destructive capacity of mass participation as it does from the political vision of the regime and the intelligence of its commanders. This is again perhaps most poignantly articulated in Clausewitz' attempt to assign a philosophical precedence to defense over attack. For the suggestion is that war does not begin simply when a polity decides to risk violence in the pursuit of a particular goal; war begins, rather, when the attacked polity *discovers what it is*—that it is a form of association capable of defending itself from attack, and that it chooses itself precisely in the form of its defense.

The reading of Clausewitz suggested here is that this ambiguity is an extension of the insight, gained from the experience of the Napoleonic wars, that *who we are* determines to a great extent *how we fight*, or even whether *we fight at all*. This ambiguity of the instrumentality of war is also an ambiguity with respect to the political itself. War for Clausewitz is not simply a given, available means adopted by a political subject, but is uniquely expressive of the political condition of that subject itself: war from this perspective is the complex result of the force of a people coming together in a certain situation of threat, under the mutual influence of both the struggle of individuals to act and a leadership to define action and event in terms of a unity of meaning. Thus war is not simply a means to a given end projected by the political subject, but war is also a "means" for political subjectivity as such, in the sense of a constitutive medium of its realization: not to be able to fight a war in the face of an attack, or not being able to discover that possibility within itself, is tantamount to ceasing to exist as a polity. Clausewitz could perhaps agree with the basic gesture of this thesis, even if its deeper ambiguity—above all the possibility that the political *needs* the appearance of war as "unpolitical," that the logic of war is not determined politically but vice versa, the logic of politics is fixed by a dependency on the necessity of war—is something that he would not.

For our purposes it is enough to make the suggestion that *On War* can be read as an important resource for bringing the idea of the *instrumentality* of war together with that of the *existentiality* of war into a common theoretical framework. This framework is defined by Clausewitz' fundamental point that "real" war, wars fought in the real world by real states and their subjects, is not something that can be defined or reduced to a logic of concepts, even if concepts are indispensable for its theoretical elaboration. Both the instrumentality of war and its existential character have to be situated within the concrete situation of war; that is, the unity of the sense of the whole that circumscribes both must be discerned in the political and social realities in which war and politics are ultimately embedded. Thus if the fundamental problem of a theory of the whole of war, of war taken as a concrete unity, is to understand how and why it is that we move from peace to war and then back to a modified peace, then we cannot, ultimately, eliminate either the sense of the pure instrumentality of war, nor its pure existentiality; for in fact, *both* play a role for Clausewitz in the determination of how and why we fight. The ambiguity thus remains in *On War*, haunting, as it were, Clausewitz' presentation in which he seeks ways to overemphasize the instrumental aspect of war, and with that to defend the ultimate preeminence of policy.

The possibility that this ambiguity of war and politics is irremovable, and that Clausewitz is too sophisticated a theoretician not to be at least potentially open to its nuances, is a fruitful point of departure for articulating Schmitt's challenge with respect to the constitutive character of violence. In turning to Schmitt, the attempt will be to re-open the question

of the dependency of the political on violence. For Clausewitz, pure violence, a real theme only when we abstract from the political, is hopelessly empty, lacking in concreteness; we need to turn elsewhere to understand the real connection of war and politics. Schmitt, however, will argue that the political, when we abstract it from violence, is equally obscured, rendered merely conceptual and with that empty. For him, we must look to violence to understand the connection of war and politics. It is to Schmitt's reversal of the conception of the theoretical role of violence that fosters the Clausewitzean ambiguity that we will now turn.

THE CONCEPT OF THE POLITICAL

Let us begin by recalling some of the salient features of Schmitt's line of reflection in the opening sections of *The Concept of the Political* (1932).[26] His first argument is that any theory of the state presupposes a conception of the political. Schmitt's purpose is to fix a sense of the political in such a way that sets it apart from the question of the nature of the state, in order to then turn back to clarify the political nature of the state. The reason this is necessary has to do with an idea that can already be found entertained in Clausewitz: the situation in which any state, as a concentration of power, exists and operates is not something static, but is a function of the social resources of power that shape the situation. Schmitt, however, insists that this dependency of state power on the social must be recognized as an *obscuring factor*, one that threatens the visibility of the properly *political* nature of the state. "The equation state = politics becomes erroneous and deceptive at exactly the moment when state and society penetrate each other."[27] That is, the more the state manifests itself in the form of one social grouping among others, or the more it reflects the society as a whole, the more the sense of the political becomes replaced or usurped by structures that define membership in a social grouping. This for Schmitt represents an obfuscation of the political. Thus Schmitt begins his analysis not by opposing the concept of the state to the concept of the political, but by opposing the conception of a socially saturated state with the problem of a more original conception of the political. The theoretical centrality of the state, nevertheless, remains; just as for Clausewitz, so here too the reflection on the nature of political decision is historically and theoretically determined by the emergence of the phenomenon of the modern state. The general theoretical problem of the state is, however, suspended in the first lines of *The Concept of the Political*, in order to bring the political proper into view.

The political for Schmitt is characteristic of a specific modality of human grouping. Central to his thesis is the independence of the concept of the political from conceptual domains in which this modality is not explicitly in view. What defines the character of a political human grouping for Schmitt is conceptually independent from moral, economic, religious, aesthetic, or any

other socio-cultural determinations of human groups. Thus when Schmitt first defines the political in terms of the antithesis of *friend* and *enemy*, his chief concern is to frustrate the reflex of conceiving this opposition in terms of other conceptual distinctions that we use to define the horizon of our understanding of ourselves and our world, such as the distinctions between *good* and *evil*, *profitable* and *unprofitable*, *beautiful* and *ugly*, and the like. None of these oppositions are of any use in revealing the basis for a friend/enemy grouping, or of grasping its specific character. Nor is it the case, Schmitt argues, that any other objective factors of distinction that sets one group apart from another are able to capture what is essential to the friend/enemy distinction, namely that aspect of *intensity* and *separation* that lies at the heart of an opposition between two properly political entities:

> The distinction of friend and enemy denotes the utmost degree of intensity of a union or separation, of an association or disassociation. It can exist theoretically and practically, without having simultaneously to draw upon all those moral, aesthetic, economic, or other distinctions. The political enemy need not be morally evil or aesthetically ugly; he need not appear as an economic competitor, and it may even be advantageous to engage with him in business transactions. But he is, nevertheless, the other, the stranger; and it is sufficient for his nature that he is, in a specially intense way, existentially something different and alien, so that in the extreme case conflicts with him are possible.[28]

The political is thus not equivalent to an antagonism between groupings; nor is any given social conflict, say a dispute driven by economic interests or even a struggle for control over instruments of power (including the state itself) *ipso facto* something "political" by nature. The political is defined instead by an extremity; not all struggles and conflicts are necessarily related to the possibility of the "extreme case." If an antagonism between groups falls short of a relation to the extreme case, then it falls short of the political. For example, if internal antagonisms of the state disrupt the stance or posture of the polity as a whole with respect to the extreme case, and with that the identification of the enemy, then this amounts to a disruption or failure of the political. Likewise, if internal antagonisms do not crystallize into groupings in accordance with the extreme case, but remain so to speak merely antagonistic, then the political entity as such fails to materialize. This leads Schmitt to distinguish "politics" from "the political," insofar as the former constitute the terms and conditions of a struggle among "parties" at the expense of the expression of the political, which determines the conditions for the unity of a state: "The equation politics = party politics is possible whenever antagonisms among domestic political parties succeed in weakening the all-embracing political unit, the state."[29] That is, if the state fails to stand above internal tensions, or if none of the parties involved with such tensions are able to rise to the level of extremity represented by

the friend/enemy grouping (and are thus capable of waging civil war), then there is effectively no "political entity" in Schmitt's sense. The "state" then becomes merely the arena for competing party interests, and nothing more.

In Schmitt's essay, there are two fundamental elements to the political that set it conceptually apart from other axes of opposition that define social groupings. The first is a striking reliance on the figure of violence or, specifically, violence in the form of *combat*. On Schmitt's account, the specifically political separation and distance of the enemy emerges only in a horizon defined by the possibility of combat, "[f]or to the enemy concept belongs the ever present possibility of combat."[30] Let us look closer at the concept of enemy that is being proposed here.

The argument is that, in order to understand what "enemy" means, nothing more needs to be involved beyond the scope of the certainty that another is a threat that we ourselves threaten, and that this threat immediately involves on both sides the possibility of violent death: "The friend, enemy, and combat concepts receive their real meaning precisely because they refer to the real possibility of physical killing. War follows from enmity. War is the existential negation of the enemy."[31]

Violent death thus lies at the heart of any "real" determination of friend and enemy; or more specifically, violent death in the form of a *present possibility*. What is meant here, however, is not an ordinary kind of death, or even violent death at the hands of another. The threat that the Other poses, and which is at the origin of the friend/enemy distinction, is founded on the possibility of the Other embodying the threat of death in a very specific form: the Other does not threaten us with violence because we are alive, but because the way that we live, and the way that the other lives, are inextricably tied to the possibility of killing. Therein lies the difference between Schmitt's irreducibility of the existential threat embodied in the enemy and Hobbes' state of nature as a *status belli*: for Hobbes, what defines natural existence is the threat that we are to each other, which means a threat that lies at the heart of our existence *as individuals*;[32] for Schmitt, the threat lies in the possibility of the formation of fighting *collectivities*, thus with the possibility of a particular modality of *cohesive force* that lends such collectivities a specific existential profile an individual could never have. As Leo Strauss points out in his remarks to Schmitt's essay, this in turn defines the difference between Hobbes' liberal polemic against the state of nature (which argues that the *status belli* is essentially impossible for individuals seeking self-preservation) and Schmitt's anti-liberal polemic (that the state of nature is not only possible, but is the realization of a particularly intense modality of human grouping). We will return to this important point of Strauss' below.

Even as Schmitt plays on an implicit distinction between "life" and "way of life," which seems to suggest a potential point of departure for understanding why some groups go to war and not others (perhaps it lies in their "ways of life," say democratic states as opposed to non-democratic), he nevertheless stresses that this threat is irreducible to whatever categories we may use to understand just how it is that we live. This argument is difficult

to follow, especially given the fact that Schmitt admits that, in the formation of a friend/enemy grouping, a given group may draw on the conceptual vocabulary of morality, economics, and other domains in order to bring itself into sharp definition against its enemy. That the political is irreducible to these domains does not mean that it does not enter into relation with them, even employ them as resources for its own self-assertion. Schmitt's point is that the specifically *political* character of a grouping, even if a specific "way of life" is entailed in order to be threatened in a *particular way*, is irreducible to any conceptual scheme that seeks to move outside of the horizon of the existential character of the possible extreme case. We may be beautiful, moral people, and find ourselves immediately drawn to talk about our beauty and morality (or our freedom, Pericles would add) in order to explain what it is that the enemy threatens; but that does not mean that the other is an enemy simply by virtue of being a threat to our beauty or to our morality. Any algorithm that would try to calculate the potential for conflict by measuring such differences of kind would fail utterly to express the political. For this reason, the political for Schmitt cannot be a program; above all it cannot be understood as the pursuit of war against those who are opposed to us for any other reason (e.g., because they are ugly instead of beautiful, evil instead of good) than the existential nature of the threat of collective violence alone. War against the enemy is a uniquely *existential* possibility, one that *independently* articulates the separateness and intensity that defines the political.

This is the negative argument. The positive argument is that *what it is* for the other than us to be against us, what it is to have an enemy, only really becomes evident at the very moment of combat, when violent death takes the form of the collective destruction of human life. Yet the real *force* that the friend/enemy opposition possesses to shape human affairs does not materialize in the event of combat (when friends and enemies are killing one another), but only in the awareness of its *possibility*. This is the second fundamental aspect of the political that lies at the core of Schmitt's argument, and which supplements in an essential manner the emphasis on combat.

The second point is a subtle one. Compare the following two passages from *The Concept of the Political*:

> War is neither the aim nor the purpose nor even the very content of politics. But as an ever present possibility it is the leading presupposition which determines in a characteristic way human action and thinking and thereby creates a specifically political behavior.[33]
>
> [. . .]
>
> War is still today the most extreme possibility. One can say that the exceptional case has an especially decisive meaning which exposes the core of the matter. For only in real combat is revealed the most extreme consequence of the political grouping of friend and enemy. From this most extreme possibility human life derives its specifically political tension.[34]

The tension characteristic of political relations is for Schmitt not the contingent effect of an objective misalignment of interests, the ultimate origins of which can be traced to insights individuals or groups may have had that can be expressed in terms of the conceptual vocabulary commonly used to understand what is important. The tension of the political is not, to recall our discussion of Clausewitz above, a function of the rational coherence of policy, even if such policy were to articulate an attempt to compel another to submit to one's will. Instead, Schmitt's argument is that political tension has its origin in the awareness of the existential significance implied by the possibility of combat, and its truth is ultimately revealed only in actual combat.

The point is subtle because, to repeat, the essence of the political does not lie in combat as such, as a concrete event; this means that it is not the case that an entity is political only to the extent to which it fights actual wars. As Strauss points out in his comments on Schmitt's essay, the point is, *mutatis mutandis*, Hobbes' as well, and he cites Chapter xiii of *Leviathan*: "[. . .] the nature of war consisteth *not in actual fighting*, but in the known *disposition* thereto [. . .]"[35] The existential characteristic in question does not lie in the act of violence taken as a fulfilled realization, but rather in the capacity of a group to give weight to such an event precisely in the form of its possibility. For this reason, the essence of the political takes explicitly the form of a decision, one that both *reveals* the possibility and *determines* whether or not the possibility requires action, or its actualization. "What always matters is the possibility of the extreme case taking place, the real war, and the decision whether this situation has or has not arrived."[36]

On the one hand, it is clear that for Schmitt war belongs to the essence of the political, insofar as combat uniquely defines the origin of the friend/enemy distinction; yet on the other hand, it is equally clear that Schmitt's argument does not amount to "militarism," if by that one means that there is no meaningful distinction between the pursuit of politics and the pursuit of war, or that the difference between the general's pursuit of military objectives and the politician's pursuit of political aims are one and the same in kind. Schmitt was as little a militarist in this cheap sense as was Clausewitz. Yet, unlike Clausewitz, Schmitt does not strive to reduce war to the status of a mere instrument of politics; nor, in a general sense, is there a correlate in Schmitt to the ambiguity that we discerned above in Clausewitz with respect to the distinction between "existential" and "instrumental" aspects of the relation between politics and war.

Let us look at this more closely. Schmitt evades the ambiguity, to the extent that he posits a constitutive violence that is manifest in the relation of the political entity to the possibility of battle. The political flows from violence, not from its actuality, but from its possibility. The existential ground that founds the political is manifest in the form of a tension that arises in the awareness of the possibility of violence. This means that, contra Clausewitz, there is in fact an original dependence of the political

on war, one that is more original than any instrumentalization of violence; the possibility of war frames the very existential horizon of the political itself, a horizon that any "policy," indeed any "state," presupposes. More specifically, for Schmitt the political presupposes this consciousness of the possibility of war in order to make precisely the distinction between friend and enemy:

> The political does not reside in the battle itself, which possesses its own technical, psychological, and military laws, but in the mode of behavior which is determined by the possibility, by clearly evaluating the concrete situation and thereby being able to distinguish correctly the real friend from the real enemy.[37]

In effect, what decisively separates Schmitt from Clausewitz is a fundamentally different conception of *peace*. For Schmitt, the specifically political sense of peace is not simply the absence of war, but takes form in the decision that the exception does not hold, all the while retaining the affirmation of the possibility of the extreme case to be decided. Such a peace is only possible as political, that is, only in the form of the decision between friend and enemy; it has no other real content that would ensure a genuine distance from the possible event of war. But the opposite is also true: the political itself can reside only in the decision about peace or war. The point is radical: the political entity for Schmitt exists *only* as the entity that decides, and in *no other form*. "If such an entity exists at all, it is always the decisive entity, and it is sovereign in the sense that the decision about the critical situation, even if it is the exception, must always necessarily reside there."[38] This means that the illumination of the possibility of combat, of killing, in the form of the political is not something that is "invested" in some entity as a right, or even a function. It makes no sense to ask: "who decides?" Were it to make sense to ask such a question in a given situation, then that would mean that the political entity would not exist. The decision and with that the right to decide, to be that which stands as the decision, is crystallized in the form of a decisive entity as such. "It either exists or does not exist. If it exists, it is the supreme, that is, the decisive case, the authoritative entity."[39]

The reasoning is clearly circular, but it is not at all clear that this circularity is vicious to Schmitt's argument. He does want to argue that the political entity has "power," but its power implies something very different than what we mean when we speak of the power of a social force, or the influence an organization or society can have on the behavior of its members. The existential character of the political decision renders it impenetrable to the logic of any other coherence of life; thus the political decision cannot be replaced by any other coherence or cohesiveness that can be afforded by a social grouping as such. Its power is fundamentally opaque, and the circle of decision/existence of the authoritative entity is an

expression of this opacity. The power of the political entity, or the state qua political entity, is in this way unique, in that it operates fully outside of the scope of "politics" understood as a competition of partial interests. This means in turn that the power of the political entity for Schmitt is also in an important sense "unpolitical," a kind of non-politics; it rises to a level that both transcends politics and remains opaque to it, a status fully consonant with the existential seriousness of war:

> The state as the decisive political entity possesses an enormous power: the possibility of waging war and thereby politically disposing of the lives of men. The jus belli contains such a disposition. It implies a double possibility: the right to demand from its own members the readiness to die and unhesitatingly to kill enemies.[40]

This *jus belli* must be understood as fundamentally different in kind to any normative or moral significance that would define one's membership in a group. It is clear from this that the type of entity Schmitt has in view is fundamentally different from any kind of "totalitarian" grouping, if by totalitarian one understands the development of the capacity of the state to control members of society through instruments of violence, such as police and gulag, or through social pressure and propaganda. Likewise, if one understands by "totalitarian" the exercise of state power towards the end of absorbing all domains of human relations and activities into its sphere of influence, then clearly this is not what Schmitt has in view. The political concept of "friend" is not descriptive of a kind of social or political norm that would govern the collective in accordance with this or that form of organization. It is *existential only*: "War, the readiness of combatants to die, the physical killing of human beings who belong on the side of the enemy—all this has no normative meaning, but an existential meaning only, particularly in a real combat situation with a real enemy."[41] Schmitt's argument here is not all that consistent, for in the end the concept of "friend" is by no means normatively empty. In fact, the classical double determination (emphasized by Hobbes) of the political entity in terms of *protection* and *obedience* follows directly from the logic of the specifically existential character of the distinction between friend and enemy.

The principal point is that, for Schmitt, these two elements—the extreme case of the possibility of combat, and its decision—are co-constitutive, in the manner already indicated. The decision is actual only as the realization of the extreme case, and the extreme case receives its meaning only from the decision. Thus war, the immediate demand to sacrifice and to kill, cannot for Schmitt meaningfully take any other form than the decision that brings the political entity into existence, nor can the decision take any other form than an engagement with the possibility of the extreme case. There can be no other *sense* for war than its existential sense. This tightly circumscribes the scope of its justification:

> There exists no rational purpose, no norm no matter how true, no program no matter how exemplary, no social ideal no matter how beautiful, no legitimacy nor legality which could justify men in killing each other for this reason. If such physical destruction of human life is not motivated by an existential threat to one's own way of life, then it cannot be justified. Just as little can war be justified by ethical and juristic norms. If there really are enemies in the existential sense as meant here, then it is justified, but only politically, to expel and fight them physically.[42]

The power of the political entity, or more specifically its *jus* (*ad*) *bellum*, is thus *sui generis* for Schmitt. In this sense Schmitt's essay represents an important contribution to an existential conception of war, and it stands out as a sophisticated and consistent rejection of the Clausewitzean option of emphasizing its political instrumentality. The political does not relate to war by way of the horizon of the instrumentality of the latter, but rather through a decision that fixes, in temporal terms, the relation of the political entity to the reality of war as the violent confrontation with the enemy. The political draws its being from a possible violence that, across the tension of a present possibility, gives relations their specifically political tension; and it is as such a tension that the political entity, the state, can be said to wield "power" as well as *jus belli*.

THE AFFIRMATION OF THE POLITICAL

Yet given precisely its unique existential origin, the power of the political entity is not unambiguously in *force*. Its presence in the form of states is, Schmitt argues, disrupted by other formations of power that are explicitly social. For from Schmitt's perspective, the state, in its being identified with society, does not thereby cease to be a concentration of power. Quite the contrary. If the political is threatened, this does not mean that the power of the state is thereby threatened, if by that we understand the effective functioning of the state as a coordination or management of forces. Such forces can be eminently social in nature—i.e., defined in terms of the moral, economic, and normative nature of human organizations. Schmitt seems to take seriously the possibility—and here we can begin to approach just what it would mean, to ask Leo Strauss's question, to "affirm the political"— that a "global society" could form that would exclude the very possibility of political groupings in Schmitt's sense. A global society would essentially replace political friend/enemy groupings with a world of competing interest groups, where all threats would be defined only in terms of threats to the interests of one party or another. In such a world, the unique opaque status of an existential threat would then ultimately find itself translated into the language of the social, economic, historical, or moral character of a nation, polity, state, or "group."

Nevertheless, Schmitt only appears to take this possibility seriously, as can be concluded from the rather peculiar speculation at the end of section 6 in *The Concept of the Political*. Here Schmitt wonders whether, given the concentration of power in a global society, such a power would not have to fall in the hands of *someone*: "The acute question to pose is upon whom will fall the frightening power implied in a world-embracing economic and technical organization."[43] This question makes sense, only if one is already skeptical of the notion of the pre-eminence of a purely social concentration of forces—namely, of the claim that it would be possible to construct an order in which the question of "who" wields power can be effectively minimized, where power would be fully mediated by legal structures to the point where any threat emerging from a given individual or group could be dealt with not by another individual or group, but by the system as a whole. This notion expresses the hope that an international society would be able to effectively sanction an act of aggression; if this were possible, then the question at hand in a given crisis would not take the form of deciding to take up arms against an *enemy* (in Schmitt's sense), so much as restoring an *order* in the wake of what would essentially need only be understood in terms of a *crime*.

Despite his dismissive skepticism in section 6, it is clear that Schmitt is sensitive to the promise of a world order constructed in terms of the cohesive potential represented by social and economic groupings. He is well aware of the argument that the era in which states stood above the nascent but growing influence of such groupings is drawing to a close. This is why the polemic he engages in *The Concept of the Political* does not emphasize any necessity of the *state* as an exception to the social, but rather the necessity of the *political* as an exception to the social. What cannot for Schmitt be negated in the fusion of state and society is the possibility that concentrations of power could, despite the hegemony of the social, provide the opportunity for specifically political groupings, that social cohesiveness could be replaced by political cohesiveness, the formation of which reflects a very different logic of power.

The real argument, however, does not rely on an understanding of the social as such, but rather on an anthropological consideration of the *nature of human beings*. For Schmitt, the question of the political is at bottom not a question of what a society is, or even of the significance of the modern rise of the social, but rather the question of what a human being is. One could perhaps say that, just as the state presupposes the political, the social presupposes the human being. Only in answering the question of what a human being is can our expectations of the potential for social forms to determine human reality be meaningfully articulated. This also applies to the concept of the political. The conception of the political that Schmitt develops arises from a fundamental conviction with respect to what a human being is; that is, it arises from the conviction that the extreme case, the possibility of killing, is existential in the sense that it reveals a fundamental aspect of

the being of the human. Specifically, the concept of the political Schmitt proposes is " [. . .] the answer to the question whether man is a dangerous being or not, a risk or a harmless creature."[44]

The brief anthropological reflection that Schmitt pursues at this point is perhaps the most unsuccessful part of the essay, but it does get to the heart of the polemic, and along the way posits a key idea that will be of importance in articulating what we will call "Schmitt's challenge." The idea in question is perhaps summed up best in Schmitt's own reference to Helmut Plessner's *Macht und menschliche Natur*: "Man, for Plessner, is 'primarily a being capable of creating distance' who in his essence is underdetermined, unfathomable, and remains an 'open question.'"[45] This is an essential point: however thick the commerce of humans becomes thanks to the determinations of association, society, morality or economics, the human situation is ultimately set into play in terms of this "open question" that humans must of essential necessity remain for themselves. In fact, for Schmitt the friend/enemy grouping amounts to a fundamentally intense experience of just this openness, one in which the question of the Other takes the form of the outer limit of the question of the life that one is for oneself. This is because the question of the Other takes shape in the possibility of killing, and in a unique way: the Other opens the possibility for killing, not as a free possibility, but as an urgency that demands a decision. Again the emphasis here falls uniquely on the *possibility* of killing—it does not imply any necessity of the destruction of the enemy simply by virtue of his existence, but it does imply the necessity of grappling with a potential that may or may not manifest itself as an actual disposition, but will always remain in play as a tension. Above all, for Schmitt it points to a recognition, and with that a taking seriously, of the fundamental question the Other represents on an existential level. This is in fact the essential point behind any "affirmation" of the political: what is affirmed is precisely the seriousness of this fundamental question.

"BEHEMOTH AGAINST LEVIATHAN"[46]

This last point—that the question of the human Other is a question of the origin of the seriousness of the question, and that the affirmation of the political is the affirmation of this seriousness—leads us to Schmitt's critique of liberalism. First one should recall that, on one level, the classical liberalism of Hobbes and Locke is itself a critique of the state, one that attempts to articulate the claim of the individual against all collectivities of whatever kind, as well as the necessary mediations of this claim. In fact, classical liberalism so understood *must* take the form of a critique of the state; but it also follows from Schmitt's argument that the critique of liberalism is in its essence *anti-political*.

The anti-political character of liberalism lies not simply in its insistence that the claims of the state can only be limited claims. For Schmitt, it lies

rather in the fact that liberalism does not replace those theories that would put the state above all individual claims with any decisively *political* theory of a limited state. The theoretical negation of the state is itself, one could say, a political phenomenon, but it is one that seeks to obfuscate its political significance: "The negation of the political, which is inherent in every consistent individualism, leads necessarily to a political practice of distrust toward all conceivable political forces and forms of state and government, but never produces on its own a positive theory of state, government, and politics."[47] That is, liberal theories are not "positive," in that they do not delimit a situation in which something like a *jus belli* would have any real sense or meaning independent from legal or moral discourses. For the classical liberal tradition since Hobbes, this is due to the theoretical primacy of the concept of the individual, a primacy that polemically asserts that the only value against which the relative significance of all other claims is ultimately measured is that of the individual, and the natural laws of existence that determine its being. This means that any claim to life, to the disposing of the lives of others, must be mediated by the relative willingness of an individual to kill or be killed. There can never be, for liberalism, an unfiltered disposal over human life, and this for Schmitt means that liberalism amounts to the rejection of the very idea of a political grouping.

Yet this critique of liberalism is itself polemical. Schmitt, as Strauss argues in his illuminating 1932 review of *The Concept of the Political*, has set himself the task of affirming what liberalism denies. This task sets the real agenda in Schmitt's critique of liberalism, and for Strauss it falls into the following basic pattern: first, there is Schmitt's claim that liberalism does not negate the political, that is, it does not *eradicate* the political, but merely *conceals* the political. "Liberalism," paraphrases Strauss, "brought about that politics carried on by means of antipolitical speech."[48] Though this amounts to a weakening of the force of the political per se, it is not for all that a weakening of the concentration of power—on the contrary, for Schmitt such an anti-political stance can be the basis for friend/enemy groupings of a unique kind, even groupings that form the conditions for a radical intensification of the destructiveness of war. For once one adopts an antipolitical posture, one does not fight an enemy with a friend, but rather opposes the "universal humanity" of one side to the "universal inhumanity" of the other, thus providing the intellectual justification for wars that have as their only aim the complete annihilation of what has been targeted as inhuman. To be sure, such a thesis is contentious at best; the universalism of liberalism more often than not envisages the political landscape in terms of a mediated pluralism, one that tends to undermine an identification of any individual group with "humanity" as such; at most, the enemy can be a target of our enmity out of the perspective of our "common humanity," but that does not necessarily undermine our commonality with those we fight. In other words, it is perfectly consistent to fight the Other out of an interest of humanity, all the while fully recognizing the humanity of the Other.

Still, Schmitt's basic idea remains on the table: liberalism is in part determined by the belief that all positions can be mediated, that all oppositions can be suspended in a system that functions in accordance with the principle that conflicts should not be allowed to reach the actual point of violence, that in principle the preservation of the ultimate value of *life* should trump whatever *could possibly be at stake* in a conflict that originates in the clash of various positions or views held by the respective parties. This changes nothing about the fact that conflicts can come to violence; it only denies the thesis that just this possibility provides, in a positive sense, an understanding of what can be possibly at stake in the confrontation with the Other. Thus what liberalism disrupts for Schmitt is the active formation of groups in light of the possibility of violence alone, one that expresses and draws from the tension that originates only in the dangerous character of human beings. Liberalism, in other words, seeks to disrupt the possibility of the constitution of a "political" position proper, in Schmitt's sense.

The second element of Schmitt's critique of liberalism, in Strauss' view, is his attack on Hobbes' polemic against the *status naturalis*. In a sense, Strauss argues, Schmitt does not limit his target to contemporary liberalism which, for all due purposes, is the heir of a polemical success against an illiberal world; the result is that Schmitt's critique is unexpectedly deep, and liberalism surprisingly unprepared to defend itself. The basic reason for this is the fact that the status quo of the modern liberal order rests on the successful rejection of the *status naturalis*, even if the latter is in fact its foundation. Strauss articulates this in terms of the problem of culture: " [. . .] liberalism, sheltered by a world of culture and unable to see beyond it, forgets the foundation of culture, the state of nature, i.e., human nature as dangerous and endangered."[49] In other words, contemporary liberalism has effectively forgotten the war that was waged since Hobbes on its behalf, namely that polemic against the natural condition of human beings as dangerous and endangered, and therefore in need of being ruled.

Hobbes, as already noted, describes the *status naturalis* as an impossible situation, as necessarily involving a war of all against all which, in accordance with the natural law of self-preservation, ultimately requires that it be rejected. To this, Strauss argues, Schmitt opposes an "unpolemical" description of the state of nature, where the possibility of killing represents a moment of crystallization, a form *sui generis* of the cohesion of human groupings. For Schmitt, the "state of nature" holds out unique possibilities for human communal existence and is not, as Hobbes would have it, the very state of the impossibility of human existence. Strauss: "Whereas Hobbes, living in an illiberal world, lays the foundation of liberalism, Schmitt, living in a liberal world, undertakes the critique of liberalism."[50]

Yet Schmitt's description is not a mere description of a possibility. It is pursued as its explicit affirmation. This is a third aspect of Schmitt's text that Strauss emphasizes, though admittedly only by reading between the lines. These comments should be taken especially seriously, since Strauss

is a perceptive contemporary reader of a controversial text written in a difficult and tumultuous time (1932). Strauss' reading amounts to this: Schmitt's affirmation of the political should be understood as distinctly *moral* in character. The charge is not one of inconsistency, since to understand the affirmation of the political in moral terms does not contradict Schmitt's theoretical separation of the political from any moral vocabulary or normativity; the existential character of the political remains autonomous. It is just that this autonomy does not mean that it falls outside of any relevant moral assessment, and in fact the foundation is laid in Schmitt's discussion for the assessment, not of the political as such, but of the being of human beings necessary in order to assess the shape of the world in which the political is possible.

In this context, Strauss points out that Schmitt's assessment of the dangerous character of man that we cited above takes the distinct form of the imputation of a lack, a depravity, that in turn forms the foundation for Schmitt's own elaboration of the idea of the human need to be ruled. This means that the affirmation of the political amounts to a *positive affirmation of this need* as the origin of the seriousness of human existence. To be sure, the affirmation of the need to be governed is not the affirmation of a *good* (Strauss: "The dangerous character of man, which was brought to light as his need for being governed, can be fittingly regarded only as a moral inferiority"[51]), but it is an affirmation of the *seriousness of the question* that we are for ourselves, and it is precisely a sense for this seriousness that crystallizes in the form of a moral assessment of a natural human lack. The result, for Strauss, is that, in affirming the political, Schmitt is attempting to counter a tendency in liberal culture that would suggest that there is nothing serious enough about human life to warrant its risk, that all assumption of risk ought to be filtered through a free subject who takes as a fundamental principle that life itself is the ultimate court of "seriousness," that only what preserves the mere continuation of bare life is what has "value." Strauss: "He [Schmitt] affirms the political because he realizes that when the political is threatened, the seriousness of life is threatened."[52]

This means that Schmitt's affirmation of the political amounts to a peculiar "moral" stance, one that essentially amounts to a kind of negative or negated liberalism, "liberalism preceded by a minus-sign."[53] For if the liberal rejection of the political is, in the end, founded in a kind of intolerance, not for war as such, but for the specific tension that emerges out of an attitude that "accepts" the possibility of war as a distinctive source of one's very sense of existence, then this negated liberalism is precisely the negation of this intolerance, or a countermovement to its influence. Schmitt strives to accept what liberalism amounts to rejecting, though in an indirect and dissoluting fashion. Again Strauss:

> Whereas the liberal respects and tolerates all 'honestly held' convictions, so long as these respect the legal order or acknowledge the sanctity of

peace, whoever affirms the political as such, respects and tolerates all 'serious' convictions, in other words, all decisions leading up to the real possibility of *war*.[54]

SCHMITT'S CHALLENGE

The preceding discussion of Schmitt's *The Concept of the Political*, though incomplete in many respects, is sufficient to formulate an important philosophical challenge.[55] On one level, this challenge simply amounts to the task of understanding how the "extreme case"—the case of giving death to the Other, and of being given one's own death at the hands of the Other, as an event driven by collective existence—fits into the philosophical account of human existence. Yet this task is immediately taken by Schmitt to another, more decisive level, in that the question is not simply about the extreme case as such, where war would be of interest insofar as it is recognized as a particularly acute human experience, but the idea that its violence plays a uniquely *constitutive role* with respect to human existence generally. The challenge lies in the suggestion that the very possibility of combat determines the genuine horizon in which "what is at stake" in our actions ultimately becomes decided. If knowing what is at stake in who we are, and being who we are, are co-determinative, then Schmitt's thesis is that to know what is at stake is possible only within the horizon of signification opened by our awareness of the extreme case, for therein lies the definitive circuit of an authentic engagement with our being.

Yet how is it that violence is supposed to be the origin of this peculiar constitutive power? In what sense can violence—and above all the mere possibility of violence—set into motion the question of the human being, and in that sense express the "openness" that Schmitt alludes to in quoting Plessner? In emphasizing the seriousness that is associated with violence, it is clear that the reflection on Schmitt above nevertheless remains open to a very Clausewitzean objection: the violence of war may be serious, but that is only because in war we are pursuing serious things *with* violence. And what is more, even when existence, above all political existence, is at stake in war, this does not in any way detract from the instrumental character of violence, even if it may *appear* to do so.

In short, if what we are calling here "Schmitt's challenge" can be thought of as a reversal of the primacy of policy in Clausewitz, one that in turn eliminates the ambiguity that emerges from Clausewitz' argument with respect to the political instrumentalization of violence explored above, then this "reversal" is potentially undermined by an insufficiently articulated conception of violence itself. We need, in other words, to bring violence into a more sharp focus, if the full significance of Schmitt's challenge is to come into view. It is precisely the establishment of a sharper focus on violence that will be the principal task for the next chapter.

2 On Violence
(Arendt, Sartre)

> "Beginning, before it becomes a historical event, is the supreme capacity of man; politically, it is identical with man's freedom. *Initium ut esset homo creatus est*—'that a beginning be made man was created' said Augustine. This beginning is guaranteed by each new birth; it is indeed every man."
>
> —*Hannah Arendt*[1]

THE QUESTION OF THE SUBJECTIVITY OF VIOLENCE

The problem raised at the end of the last chapter with respect to "Schmitt's challenge" in a sense sends us back to a reconsideration of Clausewitz' formula "war is the pursuit of policy by other means." Schmitt wants to argue for a constitutive notion of violence at the heart of the political; and if the "other means" of Clausewitz' formula refers to the means of violence, then again we face the question of whether a constitutive notion of violence can be articulated that would challenge a purely instrumental conception. Developing this question in detail will be the task of this chapter.

Yet to focus on violence itself is not a simple matter. A fundamental difficulty with any attempt to understand violence is its unsettling tendency to accompany, reflect, or imitate phenomena that it otherwise negates. Violence often comes dressed in the garb of authority, power, right or legitimacy, even when it in effect announces their absence. When in disturbed times the police turn to violence, for example, it is rather an instance of an absence of power than its expression; but that does not change the fact that this by no means counts as an admission of powerlessness on the side of the police, for it is *as power* that violence is being asserted. The result is an ambiguity that often renders it difficult to avoid the perception that it is not violence that asserts itself as authority, but authority that, in some circumstances, chooses to manifest itself as violence, or that power can be power only when instituted and defended by violence. If we attempt to approach a general definition of violence as a disruption of human relations or human situations, the difficulty that must be faced is the fact that violence is often that peculiar kind of disruption which also seeks to enforce some continuation of a given order of things, though to be sure in a different key, as if the disruption of the normal world were somehow part of the underlying reality of normality itself. Confronted with violence, the disruption in question does not suddenly release those confronted from the human world; they remain inscribed within the same world, and the structures of relations that

define it do not cease to function as the contours of the context in which they encounter violence, even as violence seems to represent a suspension of that very order.

This means that it is necessary to understand how it is that violence manifests itself in the space of human affairs, above all with respect to the question of the manner in which human beings can be said to initiate their actions. For violence, one could say, derives its protean character from essential aspects that belong to the emergence of the new. This is not to say that violence is creative, or that it emerges as the result of an act of creation; the point is not to identify the origin of violence, but to suggest that the difficulty of understanding violence is related to the general problem of how it is that the new and our actions in general *take hold* in the world, or how they come to have an abiding, lasting presence that makes them constituent elements of a situation. When I stand in defense of a point in a debate about public policy, or when I give an order in battle to take a bridge, I not only seek to break free of a constellation of elements of the situation in which I find myself, but I also seek to arrive at a "new" situation that has as much apparent solidity and integrity as the pattern of relations and factors I have sought to escape. The emergence of an act, of a new configuration of a given world, is in part the problem of how to understand that peculiar traction that allows for a genuine movement from the departure of one situation to the arrival at another.

It is obvious that such a question immediately takes us to the relation between means and ends: violence can be seen as a means for passing from one condition to another, from a state in which a goal is unrealized to its subsequent realization. The question from this perspective would be how to *assess* violence with respect to its potential to yield the effective realization of ends. Such an assessment would depend on our being able to illuminate the connections between the use of violence and what such a use leads to: if I torture the prisoner, will I get the information? Will it be a crime? Both? Yet one should be wary of the risk of reducing the analysis of violence to such an assessment, where standards and principles would be applied that would putatively define what is appropriate or not for success. Violence, as will be argued below, only partially comes into view when we consider structural relationships between means and ends from the perspective of such standards of justification, whether they be moral (what is legitimate or not, allowed or not, just or not) or more narrowly instrumental in character (whether we will in fact be able to break the will of the prisoner). The suggestion here will be that an analysis of violence needs to be pursued on the more primitive level of the establishment of the concreteness of the situation as such if the full breadth of the problem of departure and arrival is to come into view. This will in turn bring us to the importance of a phenomenological perspective on the issue: to understand violence, we must pursue it descriptively in terms of its *lived* aspect—that is, in terms of the manner in which the emergence of violence holds actions and situations in its grip,

by way of a modification of their specifically *subjective character.* Accordingly, the basic thesis of this chapter will be that violence has an essentially *subjective aspect* that must be taken into account in order to grasp the full breadth of its significance in and for human action.

In order to situate this subjective specificity of violence, we will begin by considering a set of distinctions that Hannah Arendt outlines in her essay *On Violence.*[2] This text of Arendt's, written in 1969, has its limitations; it is more polemical than philosophical, more intended as a public response to those authors Arendt considered to be apologists for violence than a sustained analysis of the problems of violence themselves. Nevertheless, *On Violence* is important for our discussion; more, it will lead us to a number of insights that are developed in more depth and detail in *The Human Condition* (1958), which in turn will prove indispensable in elucidating what *On Violence* often only indicates.

This consideration of Arendt's distinctions will allow us to fix the parameters of the discussion in a clear fashion, as well as formulate a question with respect to the thesis that violence is essentially instrumental in character. We will then pursue this question critically with a reflection on the work of Jean-Paul Sartre, one of those authors Arendt considered to be an apologist for violence, citing with dismay his provocative Preface to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth.*[3] Our focus will be on a very important extended discussion of violence in Sartre's *Notebooks for an Ethics,*[4] which will allow us to illuminate the problem of subjectivity that lies at the heart of the phenomenon of violence.

To be sure, Sartre's *Notebooks*, like Arendt's *On Violence*, has serious limitations as well. Written in 1947–1948, the *Notebooks* represent Sartre's attempt to make good on the promise made at the end of *Being and Nothingness* (1943) for a work that would present a theory of ethics based on his new phenomenological ontology.[5] Yet such a work never materialized; and the *Notebooks* themselves, while full of rich analyses, lack by far the thematic unity of *Being and Nothingness.* Because of this, the latter text often proves indispensable for elucidating the reflections in the *Notebooks*, as we will see below. It is beyond the scope of these reflections here to engage the general question of Sartre's ethics, or even whether such an ethics is possible based on Sartre's ontology;[6] the focus will instead be limited to a number of theses that Sartre develops in the *Notebooks,* with an aim to elucidating the subjectivity of violence.

THE BASIC DISTINCTIONS

In *On Violence*, Arendt introduces a fivefold distinction between *power*, *strength*, *authority*, *force*, and *violence*. Her strategy is essentially to contrast the cohesion manifest in a community of agents acting in concert against other forms of cohesiveness, both individual and instrumental.

Nevertheless, Arendt's purpose is really to make only one fundamental distinction, namely between power and a class of other phenomena that tend to be associated or confused with power. The task of capturing the distinctiveness of power is more relevant to her project than, for example, drawing a precise distinction between strength and violence, or between authority and force.

The notion of power that Arendt is after can be described as that weight which can be brought to bear on a situation from the basic fact of the coming together of a number of agents. The idea is that action can gain its place, and with that its concrete efficacy, thanks to the unique form that the capacity to act assumes when constituted in the coming together of the community. Power thus always refers to the group; an individual can be said to exercise power, or act in the horizon of possibilities articulated by the group, only in a derivative or representative sense: "When we say of somebody that he is 'in power' we actually refer to his being empowered by a certain number of people to act in their name."[7]

It is important to emphasize that this concept of power does not simply require that a group provide what could perhaps be called an external sanction to the pursuit of possibilities that would otherwise belong solely to the individual. The possibilities of action at issue here are rather internal to the sanction of the group as such; they are given only in acting together, and are not possible outside of the concert of agency. In other words, the possibilities of action at issue here are specifically *political* possibilities. For Arendt, this involves, among other things, the conception of a modality of action that lends itself to being inscribed in the order of meanings, or of sense: the concert of action is also a concert of speech, in which deeds are provided that peculiar traction and durability that is offered by the capacity of the group to make sense of things. Thanks to speech, actions co-inhabit a specifically political space of human existence that, in its potential meaningfulness, rises above both the life of mere subsistence and biological necessity, and the produced life of extended practical capacities that take the form of instruments and the built world.[8]

This specificity of action—and with that of power—as the concrete manifestation of what Arendt in *The Human Condition* calls the "space of appearance" constitutive of political life,[9] guides the discussion in *On Violence* concerning how power can be distinguished from the other phenomena Arendt finds to be relevant to the definition of violence—strength, authority, force, and violence. Let us consider each of these in turn.

Strength, Arendt argues, "unequivocally designates something in the singular, an individual entity," thus contrasts with power as a properly collective phenomenon. At first this may seem to be a rather superficial distinction. If I do not have the strength to restrain a drunken sailor from breaking a window, and have to ask for help, it is difficult to see in others coming to my aid a transition from the potential I possess as an individual to a qualitatively different potential called "power" that is not comparable to my

own physical strength. Bringing the others in, I simply manage to increase the ratio of my strength relative to that of the sailor's by effectively adding the individual strength of those who come to my aid to my own. There seems to be no reason here to adopt the phrasing "muscle strength" instead of the more common "muscle power." Yet such an objection would miss Arendt's point, which is to emphasize the human significance of strength as the possibility of *standing alone*, something that is not simply a question of being in the command of a given quantity of force. Strength, in the sense of standing alone, is in fact defined against the space of appearance, thanks to which it signifies the possibility of establishing a space of activity that stands apart from the world that has been opened up, and fortified by, the emergence of the concert of speech and action. The axis of differentiation here lies not between the relative paucity of force represented by the individual and the relatively greater amount in possession of the many, but between the situation of *standing alone* and that of *standing with others*, between independence and acting in concert. Thus when the others come to my aid, there is in fact a qualitative shift: I no longer stand alone, I no longer rely on the function of my strength as a position of independence in order to meet the threat of the drunken rogue; instead I stand *with others*, and my strength recedes in an important sense into a background of indifference. One can, to be sure, always shift focus to the strength made available to the group by its individual members, but to do this is possible only if one downplays the fundamental fact that strength subsumed by the concert of action negates the function or potentiality of strength as a standing apart. That is, it is possible to shift focus only if we explicitly run against the very logic of power as it is manifest in the form of the group: "It is in the nature of a group and its power to turn against independence, the property of individual strength."[10]

   This statement of Arendt's should not be read as claiming that the group somehow feels threatened by what stands apart from the group, as if political unity necessarily entails the suppression of the individual; yet on the other hand nor should the independence of strength be confused with the plurality of the political. Her point is best made by again emphasizing the dimension of meaning. The differentiation or plurality of communities, the multiplicity of purpose and intent that forms an essential aspect of political life for Arendt, is embodied in both power and the common project of providing a sense to things, a narrative in which pursuits and human projects are provided a context in which they can be understood. Strength is suppressed not because it differentiates some, but only insofar as the independence of strength is in effect *mute*, only insofar as it stakes out its space of action in a way that is defined by the resources of the individual alone. Arendt's claim is thus more cogent if we recognize the deep connection between silence and strength, and the problem silence poses for the space of appearance. Standing alone, one becomes an unknown quantity for the common narrative, falling outside of the logic that belongs to a common space of action.

Thus the group "turns against" strength only in the sense that any coming together seeks to break the silence thanks to which the independence of strength is manifest at all, and which left to its own resources would have no significance for the community—thus either the community admits a resource of action that is indifferent to meaning, or it resists leaving any such resource outside itself, and seeks to assimilate the strong into political life. The former option would simply be to stop coming together, to stop being the history for all who have come on the scene; whereas the latter option would be to follow the natural progression of political cohesion that belongs to the formation of the group. Thus Arendt is right to try to rescue the distinction between the independence of the strong and the plurality of the political from its traditional interpretation that casts the distinction in terms of an opposition between the vital force of the strong and the resentment of the weak.[11] If the community turns against the strong, it is not in order to make them suffer (thus to weaken them), but to seek after a sense for such strength in terms of what has come to be understood in the wake of political activity, and the discourse in which it has found its voice. In a way, Arendt here is taking up an insight that one already finds in Nietzsche, despite appearances and ultimately against his intentions: namely the realization that what is specific to the strong is a kind of self-obliviousness or unconsciousness—in our language, a muteness or a-logic that renders the strong, at least in human terms, hopelessly *superficial*.[12]

Equally mute is the phenomenon that Arendt seeks to capture under the heading of *force*. She seeks to limit this term to "energy released by physical or social movements."[13] The notion of force Arendt articulates seems to be one of a mute quantum that is captured in a net of conduits thanks to which it can be directed in various ways, whether the channels are taken to be those of "nature" or "society" or just "circumstances." Arendt toys here with the expression *la force des choses*,[14] which evokes the pattern of emergence that has, on the one hand, some kind of meaning or sense, but which on the other hand is marked by a thoroughgoing processual character that separates it from the realm of political significance proper. "Force" in this sense is present, within the realm of political life, in the form of an alien being—even, and perhaps from Arendt's point of view especially, if we are talking about "social forces." For a social force has nothing to do with persuasion; it shapes or changes the configuration of a given situation in accordance with the inexorable movements of the transfer of energy, which essentially coalesce into the brute fact of the event.[15]

Yet there is another manifestation of muteness in political life for Arendt, one that is germane to what she defines as *authority*. For in the case of authority as well, there is a conspicuous absence of persuasion, since authority does not take the form of an argument; the hold it has on us is instead an instance of immediate giving way, or obedience. What defines authority for Arendt is the "unquestioning recognition by those who are asked to obey; neither coercion or persuasion is needed."[16] Authority is thus

a different kind of "fact" than either the fact that emerges thanks to social forces or the forces of nature, and it is defined by a different modality of muteness. It is a muteness that is intimately tied to the facticity of the political community itself, that is, to the emergence of the community as the constellation of a group *sui generis*, one which rests on no foundation other than its coming together. Authority is in this sense tied to power, as that which allows for an emergence of power in a political situation in which not everything needs to be justified. For, as Arendt argues, "power needs no justification"—that is, its justification is "inherent in the very existence of political communities,"[17] and is not something that must be added from the outside as a support. If to justify oneself is to appeal to something other than oneself as a support, as a basis that shows why one must be who one is, then a political community, bearing the wave of its own momentum of having in fact come together, remains silent on the matter of its own justification. Likewise authority, as the immediate recognition of the fact of political existence in the command to obey, draws immediately from this factical immediacy and remains mute.

One consequence of this line of reasoning is that to put into question either authority or power has nothing to do with confronting something outside the community that is in principle being called on for support. To challenge power is not to attack a given set of reasons that are being summoned to justify the claims of authority (the command to obey) and the existence of power (the fact of political life). Rather, to question authority or power directly is not a question of *justification* at all, but of *legitimacy*, which is for Arendt a specifically *genetic* matter, in contrast to the inherent orientation of justification towards ends: "Power springs up whenever people get together and act in concert, but it derives its legitimacy from the initial getting together rather than from any action that then may follow. Legitimacy, when challenged, bases itself on an appeal to the past, while justification relates to an end that lies in the future."[18] In this sense, a questioned authority can reply only by referring to the conditions, through the medium of memory, under which it had once operated as unquestioned; it remains locked in a reflection of the facticity of the community as a political whole, and in no way should it itself be seen as a factor that ultimately holds the community together in a projection of resolve. Authority is in effect parasitic on the fact of the concert of action that is, in turn, the sole origin of power; in the absence of power, or when the concert of action faces a crisis of legitimacy (in Arendt's sense, a problematization of its relation to its own ground, its own existence), where the immediate recognition of authority is compromised, this authority immediately dissipates. If an authority attempts to assert itself in the face of its own dissipation, it becomes ridiculous: "The greatest enemy of authority, therefore, is contempt, and the surest way to undermine it is laughter."[19]

The distinction Arendt draws between justification and authority is of particular interest for us due to her emphasis on its *temporal* aspect:

legitimacy recalls a past, justification projects a future. This distinction also plays a key role in Arendt's conception of violence that she articulates in these pages. This is in turn of particular importance for us, since it is on the question of the relation of *violence* to *time* that we will pursue an alternative set of considerations in Sartre. But first let us consider Arendt's description of the essence of violence: "Violence [. . .] is distinguished by its instrumental character," in the specific sense of an instrumentalization of *strength*, "since the implements of violence, like all other tools, are designed and used for the purpose of multiplying natural strength until, in the last stage of their development, they can substitute for it."[20]

That violence is essentially instrumental for Arendt has a number of consequences. The first is a characteristic muteness specific in kind when compared to either authority or strength. Violence, and its embodiment in the implements of violence, is a focused concentration of the disruption represented by strength—when the soldiers aim their rifles at us, we all fall silent; when they fire, we disperse. In violence, strength not only stands *apart* from the community, it stands *against* it. If it is mute, it is not only because it is silent, but also because it *silences*. A second consequence is the marked dependency of violence on its justification, in direct contrast to power. As an instrument, violence can for Arendt *only* be a means to an end; it is only something that is "used for" something else which in turn provides its justification or support. The violence the soldiers employ to disperse the crowd with gunfire does not provide in any sense its own "why"—and if the explanation is not forthcoming politically, then the act of violence remains silent and silencing, a break in political cohesion that nevertheless remains dependent on this cohesion for its own sense. It is thus necessary from Arendt's perspective to distinguish between two essential aspects of violence, namely, its function as a *strength multiplier* and its function within *the action or pursuit of a given end* of the one who employs it. Emphasizing both of these aspects, and taking them together, represent a distinctively Arendtian manner of articulating what in the Introduction we explored under the heading of the "stupidity of violence."

Another consequence is that, as an instrument, violence can be evaluated in terms of its efficacy in shaping the concrete situation (stopping an advancing enemy unit by destroying a bridge; physically removing protestors from the street); but this is only true to the extent to which the end can be defined in purely instrumental terms (namely what needs to be changed in order for a certain goal to be considered "achieved"). Here violence is being identified as a phenomenon that emerges within the confines of processes that link, in certain determinate ways, the present with the future. This is something that we have already considered in the Introduction when we described the possibility of approaching an analysis of violence in purely technical terms. Yet from Arendt's perspective, violence as a moment embedded in an action is another matter entirely, insofar as actions for Arendt are not reducible to the manipulation of natural processes. Action for Arendt is the capacity

to begin something new, to choose an end, to pursue and realize a project in concert with others, in a situation in which the ultimate consequences of what one does are unknown. Action in this sense stands outside of the lock of process, and inhabits a different realm entirely. This means that the pursuit of a political end, or an end of action, using violence as a means, is not simply to engage in the manipulation of a natural or a social process; to employ violence is not simply to transform being in accordance with a field of possibilities that are already in place, that already constitute the limits of what can be pursued.

In this way one can see that the key thesis of *The Human Condition*, that action stands apart from labor and production, representing a fragile realm that is distorted if reduced to the perspective of the management of a society or a technology of rule, is more or less openly employed by Arendt in her distinction between power and violence that she presents in *On Violence*. If the use of violence is a political question, it is only because the use of violence is often fused with the exercise of power to the point of being almost indistinguishable—behind the violence of wars and revolutions lay real questions of power, or better, what has become possible due to the reality of power. But for Arendt it is imperative that the two not be thereby confused: the instrumentality of violence renders it inessential in a manner that is never the case with power; for violence, as an action of human beings in a human context, is not in itself at all a matter of the production of human reality, or of political life. Violence for Arendt is never the proper origin of power, for an instrumentally engineered political existence is not a political existence at all, but the regime of a violence that attempts to usurp the function and place of power in human affairs. Nevertheless, power can be disrupted by violence; faced with the implements of violence, our capacity to realize the fundamental human possibility of acting in concert is threatened, and potentially rendered impossible. However heroic and significant in our appraisal of the human spirit, one should not ignore the brute fact of the utter futility of the actions of that lone Chinese citizen who stared down a column of tanks shortly before the massacre in Tiananmen Square in 1989. Yet nor should the subsequent clearing of the streets with tanks and troops be confused with the exercise of power, as Arendt would emphasize, since at the heart of the effectiveness of the operation lies the negation of political cooperation: "Violence can destroy power; it is utterly incapable of creating it."[21] The origin of the group lies in a coming together, and a regime of violence can at best *mimic* this solidarity in the form of terror, but it can never *translate* into power proper.

THE AMBIGUOUS INSTRUMENTALITY OF VIOLENCE

The phenomenon of state terror, on the other hand, already suggests that the instrumentality of violence is more complicated than Arendt's

distinctions seem to allow. The situation is in fact ambiguous: terror is on the one hand the destruction of power, but one that has a peculiarly viable political *Gestalt*. Arendt herself sees the problem, and accordingly suggests a distinction between terror and violence: "Terror is not the same as violence; it is, rather, the form of government that comes into being when violence, having destroyed all power, does not abdicate but, on the contrary, remains in full control."[22] This control in the absence of power, or the absence of that fluidity of speech, action, and beginning that forms the plural essence of an action in concert, is in turn what Arendt understands by totalitarianism:

> By pressing men against each other, total terror destroys the space between them; compared to the condition within its iron band, even the desert of tyranny, insofar as it is still some kind of space, appears like a guarantee of freedom. Totalitarian government does not just curtail liberties or abolish essential freedoms; nor does it, at least to our limited knowledge, succeed in eradicating the love for freedom from the hearts of man. It destroys the one essential prerequisite of all freedom which is simply the capacity of motion which cannot exist without space.[23]

How to understand this constriction ultimately involves the question of totalitarianism as a form of government or regime; it is not simply a question of violence. Nevertheless, I would suggest that the cogency of Arendt's account of terror, which in the same chapter at the end of the third volume of the *Origins of Totalitarianism* she identifies as the "essence" of totalitarian regimes, depends on an account of how it is that violence takes hold in the world of action, and with that comes to have a lasting presence in human affairs. For in the terror of regimes, the muteness of violence, as an extension of strength, assumes a radically new form: it does not simply hold itself apart from and against the space of appearance proper to the political, but annihilates it from within by an unchecked extension of a suffocating stupidity.

Such a conception of terror makes sense, only if one can understand how it is that violence can become *normalized*, or part of the very fabric of human relations—that is, how violence can be more than simply an available means, and instead be concretely constitutive, even if what it constitutes is at best a distorted parody of a properly political space of encounter. It is in this context that the attempt at a finer distinction between force and violence proposed by Sartre in his *Notebooks on Ethics* becomes particularly interesting.

Let us begin by returning to the distinction between force and violence, this time from Sartre's perspective. The basic idea in the *Notebooks* is that, insofar as an action, materially situated in the world, must in order to attain an end seek some means or other to release energy in accordance with the regularities that define nature, then it makes sense to speak of such

an action as a deployment of force (*vis*). Force seeks to move what can be moved. Violence, on the contrary, does not share this gesture of maintaining a harmony with the laws of nature, but seeks precisely to *break free* of the constraints embodied in such laws and regularities, in order to attain the goal *immediately*, without the mediation of a process. Violence seen from this perspective is specifically *anti-instrumental*, in that it seeks to render the order manifest in instrumentality itself *inessential*.[24]

This of course often puts the very possibility of attaining the end at all in more or less acute jeopardy, in that any reasonable standard of effectiveness is necessarily compromised, if one understands effectiveness to be conditioned by a respect for the structures and patterns that define the natural order of things. Not only that, but it is clear that the attempt to render nature itself an obstacle, its order as such inessential to the achievement of an end, is in a strong sense just impossible. This is why there is something patently absurd about confronting the natural order with violence. When Xerxes had the Hellespont whipped, he did not succeed in standing outside of the order imposed on human activity by the brute positivity of nature. Yet even the absurdity of such an act expresses something basic about violence, and perhaps holds a clue to the manner in which violence establishes itself as something enduring. Violence is not simply a rejection of a given order of things, but something that takes aim at order in a particular way, namely as that which sets human actions into the structure of a course of events that emerge from a beginning that can only take the form of an acceptance of this order, before proceeding towards that which is intrinsically made possible by this order as such. Violence does not try to *influence* the course of such necessity, but instead strikes at the very *acceptance* of necessity inherent to the beginning of action as such. The violent man, as Sartre puts it, in this sense refuses *entry to the world*, that is, he refuses *to be born*.[25]

This means that, however potentially absurd, violence is nevertheless in this sense (i.e., in its contrast to force *qua* lawful employment of energy in the pursuit of an end) significant. First, for Sartre it amounts to a manifestation of a freedom that takes up a place, a position, that is defined by a rejection of acting out of an acceptance of being immersed in natural processes. This rejection itself has a positive, though intrinsically unstable relation to the negativity of nature.

We can perhaps turn to Arendt to help articulate what this could mean.[26] In *The Human Condition*, she describes the emergence of the sphere of human works (production) in very similar terms: the world of instruments, of produced and built things, represents a violent breaking free from the monotony and impermanence of the incessant metabolism with nature that is embodied in labor. This is significant, because it reinforces the association in Arendt of violence and instrumentality in a distinctive manner: it is not just that violence is instrumental, but that all instruments derive their position in the human condition in part thanks to their establishment within the

horizon of an originary violence definitive of instrumentality as such. The relation of the horizon of instrumentality to the horizon of the world is in a genetic sense that of the violence constitutive of the sphere of *homo faber* itself; and when "making and fabrication" progressively comes to define the political, this violence emerges in ever more intense forms. Consider the following passages from *The Human Condition*, where Arendt argues that the ascendancy of making over acting represents a direct challenge to the cogency of speech and action as definitive of political life:

> It is true that violence, without which no fabrication could ever come to pass, has always played an important role in political schemes and thinking based upon an interpretation of action in terms of making; but up to the modern age, this element of violence remained strictly instrumental, a means that needed an end to justify and limit it, so that glorifications of violence as such are entirely absent from the tradition of political thought prior to the modern age. [. . .] Only the modern age's conviction that man can know only what he makes, that his allegedly higher capacities depend upon making and that he therefore is primarily homo faber and not an animal rationale, brought forth the much older implications of violence inherent in all interpretations of the realm of human affairs as a sphere of making.[27]

This does not contradict the theses of *On Violence*, but instead deepens the perspective. Arendt's dissatisfaction with the "preachers of violence" (along with Frantz Fanon and Sartre, figures such as Georges Sorel and Mao Zedong) is not that she is unwilling to accept *any* constitutive function of violence as such. On the contrary: the human artifice is itself an example of the constitutive character of violence; it stands apart from nature thanks to violence. Her argument is instead directed against the *reduction of action in general* to the logic of the human artifice, to its production as that which preserves humans as something apart from the burden of natural existence. Arendt decisively rejects the pure reification of the political that is implied in calls for violence such as Mao's "power comes from the barrel of a gun" or even Fanon's claim that "violence alone" forges the basis for collective understanding and action among the oppressed.[28] It is not that violence is not justified (often it is); it is just that *one does not "make" men.*

Likewise, this original constitutive character of violence can help to understand how terror can be *more* than violence, but *less* than power. Terror can only be something other than violence if it is seen as inhabiting a lasting space of human relations that is, in its separateness and exception, the consequence of an originary constitutive violence; but as such it is also a radical limitation, in that it limits itself to the production of forms that in the end demonstrate the utter impossibility of a genuine production of their sense. In short, if we read *On Violence* in the horizon of *The Human Condition*, we can see that Arendt is arguing that there are other possibilities

of constitutive beginnings, or for the beginnings of something new, that do not derive from the re-enactment, so to speak, of the violence that lies at the origin of our freedom from lives of mere toil for the ends of consumption.

Arendt's discussion of the separation of labor and work in *The Human Condition* leads to the interesting thought that the order of instrumentality as a whole is a kind of violence, though in a very specific sense, one that bears on Sartre's description of violence as a negation of natural process. That is, it points to the idea of a modality of transcendence that does not as such amount to a breaking free of nature, if by that we mean a willful breaking of the laws of nature. Again, that would be absurd: Xerxes' violence does not change the behavior of the seas, since they are not subject to the mediation of an act of submission. Just as little do the sails of a boat bend the laws that govern meteorological phenomena to the will of the steersman. Yet both acts do channel or harness natural phenomena in the service of a goal or an end that is itself not natural—that is, determined by this or that set of natural needs. The violence in question here is thus not so much directed against a natural order as against the *condition of human beings as natural beings*: what we break "free" from is the complete immersion in a cycle of need and satisfaction that would hold us fast to a minimal existence as *mere* natural beings. Such a breaking free is thus a violence in a very particular sense: it is not a refusal of what cannot be refused, only a refusal of taking natural necessity, natural existence, as a cue or a guide for what it is that one is going to be, or aim towards; it is breaking free not of the dominance of nature over the course of the actual, but of an existence in which natural necessity exhausts the horizon of the possible. Such a violence is constitutive, but only to the extent that it illuminates paths within nature that show the way towards a modality of life that runs contrary to the dominance of nature as determining the shape of the future; for Arendt, this takes the primitive form of a violence that breaks the burdensome and transitory character of natural existence that is manifest in labor. The result is a being that stands apart *from* nature, but who remains *in* nature, obeying its inexorable laws that are nevertheless *not taken to be essential*. This is, again in Arendt's terms, the very origin of a *world* as such:[29] humans move in a "world" that stands apart from nature, in a space that is premised on the refusal to take natural necessity as the last word. This world does not represent a suspension of nature but rather the attempt to be *more*. Originary violence is thus constitutive in the form of this excess of a "more than nature," and it is as the potential for an excess beyond mere consumption that the artifice of human space takes the concrete form of a world.

As a consequence the world, born of originary violence, is something intrinsically fragile for Arendt, threatened by a collapse "back into" purely natural being. This is an important thesis that we will return to below, but first we are now perhaps in a position to consider an important insight of Sartre's in the *Notebooks*. The violent man, Sartre argues, effectively

seeks to annihilate or render inessential "the world." Again thinking of Arendt, this can perhaps be understood as the attempt to radicalize, so to speak, the violence inherent in the instrumentality of specifically *produced things* (as opposed to the things of mere nature). Let us look at this thesis more closely.

Sartre in effect argues that violence does not represent a specific class of means, but a modification of the being of means as such. The violent act seeks to pass beyond the restrictions inherent in the connections that constitute a given course of action (and that condition any "means employed") and a given end. The key does not seem to work, so I "force" it; I slam the door, kick the lock—my force as a physical being thus no longer follows a specific route or settles into a conformity with what is possible but, to use Sartre's language, becomes "decomposed."[30] This discomposure of violence is not a psychological feature of the violent person (the issue is not one of "aggression"), but a modification of the very manner in which the figure of means becomes inscribed in human reality: the procedure that must be followed, the pattern of acts that define a path through a series of actions toward a given end, is in the act of violence manifest in the figure of an obstacle, a mute something that appears in the form of its own negation. Everything that I need to do to get the door open is palpably manifest for me as I rage against the door, but only in the form of an opaque obstacle that lies between me and the opening of the door—for what I aim at, and thereby seek to destroy, is the very density of procedure that I would have to "endure" in order to compose myself into an effective agency.

Sartre explores a number of permutations of this way of describing the act of violence. In some cases the end is immanent to the means, thus the destruction in question either consumes or at least transforms the end into something else. Where the end is immanent to the means, I cannot negate the means without also negating the end; the key breaks in the lock, the door will not and cannot open, thus in striking out I have also adopted as my end the very destruction of the project in its entirety. One might assume that this is the case universally, in that violence can only have destruction as its end. Yet there are cases, Sartre argues, where the end is indifferent to the means, where it stands outside of the effects bound up with the employment of any given means as a constant pole of orientation, *no matter what happens*.[31] Yet this is the case only when it is not a question of the end justifying a specific means; if the end is indifferent, this can only mean that it is not conceived in the horizon of what needs to be done in order for it to be realized. Nevertheless, we still have a means-ends relationship; it is just that the indifference of the end in effect justifies *any means whatsoever*, however arbitrary or unconnected they may be to the goal. This is true, Sartre argues, in cases where the end is something absolute, and where consequently violence can take the form of an arbitrary violence. Such a violence is committed in the mere "name" of an absolute order or truth, one that transcends all events of violence, just as it transcends all positive

attempts to achieve the end; the end is indifferent to everything, against it everything is "inessential." However extreme the atrocities committed by the Crusader, however drunk on conquest he becomes and however destructive the consequences are for the order of the world, for him the will of God remains transcendent both as justification and as end—it is simply not available, so to speak, for modification at the hands of the Crusader; its realization can never be frustrated by his failures or crimes.

Yet the theoretical construct that Sartre fashions in these pages of the *Notebooks* as an example of the most extreme manifestation of violence is not violence pursued in the horizon of "absolute" ends, but rather violence pursued for its own sake, which at its extreme is constitutive of what Sartre calls the "universe of violence."[32] Its possibility lies in the figure of the denial of all process, where such a denial is itself the end, that is, the "end" of overcoming the necessity that is embodied in all means as a movement towards a given end. This "orgy" of universal violence is described by Sartre as an absolute assertion of freedom in the form of a complete rejection of one's place in the world, or of *any* process that would lead to the manifestation of one's presence in terms of a system of relations to things and persons.

Here, again looking to Arendt, we can perhaps compensate for some of the abstractness inherent in Sartre's ontological vocabulary. Something like the orgy or the universe of violence makes sense, to the extent that it feeds on the inherent fragility of what Arendt calls the "human artifice," the built world of artifacts (in the broadest sense) that provides a common space of permanence that forms the horizon for the intrinsic impermanence of action. Without some sense of the inherent instability present at the very heart of human productive situatedness in natural life, there would be nothing at which this pure negativity of violence could direct itself in such a way so as to emerge as a freedom. For this sense of the fragility of things is just our consciousness of the ontological nature of the human project as conditioning a sphere for the exercise of freedom: things in this world, the world itself, is "breakable" only to the extent to which it is a project towards the cultivation and realization of such a freedom, where such a project is conditioned by the limits of what can be done and always exposed to the threat of its dissolution. Here we can cite a passage from *Being and Nothingness* where Sartre emphasizes the human origin of fragility, that is, its being posited by human freedom:

> [It] is man who renders cities destructible, precisely because he posits them as fragile and as precious and because he adopts a system of protective measures with regard to them. It is because of this ensemble of measures that an earthquake or a volcanic eruption can *destroy* these cities or these human constructions.[33]

More: "The original meaning and aim of war are contained in the smallest building of man."[34] The "freedom" that emerges in the form of violence

can appear only within the horizon of this limited, partially cultivated project of free action—that is, only to the extent to which such a project has already found traction in the fragile permanence of artifacts. As a soldier I need something to fire upon in order to reveal the consequences of its fragility; in the orgy I need something to break (the glass, the bottle), which means that I always need to initially follow some given pattern of settlement, thereby implicitly compromising with the necessity of things in order to precisely "break away" from it.

Nevertheless, the arc of possibility open to violence is very constrained; nature itself, not the *world* but *life*, as Arendt would put it, continues to function as an outer limit to the universe of violence. Again, we do not hold ourselves free from nature, only in tension with it, and this is in turn a tension with respect to which nature is completely indifferent. Nature allows, as it were, for "violence" in the sense of the emergence of a human world as an alternative to the complete absorption into the rhythms of natural being. Thus it is on *this* exceptional world that violence feeds, and *not* on nature. Consequently, Sartre rejects the idea of a violence against nature as such,[35] arguing that the negation of lawful forms relevant to the problem of violence can be recognized as meaningful only in those cases where such forms can be in fact destroyed. This is the case in those instances where we are dealing not with natural forms of lawfulness, but a lawfulness that has its origin in the human will: "There will be violence only when the form that is opposed to you is destructible, in other words, when the laws of normal usage are established by wills. When, in a word, it is a question of some human lawfulness."[36] Nevertheless it is equally the case that violence itself, according to the logic of Sartre's reflections in the *Notebooks*, is essentially oblivious to this distinction—violence in principle strikes indiscriminately against any process, whether natural or human. For what is essential to violence is only that obstacles are present, even that what is present is present *only* as an obstacle; it relates to the world in general only in its aspect as resistance, against which it posits itself as a fundamental force of the negation of resistance, or its dissolution.

However, violence does differentiate itself with respect to this distinction between natural and human lawfulness. First let us emphasize what the differentia have in common: in both cases, violence reveals form as that which resists, thus opposes, as a pure mass; it reveals a resistance in a way that it becomes manifest as significant to the exclusion of everything else. This in fact defines a limit to violence: where it cannot reveal being as resistance, it loses all traction, and effectively ceases to function. This means that violence cannot be the origin of the form that would provide a genuine ground for what resists: "Violence is disconcerted by labile matter, the kind that slides through one's fingers, that crumbles, that is oily. For violence does not know how to put things together. The universe therefore becomes a universe of masses."[37] This again points to the fact that violence only has a home in the human world: it functions only in a space where

both nature and life have already provided the ground for articulated forms and possibilities; and where such an articulation is most advanced, the possibilities for violence are increased, since it has before it more numerous and complex systems of destructible mass against which to rage.

Something else goes with this. As that which negates such masses, Sartre argues, violence in effect amounts to a kind of claim to a *right*—in the sense that it contains in itself its own justification, and does not appeal to anything outside of itself, since "everything" beyond violence as such has been rendered inessential, "dirt cheap." This is the result of its radical non-instrumentality: to engage an instrument is to submit to a dependency, while "here, on the contrary, there is a refusal of prior techniques and forms, therefore just the aspect of being an obstacle is present. This aspect brings together and simplifies objects to the extreme."[38] To draw out the distinction between Sartre and Arendt, we could say that violence for Sartre is characterized by a precedence over things, and in this limited sense by a "right," but one that does not emerge in the form of an external justification that would define a purpose which would in turn condition its instrumentality, nor one that would be constitutive of either power or legitimacy. It is a right that emerges solely as an expression of the extreme simplification of whatever violence may face as an obstacle; it is a right, in other words, that is definitive of the very stupidity of violence as the assumption of a right to refuse absolutely anything.

It is with reference to this peculiar idea of violence as a right to refuse order that we can fix the difference between the relation of violence to natural as opposed to human form. The difference consists in the mode in which the mass represented by natural lawfulness and that embodied in the world of human lawfulness is *subject* to this right. In the case of natural form, violence emerges as a pure freedom, a negating space that holds itself apart and in tension within a bond that cannot be broken; whereas in the context of a world composed of human forms, violence seeks to extinguish the freedom of others through the medium of the products of such freedom. For the one, violence is the pure negativity of freedom itself; for the other, violence asserts itself in the form of pure necessity, pure being, that seeks to overwhelm the freedom of others, negating the negativity of their freedom. This distinction of the origin of forms thus leads to a peculiar double face of violence: on the one hand, the violent man is a *pure freedom* that denies being identified as part of the world *qua* plenum of *given being*; on the other hand, the violent man seeks to manifest himself to others as the force of *pure being*, a pure destructive *thing* that negates their existence as a plurality of *freedoms*: "He is man (that is, pure destructive consciousness) when he destroys the given in itself of the world and he is a *thing* when he destroys man."[39] In the one, the "refusal to being born" of violence is the destruction of its own facticity; in the other, violence seeks to be a nihilating facticity, not the negation of being but a negating being, destructive of the freedom of another.

Yet this distinction does not correspond to two distinct phenomena of violence. The two sides of the distinction—the assertion of freedom and the destruction of freedom—overlap within the structure of a single phenomenon. If, following the suggestions of Arendt cited above, one posits an originary violence that separates work from labor, one should nevertheless emphasize that it is "in things" and their factical necessities that works are embedded. Thus the refusal or resistance of form embodied in physical violence—smashing the lock, or Sartre's rather antique example of forcing a sword into a scabbard the wrong way—has a double character: it situates itself in the space of tension opened by the originary violence at the heart of instrumentality, but in order to assert a right of destruction at the expense of the human intentions and wills that have found their expression in the things of the world. These intentions take the form of designs, manipulations of materiality, that are articulated in the mechanics of the lock and the fit of the sword in the scabbard; their constraint, therefore, is as much a question of a *human* as a *natural* density. The overlapping of these two densities parallel the overlapping of violence as the assertion of freedom and the destruction of freedom, and are constitutive of the very thingliness of the thing that I attack, namely, that it is a thing *intended for me* by another against whom I direct my right of refusal. The "refusal to be born" can consequently be understood as the refusal to follow a path intended by others for a being such as myself: "I refuse to enter into a series of operations that have already been marked out on this object—as a form of restrained lawfulness—which indicate that men have intended me in their intentions."[40]

To follow the "series of operations" that define a course of action in instrumental terms is to forgo the right to stand apart not simply from nature, but from a nature that has been fashioned by the freedom of others—that is, it is to submit, to be defined, to fall in line with what others have foreseen and fixed as a practical procedure in the world. To refuse to be in such a world is to refuse to be anything other than *pure choice*, thus to have no path chosen or articulated in terms of how it is that a choice, a freedom other than myself, would posit my factical being—it is to refuse this facticity itself in a radical self-justifying assertion of right that rejects what Sartre calls the very *look* of the other. "Violence is the refusal of being looked at. [. . .] The artisan, the engineer, the technician look at me across the tool that they made for me. Consequently, to destroy the tool is symbolically to destroy this gaze."[41]

In this sense violence—at least in the ideal form of Sartre's "universe of violence," or the negation of the world as a world of freedoms encountering one another in the mode of being situations for one another—seeks to be complete: it seeks to appear as an inexorable, pure freedom for itself and a pure being for others. It is the project of an absolute, unconditioned success of one's own freedom and the extinguishing of that of others; it is the project of negating the facticity of one's situation that in turn absorbs

the negativity of other subjective projects. The universe of violence is thus characterized by a *constriction* that is even more complete than the restrictions demanded by natural necessity. For unlike nature, the violent man is not and cannot in any sense be *indifferent* to the tension with the negating freedom of others, if it is to be manifest precisely as the free projection of a refusal of all obstacles.

This sensitivity of violence to human freedom perhaps sheds some light on why Sartre is interested in the inherent instability of this pretense to perfection that characterizes pure violence, or the tension that exists between its principle of right and that which this freedom attempts to negate. For the formulation of the figure of the "universe of violence" serves to reveal an inner contradiction basic to the project of violence. In Sartre's reflections in the *Notebooks*, this contradiction takes two basic forms: first, the attempt to exercise a freedom as absolute independence from the realm of the world is radically dependent upon the world as such; violence needs to be fed, which in the end amounts to a lingering dependency on the world at the heart of its destruction. The violent man's freedom, therefore, is asserted in a form in which it cannot be ultimately recognized, which means that this assertion takes on the figure of bad faith: "the violent man is therefore a person of bad faith because, however far he carries his destructions, he counts on the richness of the world to support them and to perpetually provide new things to be destroyed."[42] Bad faith should be taken here in the sense of precisely a belief that, in its very execution, is a failure to believe: the violent man initiates destruction, believing in a freedom that is transparently a non-freedom.[43] Violence is not a self-sustaining reality; it must constantly re-assert itself against an obstacle in order to be, and that requires the presupposition of the inexhaustibility of the world to provide material that provides the fuel necessary for the very sense of destruction. Thus if violence is the "refusal of being born," of accepting those constraints that mark out the conduits that access the world of human things, then it does so only by immersing itself in the *possibility of being born* in the form of its perpetual negation. Violence in this way gets to the heart of things, despite its superficiality, since it must paradoxically affirm "once again" the birth of being in the world at the very moment that it chooses in bad faith to ignore this affirmation—or else it must fade literally into the "nothing at all" that it continuously risks. In other words, without there being the possibility of something other than violence, violence "is" nothing at all; and we might argue, *pace* Arendt, that the fact that there are other forms of natality, other modes of beginning something "new," is actually *affirmed* by violence, even if it is ultimately just this fact that is distorted in its bad faith.

The second form of contradiction that Sartre discusses has to do with the destruction of the Other, or the freeing of oneself from the other's freedom in the form of a rejection of the being-intended by the other (the engineer or craftsman, for example, who attempts to lock me in a gaze by way

of the instrumental form of an object). Here, too, there is a dependency that threatens the cogency of the project of violence, clouding the clarity of its performance. Yet the freedom of the Other inhibits and clouds the right to violence in a very different manner from the world of things. Namely, Sartre argues that violence is dependent upon the Other insofar as the full force of the right of refusal can only be attained if it is freely acknowledged by the Other, in a way clearly reminiscent of Hegel's analysis of the dialectic of self-consciousness in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Thus on the one hand, the violent are cut off from the free acceptance or non-acceptance of the Other; on the other hand, they require or need this same freedom of the Other to confirm the status of the right of violence itself, since only the recognition of the Other harbors the possibility of the freedom of the violent taking hold as an insuppressible facticity. Violence needs the withdrawal of the Other, not as a mere withering away, but in the positive form of the recognition of the *impossibility of not accepting* the loss of freedom that such a withdrawal entails. For violence does not seek to be invisible, but to be a genuine refusal of a look that is thereby willingly forced back into itself. Thus the assertion of violence as a "pure being" for others, as pure force, is undermined at the same time by the necessity of the violent man to appeal, at the core of the necessity imposed by violence, to a freedom that is not present in its mere absence, but conforms to a logic of original self-expression. This means that it is not simply the world as a resource or fuel that is presupposed by the violent man, but also the world as an awareness, or an acknowledgment of its own negation: "Destructive of the human world, it [violence] needs the human world to acknowledge its destruction."[44] This modifies in a significant manner what following Arendt we called the silent/silencing character of violence: if what violence seeks to silence is the freedom of others, it can do so only if the silence of the others is at the same time expressive of an essential recognition.

An important result of this double instability of violence is that Sartre's thesis that violence is a "right" needs to be put into context. It is a right that marks out an intrinsically unstable sphere of access, one that can never take hold as a kind of lasting accomplishment; in this sense violence is a right the concrete sense of which dissolves in its being exercised, since once it is caught between the absolute denial of any resistance on the part of the Other and the ultimate need for the sanction of that same freedom, it can no longer mark out a coherent space of expression. "For if freedom resists him [here Sartre's example is a torturer], he no longer has a right, his demand becomes mere desire, he only has *violence* left, he is a monster. But once he [the victim] has given in, the victim becomes inessential, he has given in to evil, his recognition has no value."[45] The exercise of violence as a right to refuse can only result in the dissolution of this refusal, in the failure of this refusal to crystallize into an enduring position assumed by the subject of violence; left to itself, violence necessarily fails to sustain any claim to being.

THE PROBLEM OF THE SUBSTANTIALITY OF VIOLENCE

These intrinsic contradictions emphasized by Sartre imply that violence can only be parasitic on human relations, that it can never establish itself as a concrete form of such relations. More, these contradictions imply also that violence, if thought of as a given "means," can never be unambiguously instrumental in character. Violence is instead a modification of instrumentality that takes a double form of bad faith: it is the bad faith of a freedom that would ignore both its dependency on the world and its dissolution as a right to refuse. Even if, following Sartre's argument, it is important to understand that pure violence is not dependent upon something other than itself to justify it, as Arendt would argue, it is nevertheless dependent upon external factors in order for it to have a place or influence in human affairs at all. Thus in a sense Arendt is right to emphasize a dependency of violence that undermines its putative originary character. For given enough time, violence as a means dissolves into a fluctuation between the extremes of its double contradiction (pure destructive consciousness and dependence on things; pure being for Others and the demand on the Other as a free being). From the perspective of the world as a meaningful context of action, violence appears ultimately as a mere disruption of pattern, a temporary delay in the flow of events, a contingent disturbance that proves inessential with respect to a situation that finds its authentic articulation ultimately in terms of interest and value. In a composed world, the decomposed figure of the violent can only be an aberration; it literally "has no place."

Nevertheless, and in spite of all this, violence does have its own peculiar substantiality. This concreteness must be traced to resources other than reasons or justifications in order for it to be sufficiently clarified. This puts us in the position to identify the significance of *subjectivity* for violence, for the basis or resource for the substantiality of violence, we will argue, is preeminently subjective in character. The primary phenomenon that we have in mind in this connection is the *distortion of time* that belongs to violence, a theme that emerges in several places in Sartre's discussion of violence in the *Notebooks*.[46] There are a number of forms such a distortion can take, but they all have to do with a fundamental denial of a *future of possibility*.

Let us look closer at what this might mean by considering an extreme example introduced by Sartre: the rape of a young girl by a worker. The act is violent, in that the aim is to realize an immediate fulfillment of an end, that of the sexual possession of the young woman. The worker employs violence either because the end is in itself impossible to obtain, or the hope of success too small if it were to be pursued as a project unfolding into a possible future. To be sure, the rape distorts and perverts the end; the act, once it has become violent, is no longer a question of desire per se, but is at most determined by the projection of an object of obsession. The key element in this example of Sartre's is the fact that the "immediacy" aimed at in the act of rape does not, and cannot, take the form of a future possibility being

magically realized in the present, as if violence simply negated the interval that separates the present from a given possible future. The rape does not simply "speed up" an otherwise normal course of action towards a given end, but its very abnormality, or distortion, lies in the refusal to subsume the act to any future that is determined by or made visible as anything other than the object of obsession, which in fact does not represent a "future" at all. Sartre argues that the distortion is thus immanently temporal in character, or better, it is a distortion that effectively *suspends time*: there is an *absolutization* or an *eternalization* of the goal (the obsessed object), which takes the form of a d*enial of the connection of the act to the future at all.*

This suppression of the future amounts to a peculiar "meditation on death," and Sartre suggests that this is the reason why murder and suicide are often associated with such cases. They fit into the logic of violence, insofar as the point of violence is "to prevent there being an *afterwards* for a consciousness."[47] That is, the point of violence in the case of the rape is to suppress the potential for there being anything other than the obsessed object as such, or to close it within that pure exception of violence that finds no place in an undistorted world of events. The connection of violence to death that this example illuminates—to death understood in rather Heideggerean fashion as the possibility of the impossibility of projects—is essential here: for the possibility of death lies at the heart of the temporal distortion basic to violence. In violence, the distortion of the present, where the present is experienced as a break with the very possibility of the future as such, is intensified by way of its refraction through death as the very nihilation of all the demands of time.

To be sure, Sartre's example of rape followed by murder and suicide is limited, as was his abstract thought experiment of the "universe of violence." Such examples serve at most to illuminate the ambiguous character of the instrumentality of violence on the one hand, and the temporal distortion at the heart of violence on the other, but their extreme character renders them unsuitable for a general account of violence. More common are cases in which violence is subsumed to a specific goal that in fact remains part of the fabric of human relations as a projection of the future; such cases fall well short of a clear meditation on death, even if they might remain in essential respects related to it. We thus need a more nuanced approach to the question, one that will in turn allow us to understand how violence takes hold, or how the ambiguity and distortion of violence takes up residence, despite everything, in human reality.

In fact there is a better way to make a similar point about the temporal distortion of violence, namely by understanding it as a particular form of assuming a relation to *risk*. Take for example standing in line waiting to buy tickets for the theater: the staff announces that there are only three tickets left, Pierre is fifth in line; but he decides, out of frustration, to push forward and impose himself at the front of the queue. An apparently closed off possibility seems now to be in his grasp; it is as if he has punched a hole

through what had threatened to form an insuperable barrier, closing off access to his end. But this success is only apparent, it holds only if he "gets away with it"—that is, only if there are no consequences in the wake of what he has done, having pushed ahead of the line.

The tendency towards violence here (Pierre is not yet "violent," but has taken a step towards the decomposure that inaugurates violence) lies in the attempt to suppress the connectivity between what one does and the future that all actions, without exception, set into motion. As Sartre expresses it, in violence I prefer *being* to *doing*, or better: I stand merely in the horizon of the fact of what I have done, distorting the time of action in such a way that the situation I am for others is forced to appear (if we think of distortion as a *forced appearance*) as something irreversible, and which thus cannot be challenged:

> The violent man, therefore, is the man who espouses the party of Being (of the past as Being, of causality, of instantaneousness, of the indestructibility symbolized by irreversibility). More precisely, Being as it *would be* without finitude, temporality, the necessity of waiting, of going from the parts to the whole, the diversity of things, the determination of means by the end.[48]

Yet if, in contrast to the case of the rapist, the end that Pierre is pursuing remains defined from within the context of his actions, thus within the forms of lawfulness that define the order in which it is inscribed, then he effectively puts his very relation to his end "at risk," even if at the same time he seems to realize it *immediately*. What he holds on to in violence is in fact his end, but now it has taken on the form of an immediately threatened situation; the future end has been made present, but only as an unstable present that risks dissolving, or passing through his fingers as if revoked by the world. "Risk" refers precisely to such a threatened reality; for in the risk of violence the end is not realized, it is only distorted into the forced appearance of a realized goal, and is for that reason "at risk" of falling asunder. More, risk means something more in this case than a simple appearance, since insofar as Pierre has no recourse to death or murder to evade the re-emergence of the force of the future, he remains dependent on the others to cede to the putative irreversibility of what he has done, either through indifference or weakness of will. The situation is only tenable if the others accept the distortion as given being, as a *fait accompli*, and the "violence" is worth its risk only under conditions of its being accepted by its victims. Risk in this sense thus describes how something that ought not to have a place at least initially takes hold, has a place, and structures the situation one is for others or, more precisely, the manner in which others are a situation for oneself.

This distortion amounts to a partial dissolution of the unfolding of a future, a subjective decomposition that constricts what "needs to happen"

for certain possibilities to be realized in the manifestation of a risk; more, this distortion is intrinsically "subjective," in that it is a perversion of the temporality of the subject as a being that forms itself as a tension between the past and the future, thus opening itself as a space of the manifestation of the possible. The aim of violence, or what it means to call violence a "means," can be described as the attempt to close off a future in favor of a false past that is thrust between the others and their own subjective futural openness, as so many instances of the being of consciousness, to this manifestation of the possible: it is the insistence that all involved cease to view the situation in terms of possibilities they nevertheless essentially disclose, instead substituting the claim of a given being or given past that has absorbed the possible into itself.

Yet this again demonstrates how violence represents an example of bad faith, in that such an acceptance can never assume a stable form that would not always already be undermined by precisely the originary, undistorted relation of subjectivity to its future. Thus either violence invites counter-violence, a further distortion of the situation, but now in a way that threatens to severely restrict the freedom of the violent subject instead of appearing to promote it; or the situation that one is for others becomes re-assimilated by way of a correction of the pattern of affairs that compensates for the violent attempt to distort the situation in one's favor. Either way, the axis of action and response turns uniquely on the subjective resources for the distortion of the emergence of the possibility for the realization of an end, or the manner in which such a distortion can become a "problem" that is not simply a question of a structural insufficiency within the order of relations. The problem of violence then seems to turn on understanding the potential for this particular topology of risk, where the future and my openness to it are constituted in the state of being threatened. More: this risk represents a way in which, even in cases where violence is subsumed to a positive goal, something like the "universe of violence" is in play, the universe in which the exception manifest in such a distortion becomes more and more prominent, dissolving the very coherence of the situation as such by retarding the effective openness of subjectivity to the future.

Nevertheless, we could (and should) recognize that risk is not introduced into the world through violence. Risk in a general sense is a structural feature of factical life, of a life for which it is possible to be brought, without warning, to a sudden close. Risk in this general sense of exposure to contingent closure illuminates the temporality of human life in a specific manner, and is not specific to violence.[49] What is specific to violence is the manner in which it distorts the temporality illuminated by risk, and it does so by directly taking aim at the *human world*. This assumes something already touched upon above in the discussion of Arendt: what is exposed to risk, and with that experienced in its fragility, is already modified in accordance with the logic of the human artifice: our construction of our world, the very opening up of the "world" as a whole, is a qualitative transformation

of the finite character of bare existence into a world that is encountered in terms of a different type of density than the unfreedom of nature. Instead of the burdensome, mute rhythms of natural existence, the space of risk is now delimited as the sphere of the threatened, or potentially threatened, permanence of produced life—and it is in such a world that violence takes on more of a subjectively significant role than it ever could in mere nature. To be sure, it is still natural death that lies at the origin of even risk modified by human artifice and the distortions of violence; death remains the ultimate ground of the futility of a world that lives in what it produces. But here both death and risk become problems and questions that are very different from an experience of death and risk that would take as its model the rhythms of natural life.

Here we can again take up the theme of the possibility of violence as the origin of political tension that we explored in the last chapter in our reading of Schmitt's *The Concept of the Political*. The logic of Sartre's reflections support the suggestion that the threat articulated in this possibility cannot be simply the question of a purely natural risk of death at the hands of another's violence, as if the enemy were an instance of a "natural danger." And in fact Schmitt's thesis is not simply that the possibility of death at the hands of the enemy counts among those limiting conditions of finite existence that we inevitably must recognize, qua living beings; rather the thesis was, to stress the point yet again, that the existential possibility of combat lies at the origin of the particular tension definitive of political relations, a tension that sets them apart in such a way that points to the autonomy of the political. Here we can expand this suggestion in the following way based on our reflections on Sartre: this "political tension" is not simply reducible to risk as it finds its place in natural existence, but rather: it is the problem of death refracted throughout the human edifice as such, thus ultimately in terms of a life that (by way of an originary violence) has refused being a "mere life," or refused to follow natural patterns in fixing for itself the horizon of its self-encounter. To die as a human is not the same thing as to die as an animal. This is not because the animal is without purpose or essence, or that its death is not mediated by a meaning of the life that has come to an end, but because one's relationship to one's own nature is fundamentally problematic in character; it is at risk in accordance with the logic of its self-extension into what Arendt calls the space of appearance. It is this mediated risk that is set into motion in cases of violence in the human context: the risk is not simply to expose oneself to danger, to death; what is risked or at risk in violence is instead the very human project of being something other than mere life.[50]

To explore this, we can again turn to Sartre, in particular to his reflection in the *Notebooks* on a form of violence that is personal/spiritual rather than physical: the violence implicit in the *lie*.[51] Key hallmarks of violence already elaborated apply equally to the lie: the transcendence of the Other is reduced by my lie to a manipulable "thing," in that I engage

the movement of the Other towards a projected future by anticipating this movement and essentially "derailing" it by providing a false projection, thus a false situation from the ground of my own freedom. In an attempt to seduce, I present myself as a man of means, ever quick to promise what I can never deliver, bending the Other to my will for the short term. Again we have the temporal distortion essential to violence: the explicit decision to restrict the project to the moment, sacrificing the future—as long as the immediate does not contradict the end, it suits one's purposes; the strategy is to strive to close off the inevitable challenge that the future brings to any such project.

The lie does not have to be vicious to damage. I praise the manuscript of a novel written by my friend in order to preserve our friendship; what is damaged here is not the result or consequences that I may be faced with once I have lied (things in fact may never come to a head, the risk in lying is not simply putting oneself in the position of being discovered "in the lie"). What is damaged or suffers violence is that common space between freedoms that allows for the pursuit of a life that is more than mere life. To be sure, such a risk can be assumed by a larger project of such a pursuit— I can lie to someone for his "own sake" (Sartre here uses the example of party leaders lying to party members), or for the truth or idea ultimately definitive of the future of myself and the Other; I may lie so that we can have a life together, or to support the Other in this or that project. In lying I may in fact be cooperating. Yet the lie nevertheless introduces a separation between us, and the more this separation takes hold, or the more it follows the course of a violence that depends on a cold, paralyzing distance between myself and Other, the more the other becomes for me simply a "thing," a mass clouding the projection of my freedom. The more my lie to my friend about his brilliance as a novelist becomes a normal factor of our relations, the more "friendship" itself becomes a mute "value" to be preserved in the form of a thing manipulated at will, as opposed to something around which has formed our mutual openness to a common future of possibility. Wrapped in the lie, the freedom of the other is forced into a mechanical seriality of which the Other is oblivious but which, in a reciprocal fashion, the emergence of a gesture towards the pure nothingness of my freedom is intensified.

In a sense, the real extreme case of violence in Sartre's reflections in the *Notebooks* is not the "world of violence," but this (tentative, to be sure) identification of the lie as a kind of violence. But what is important from our point of view is the suggestion implicit in Sartre's analyses, namely that the question of what constitutes violence is de-coupled from the question of *damage*—of harm that can be defined in moral, social, or economic terms. Damage does not serve as an index to violence, not even in Arendt; more, to adopt a course of violence is not simply to aim for damage as a result, in fact damage may not even be desired at all, as in the case of the lie. Violence is instead a function of what we are here calling risk—the risk of a life that,

as free, attempts to be more than life, more than the mere "metabolism with nature," to use Arendt's expression. Violence is visible only within the horizon of the assumption of, and attempt to manipulate risk; to be conscious of violence is in turn not simply to note damage done, but it is to be conscious of that risk which belongs to properly human existence as such. More, what is at stake, or "at risk," comes into sharper focus in the case of violence: the very sense of the possibility of asking the question of what it could be, to be more than mere life; or what it could be, to be a human being.

Another aspect of the lie is equally important, namely, the gradual accretion around the lie of an opacity that fixes a distance between freedoms, like a fog of separateness that robs both parties to the lie of the possibility of coming together and addressing what is in question through the exercise of speech. Lies, and in a general sense hypocrisy, kill speech, and represent a violence that strikes at the very heart of the possibility of political life; but more, as a praxis the lie, and by extension the subjective-temporal distortion of violence in general, if not forced into the open and negated, can take on the form of an inertia in human relations that shapes the context, the situation that humans are for one another. Lies and violence leave a legacy, and in the form of a legacy they condition action.

In *The Critique of Dialectical Reason*, a later work that turns from ethics to the task of a philosophy of history, Sartre attempts to conceptualize this legacy with his notion of the *practico-inert*. The term describes the inert presence of past praxis as determinative of the shape of things, where the legacies of action yield a kind of material landscape of human actions and situations. From this perspective, violence is not limited to the being of the "violent man," or to the horizon of an act and its consequences, but can exist as an *objective dimension* of the situation itself. Consider the following passage from *The Critique of Dialectical Reason* on colonial Algeria:

> [For] the child of the colonialist, violence was present in the situation itself, and was a social force which produced him. The son of the colonialist and the son of the Muslim are both the children of the objective violence which defines the system itself as a practico-inert hell. But if this violence-object produces them, if they suffer it partly as their own inertia, this is because it used to be the violence-praxis when the system was in the process of being installed. It is man who inscribed his violence in things as the eternal unity of this passive mediation between men.[52]

Sartre's idea of the practico-inert as the inscription of "violence in things" is important, since it points to an aspect of violence that we have not touched upon, and which leads to a more fundamental appraisal of the constitutive character of violence. For if we understand the praxis of violence in terms of the potential that violence can have a hold on us in the form of an embodiment in materiality, then we can begin to understand in what sense violence could be taken to be "constitutive," and still take seriously

Arendt's objection that nevertheless violence does not "make men." Following Sartre's reflections, we have seen violence in the form of a distortion that flows immediately from the negating freedom of a subject encountering the world of things and other free consciousnesses; and if with Sartre we go on to identify the being of violence as "nihilistic," the sense of this nihilism has been limited to the manner in which the temporal distortion of violence negates the free relation to the future represented by the moment. Yet in the form of the practico-inert, this distortion itself can shape the landscape of human action thanks to an inertia that no longer flows simply from the facticity of human freedom, but borrows a permanence and a force that lies on the side of things as such.

Violence, in other words, can become, as the practical legacy of its exercise, a *system* of violence, and with that a "world" of violence in a difference sense than the free projection of a subject that affirms a negative reality in the guise of its own relentless destruction. For Sartre, the most pressing form of such a violence of his time was colonialism, and he saw a confirmation of this in the writings of Frantz Fanon. The colonial world in Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* is described as a kind of anti-world; if the violent subject represents a refusal to be born, the colonial world is a world that rejects birth as such: it is the institution of an opacity that disrupts the very possibility of speech, or of the natality that Arendt argued was essential to political action, and as such refuses the colonized the very ground of the possibility of assuming a properly *political* existence. This is exemplified in the fundamentally racist nature of colonialism: it institutes itself in the form of a hatred that is impervious to reasons, to even the very being addressed by the colonized, forcing, as Fanon puts it, the "native" populations into a mode of existence that does not rise above being a feature of the surrounding natural landscape. "The Algerians, the veiled women, the palm trees and the camels make up the landscape, the *natural* background to the human presence of the French."[53] Though to be sure this landscape itself is constituted by the distortions of violence; thus when Fanon says that colonialism "dehumanizes the native, or to speak plainly, it turns him into an animal," the animality in question is peculiarly charged with hatred and disgust—the native is not so much an animal, in other words, as a *beast*, an animalized man, for men only animalize *other men*.[54]

This also points to a central, and controversial thesis of Sartre's, one he shares with Fanon. For Sartre, the "system of violence" represented by colonialism does not as such have a "political" solution, for it defines a space that fuses together the colonizers only in the form of a system of violence and, through the atomization of the colonized, negates the very possibility of that coming together in a concert of action that Arendt identifies as the origin of a political community. In Sartre's language, the practico-inert of violence represents the institution of a seriality that represents a radical combination of the nihilism of violence, the distortion in which the very future of things is manifest in an insuperable absence, with an inertia which inscribes this nihilism on the very bodies of the oppressed as well as the

oppressors. The thesis is that even the colonizers are ultimately fused by nothing but their hatred, in accordance with the logic of a fully instituted regime of violence that warps even their relationship to the parent nation of the colony; whereas the colonized live in a spiritually and physically pulverized society, separated again by nothing but the inertia of the legacy of the catastrophe that was the factual origin of their submission. The colonized are born into a world in which no one is allowed to be born; they are identified as nothing more than a threat represented by the dark motions of a mass that can only be struck down, manipulated, and controlled. The colonizers are born into a world in which their birth is divided between the promise of politics and the logic of the instrumentality of brutal suppression, one that has always already corrupted the promise of political existence from within. The conflict between the two, and the war that both pursue, is inescapably determined by the logic of this systematic, concrete violence.

One can perhaps, with some reservations, recognize in Fanon's description of the colonial situation a special case of Schmitt's notion of a friend-enemy grouping. In his 1963 *Theorie des Partisanen*, Schmitt himself already sees in colonial and revolutionary warfare the emergence of unique conceptions of "enemy," which he traces to the growing importance in modern history of irregular or guerilla warfare. Such warfare represents the development of a progressive extension of an ambiguity of what counts as "the enemy," an ambiguity that is summed up in the contradictory figure of the "partisan." The notion of partisan that Schmitt pursues defines an intensely political combatant who does not, however, fight for a state, or for a political unity that could count as a state, but is rather a more local, territorial-bound agency.[55] This "telluric" or local character of the partisan is the source of a potential ambiguity as to just how the partisan can be conceived to be "political," particularly in those instances when the state authority, which would normally control a given territory, is identified by the partisan as, if not the enemy, at least in collaboration with the enemy— as, for example, in those cases where the partisan continues to fight an invader long after the state has capitulated (the French Resistance during the Second World War, or the resistance of the *guerrillos* in Spain and Portugal to the French in 1808).

Schmitt himself mentions the case of General Raoul Salan in Algeria as a figure who brings, so to speak, the logic of the partisan to a kind of close. Salan, one of the founders and head of the terrorist organization OAS (*Organisation d'Armée secrète*), in effect declares war on all organized parties involved in the Algerian conflict: the FLN, the civilian population of Algiers, the French government, and even to some extent the French public.[56] It is this peculiar zone of alienation, where the OAS fights against the French in fighting for the French against the Algerian population for Algeria, that Schmitt sees as the radical culmination of the paradoxical extension from Clausewitz through Lenin to Mao of the semantic space of determination that constitutes the notion of "enemy," and with that the very meaning of enmity itself.[57]

Yet one should perhaps be skeptical about the coherence of such an analysis. Is it not much more the case that in the figure of the partisan we see not an intensification of a radical form of the political, but rather a unique *failure* of the political, precisely in Schmitt's sense? Take the colonial situation. Is not the distinction between friend and enemy, again (following Schmitt) dependent upon the possibility of violence, not disrupted in a fundamental way by an enemy that is now articulated not simply in terms of a possibility of violence, but the system of violence that forms the colony as such? Does not the substantiality of violence in colonialism, thanks to which the "enemy" becomes an all pervasive threat that can manifest itself not only in the FLN fighter or the revolutionary soldier, but also in the far more ambiguous form of the "traitor to France," lead us to a point where the distinction between friend and enemy cannot function to distinguish friend and enemy as distinct *groups*, because in fact the legacy (not the mere possibility) of violence prevents the enemy from appearing as a *grouping* at all?

Fanon in fact presents a number of interesting examples of this kind of breakdown in his writings on the colonial condition. Fanon was a psychiatrist and doctor, and in one of the last chapters of *The Wretched of the Earth*, "Colonial War and Mental Disorders," he writes of a police commandant in Algiers who, after having taken part in many interrogations that involved torture, becomes concerned that he is mentally disturbed after he finds himself beating his wife in front of his children.[58] What disturbs him is, one could say, that the violence of the situation does not remain contained in the mold of an instrument, that it instead tends to bleed beyond the limits imposed by a given task and becomes a reality, an opacity or inertia that inevitably saturates all relations. The reality of such a war, of a legacy of violence that is encountered as it were in any given arbitrary relation among persons, is again arguably no longer a distinctively *political* reality, but a distorted world in which violence has taken a radically *antipolitical form*: a violence that saturates relations among all can no longer function as an origin of a tension that would divide distinct political groupings, or in general serve to articulate possibilities that would be pursued by such groupings. At most, it can remain as a kind of legacy, the meanings and consequences of which are fundamentally unpredictable.

In a sense, *mutatis mutandis*, this confirms the thesis of Arendt's that violence is purely instrumental in character, despite our attempts to show that Sartre takes us beyond the limits of such a definition. For if we rely on the development of our instruments to chart the course of our future, then we will inevitably lose our bearings. That may in fact be true. But first let us reconsider Sartre's fundamental thesis: the argument is that if the violence that has a hold on the situation in the form of a "system of violence" precludes a political mediation between the colonial project of the *pied noirs* and the desire of the colonized to be men, this does not mean that political action as such has no basis, that there cannot be resistance. On the contrary, the argument is that, for the colonized, violence itself, the

very assumption of the implements of violence and their use in common, represents a break with seriality and, subsequently, the fusion of a group; and with this comes a beginning that, to be sure, is not a beginning *with* the colonizer, but a pledge *against* him. What is possible for the colonized is a friend-enemy grouping that, again, emerges out of the possibility of a violence against violence, a counter-terror against terror that fuses the basis for the pledge of decision against the colonizer. Nicolas de Warren, in a perceptive article on political violence in Sartre and Fanon, puts it this way: "Violence is a praxis that brings together those deprived of speech into a space of possibility in which their own speech becomes a possibility (this is the movement from a fused group to a pledge group); and this possibility of speech is the vernacular of a national consciousness."[59]

Again we can invoke the figure of the partisan: the partisan is a creature of the local situation, grouped only in the most immediate fusion over seriality, that is, grouped not in accordance with a regular plan or structure or organ of warfare (such as a national army), but solely out of the irrational structural patterns that constitute the local itself, as a concrete space of experience. The partisan is the nation "spontaneously" generated; and the question then becomes whether violence alone, or the counter-violence that defines colonial war, is sufficient to understand the link between the partisan and the nation. This leads us to Fanon's thesis, or at least his hope— namely, that the colonial oppressed can find a new voice, and with that a new humanity, through the experience of collective violence—or better, through a violence that directs itself against the collective violence represented by the colonial system itself.

Fanon and Sartre's writings on the colonial wars of the twentieth century could be said to represent another version of the thesis of the constitutive character of violence that we have already sought to articulate in Chapter One with our reflection on Schmitt's *The Concept of the Political*. The key element for our purposes is the figure of the fusion of, on the one hand, the *nihilism* of violence with, on the other hand, the *institution or inertial formation of the landscape of human relations*. The subjective specificity of violence is its nihilism, that peculiar insistence of inhabiting a world without being born into it; the substantiality of violence is the material legacy of this subjective distortion that undermines the integrity of the space of appearance. The problem of violence and counter-violence is, in other words, to a great extent the problem of the *substantiality of nihilism*, of the potential for the nihilism of violence to shape and form a world in the act of destroying the world—or how something that is the negation of every world, every possibility of world as a common space of appearance, can imitate the freedom that is promised in the very idea of a world. The nihilism of violence is accordingly not nothing, just as its subjectivity is not a "mere" subjectivity. To pursue the implications of this idea of the nihilism of violence thus leads us to the problem of nihilism itself, which is the topic of the next chapter.

3   On the Line
(Jünger, Heidegger)

THE NIHILISM OF VIOLENCE: EXTENSION OF THE PROBLEM

When Sartre, in the *Notebooks*, argues that "violence implies nihilism," he has something very specific in mind. He is concerned with the sense in which violence can be the symptom of a weakness, especially given the "theoretical supremacy to action accomplished in conformity with laws over an action that is accomplished against such laws." [1] To conform to laws entails power, since laws mark off the space of the possible, and power can be thought of in terms of the ability to fully inhabit and act within such a space. To conform specifically to human laws or demands, thus to fully inhabit the space that they mark off, involves the dynamic potential for *political* power, if we recall here Arendt's conception of power emerging from acting in concert. Violence disrupts this conduit of power, breaks off the relation thanks to which action realizes the possibilities of power, but in such a way that takes the form of a particular kind of *affirmation*: "I may prefer the nonlawful; that is, I can place destruction as a means of obtaining an end above respect for what is. In this case, I affirm the inessentialness of everything that exists in relation to me and my goal." [2]

This "affirmation of inessentialness" raises the important question of how something that is determined by a lack, a break, or a failure can nevertheless be characterized as a type of positivity. This is the problem of nihilism: the problem of the affirmation of the nothingness of things, if by "inessential" we mean a definitive "nothingness" that serves to fix the sense of things. This would be consistent with Sartre's philosophical vocabulary from *Being and Nothingness*, insofar as there the term "essence" refers to the fixity and definiteness of a being that is taken for what it "is" in its factical existence. The affirmation of the "inessentiality" of things would then be understood as a countermovement to the relation of human being to essence, thus the denial of facticity, in the sense of those forms in which things have taken shape factically in accordance with definable and stable, if not always absolutely fixed principles

of essence. If in violence one affirms the inessentiality of things by adopting destruction as an end, then the point is that violence can do so only as the affirmation of a certain fluidity that exists between the existence of things and the form they take in their manifestation as essences. From the perspective of "essence," of grasping facticity that has already become what it is, such a fluidity is just "nothing," and the attempt to force beings to appear only *in* this fluidity of their relation to their own essence would appear as "nothing" but their destruction.

Yet one needs at this point to ask: what does this "affirmation" amount to, in the case of violence? Does not the logic of Sartre's reflection seem to indicate that destruction itself is at least comparable to a "form," or even an "essentiality," where the putative "affirmed inessentiality" would then be merely a kind of negative image of essence? Is there not, in other words, a sense in which all affirmation is form-giving, thus where the fluidity of manifestation would somehow become substantified in violence? After all, on Sartre's account, it is only insofar as freedom sets into motion the fluidity of the relation between existence and its forms that essential being emerges at all; it is only in the movement of the transcendence of consciousness that beings are brought out of the solidity of the pure *en-soi*, of being-in-itself, and set into a context, the situation of the *pour-soi* in which they are subsequently engaged. What is the difference, then, between the affirmation of this fluidity in violence and the emergence of the concrete situation of freedom itself? To what extent is the affirmation of the "inessential" simply another modality of this same bringing into appearance of things, though now in the peculiar form of a counter-tendency to all forms?

This requires not so much a more specific analysis of violence, as of the concept of nihilism itself. The basic task of this chapter will be to develop a conception of nihilism that is robust enough to pose the problem of just in what sense we can say, with Sartre, that "violence implies nihilism," and what such an assertion could mean.

The reflection here will be framed in terms of an important exchange between Ernst Jünger and Martin Heidegger on the subject of nihilism and metaphysics from the 1950's.[3] The result of this reflection will show that the relation between violence and nihilism is deeply problematic; above all, it will show that what may appear to be the next obvious step in Sartre's argument that we followed in the last chapter—namely, that violence is constitutive in the sense in which nihilism is an affirmation—is in fact deeply problematic, and will require that we reformulate the problem from the ground up, as it were. For, as will become clear when we turn to Heidegger's critique of Jünger's essay "Über die Linie," nihilism is a far more ambiguous problem than one might suppose; more, nihilism may in fact be precisely definitive of those conditions under which violence can be in no way "constitutive," in that the very possibility of its constitutive character has been closed off from the very beginning.

"OVER THE LINE"

The title of Jünger's essay, "Über die Linie," can be translated "Over the Line," but it can also be understood as an expression that means "About the Line"—a contrast that Heidegger exploits in the opening pages of his letter to Jünger in *Zur Seinsfrage*. We will begin with the sense of passing over the line, thus taking the title to be an expression for *trans lineaum*.

Right away, of course, given that this is after all an essay by the author of *Im Stalhgewittern* and *Wäldchen 125*, it is difficult not to associate the "line" spoken of in the title with the "front line," the paradigmatic line of the trench so familiar from the images we have of the First World War— thus where "over the line" would evoke charging out of the trench, initiating that moment in which an acute confrontation of material power transforms itself into a conflagration, where violence consumes material both human and non-human in an expression of pure force. To survive over the line, to pass through the fire and live, seems to hold out the promise of being transformed irrevocably, even of the beginning of a new reality. Perhaps the significance of the front line in the First World War was that it was irrevocable proof that any world that would create such a confrontation of force cannot sustain itself, that it is "nihilistic" in the sense of ultimately self-destructive and ripe for its passage in favor of a new order of things. We will return to this idea that the front-line experience represents a rupture, a breakdown of metaphysical extremes in the next chapter, where we will discuss this idea as it is articulated in Jan Patočka's *Heretical Essays*.

In Jünger's 1955 essay, however, the idea of the "line" amounts to something quite different, though the assertion that it represents a kind of point of no return, a decisive moment, is nevertheless an essential aspect. Unlike Patočka, Jünger is here not so much concerned with cataclysm as he is with fulfillment. The central question he tries to formulate, drawing on Nietzsche and Dostoyevsky, is the possibility of thinking of a completed, fully formed European nihilism that would at the same time represent the inauguration of a new, transformed life. This is in itself, for Jünger, something of a paradoxical task, if what we mean by "nihilism" entails the negation of all genuine "living," or of all value-ordered existence. Nihilism, in the traditional sense, expressed for example in Dostoyevsky's polemics against Russian anarchism, is doubly determined by an "everything is permitted" and an "everything is lost"—which would seem to negate the possibility of any form of life at all taking root, or taking hold of existence. Thus if we were to think of the "line" as that point at which the nihilistic dismantling of the forms of value has been completed, then it would seem to indicate precisely that point at which the possibility of a "new" form would itself have been destroyed.

Yet Jünger wants to approach the notion of the "line" in terms of the possibility of looking *beyond* the end nihilism represents. If the line fixes

the absolute point of no return that is nihilism itself, then the question is not somehow to pull back from the precipice in order to re-engage an order of values that had degenerated into nihilism, as if we could embrace a diseased existence in order to somehow find a way to recover from it, or to heal. Instead, Jünger explores the possibility of thinking the line not in terms of the horror of total loss, but as the embodiment of a peculiar kind of optimism, that is, as the expression of a potential capacity to look beyond the present on the basis of the resources of one's own character. This optimism would be based upon resources that are not drawn from the world, but which lie out of the reach of the violence imposed by its nihilistic expression: "In this case one encounters optimism as a knowledge that goes deeper than the authority of facts [*Gewalt der Tatsachen*]—it can even create facts. Its center of gravity lies more in character than in the world."[4] Thus the question Jünger tries to articulate could perhaps be expressed thus: at that point at which nihilism comes to its completion, does it perhaps also come to a kind of closure that, in the form of a new experience of possibility, points us to resources of the self that allow us to look beyond this very closure? Is the point where the nihilism of the age is realized in turn the point where we are sent back upon ourselves in such a way that there is awakened in us a basis for existence, a resource for living of which, up to this point, up to the line, we have been unaware?

The key section of the essay is §4, where Jünger, in contrasting this optimism with its opposite, draws an important distinction between "pessimism" and "defeatism." Defeatism is alien to pessimism, which is in fact a spiritual cousin of optimism, in that it expresses a unique resource of the self. The negativity of pessimism enables one to hold out, against all hope, in a fashion that is compatible with the "looking beyond" the closure of nihilism that defines Jünger's positive sense of nihilistic optimism. Pessimism has its own resources, so to speak, and the pessimist can stand shoulder to shoulder with the most convinced optimist. For pessimism can take the form of a moral disgust with the present, and with that the strength to stand for one's own against all hope, when there is nothing to stand upon. The real opposite of optimism is thus not this pessimism, but rather the spiritual disintegration of defeatism: that total succumbing of the resources of selfhood to the violence of the real.

It is worth lingering somewhat on Jünger's notion of defeatism. It can be used to open the question of the way in which nihilism can be considered a disaster, or a catastrophe. Jünger describes defeatism as a kind of panic in the face of fear, whether fear for what is ownmost and inward to the self, or, for what belongs outside of the sphere of the inward—in short, fear for what is *inner* as opposed to what is *outer*.[5] An inner fear is experienced in terms of a threat to one's own existence: in such fear one senses a threat to the viability of those threads that hold one suspended in the web of relations that fix the individual whole of one's own being. External fear involves being witness to a threatened reality, where the very coherence of things,

the very order of the world, is threatened by gigantic forces that appear wholly indifferent to one's own existence. Writing in 1950, the object of such fears had already culminated for Jünger in the form of the possible orchestration of apocalyptic world-annihilation in a nuclear war.

One is threatened in both cases by virtue of the very fact of being woven into the fabric of things; but to succumb to either fear is a decisively "inner" experience, one that takes the form of a collapse, of an inability to face a situation in which both oneself and the entire world has as it were been held hostage. This sense of defeatism, or the form of a collapse that presupposes a strong sensitivity to the presence of the world as a whole, is at the heart of what Jünger describes as the phenomenon of the "war of nerves" (*Nervenkrieg*). In such a war, one aims for the spiritual collapse of the other's will in the face of the possibility of the total annihilation of human existence on a planetary scale.

What Jünger has in view here is something similar to what we have already seen in Schmitt: the idea of a violence that we are aware of in the form of a possibility that illuminates the distance between fighting collectivities. The possibility of violence can have such force only if it puts into question the cohesiveness of existence as such, and not simply the integrity of relations between groups. However, the specific arena of a *Nervenkrieg* is for Jünger the inwardness of the individual; for it is only the decision of the individual, inwardly made or even encountered as a question, that is relevant here. The idea, I would argue, could be taken as nuanced variant of the strategy of attrition (*Ermattungsstrategie*) that found its classical expression already in Clausewitz' notion of a "limited" vs. "total" war, and which was later developed in the work of the military historian Hans Delbrück,[6] even if Jünger himself has in view only the political and social characteristics of the cold war.

Yet Jünger's point is not so much to emphasize the role of psychological warfare, or brinksmanship between the nuclear powers, as to suggest a conception of warfare that recognizes the unique potential for the private mental life of citizens to serve as an explicit and defined arena of combat. Such warfare is not pursued in public only, but inwardly in the space of the imagination; and the struggles carried out in this shadowy realm of the imaginary may decide whether or not a given community is able or not to form itself into a fighting collectivity. Jünger even goes so far as to argue that in such a war the inwardly encountered moment of decision is more important than the public decisions of those who actually wield power and pursue policy, since the force of will that emerges from the former is presupposed by the latter. The result is the interesting suggestion that deciding just where the subject of the decision to fight is formed, where it has its locus, is rendered distinctly problematic in the phenomenon of the cold war.[7]

Defeatism, as the catastrophic experience of fear, suggests that the experience of fear itself illuminates the condition of nihilism: the overwhelming threat makes palpable the truth that there is nothing in our existence with

which to defend ourselves; we are mercilessly confronted with the painful fact that we have no resources. The implication is thus that we can speak meaningfully of the emergence of nihilism not only as something that takes the form of a disaster, but specifically of a disaster in which nihilism itself becomes something potentially *visible*: it is as if we were in the position to witness our own collapse in the face of the threat, before the fact, inwardly as it were, before its ultimate expression in the actual disappearance in the world in which we live. The movement towards the end is in this way subjectively experienced on the brink of its objective culmination.

If so, then it appears that we can ask the following question: if we know what it is to fall apart, and even experience it subjectively in the hysteria of defeatism, can we not fix in view that which has brought us to this point? And if such a view enables us to understand what it is that such a catastrophe amounts to, then would this not enable us to perhaps find traction for a genuine spiritual alternative to defeatism?

This is the task that Jünger sets for himself, and it is one that essentially amounts to a task of clarification. If we can bring into view what it is that lies at the heart of nihilism, this will provide us with a basis for a response: "A good definition of nihilism would be comparable to making visible the cause of cancer. This would not be a cure, but it would be its presupposition, insofar as humans in general have anything to do with it."[8] More, if nihilism could be illuminated in this way, at the very moment when the spiritual decadence it causes has taken hold of us, then could not such a diagnosis take the form of a call for the *necessity* of a transformation? This is not so far from Nietzsche: the essential point is that nihilism, however difficult to understand and handle it may otherwise be, is nevertheless something that can be "diagnosed," and with that be subject to a demand for its transformation. Jünger traces this path from diagnosis to action as a gesture common to Nietzsche and Dostoyevsky: in Nietzsche, where nihilism represents the end of Christianity, and in Dostoyevsky, where nihilism represents the isolation of a self-destruction that also negates the possibility of a common life—these two conceptions of nihilism "advance through the same three phases: from doubt to pessimism, from there to actions in a space empty of value and gods, and then to new fulfillments."[9]

Nevertheless, Jünger emphasizes, signaling a cautiousness that is not present in his earlier interwar writings such as *Über dem Schmerz*, nihilism itself, if not the movement that gathers around it, remains impossible to grasp—the full revelation that the world can exist *no longer* is not itself an aspect of a world given to us in definite ways. It is in essence out of our grasp. This gesture of Jünger's is important for our purposes, since part of the problem of the very concept of nihilism is that it is both *ambiguous* and *obvious*. Few lack the confidence in understanding what "nihilism" is supposed to mean, but this alone never prevents the ambiguity that comes with declaring any given phenomenon to be "nihilistic." Thus when Sartre emphasizes the nihilism of violence, it is all too easy to take this

characterization as a ready made conclusion instead of a genuine problem for understanding.

Violence is nihilistic in that, like nihilism in general, it is the experience in which the world becomes subjectively nothing, affirmed in its inessentiality. But what does that actually mean? Jünger is interesting here because he begins with a recognition of the difficulty in defining nihilism, however familiar a concept it may be.[10] And he sharpens the problem considerably in a way that is specifically designed to draw Heidegger into a dialogue: that is, Jünger identifies the difficulty in defining nihilism with an inherent impossibility of making visible the "nothing" (*Nichts*) in which, or perhaps as which, the line of the fulfillment or closure of nihilism is realized.

Let us try to formulate this more precisely. Jünger poses the problem in terms of a kind of paradox of movement: though nihilism culminates in nothingness, it nevertheless remains caught in the movement from doubt to pessimism to action and its fulfillments, where none of these phases are in themselves the "nothingness" of nihilism. That in which nihilism culminates, its nothingness, effectively defines this movement without being a moment within it, since all of its moments are already the gathering of a counterstroke, of an overcoming of the nothing. Jünger expresses this by arguing that nihilism, as a spiritual phenomenon, only brings us to the "Gürteln" and "Vorfeldern" of nothingness, but it itself does not directly experience or grasp this nothingness. We experience the catastrophe, to be sure, but not the nothingness that provides us with its sense. Something similar is true in the case of our own death: it can be approached, but at the very moment of its emergence it consumes us, with nothing left to provide enough ballast of experience to take hold, giving our death a presence. We experience dying but not death; likewise we experience nihilism, as that movement from doubt to action, but not its nothing.[11]

The paradoxical character of this account of nihilism, and the idea above all that its movement, or development, draws from an inexpressible core that does not appear in it, leads Jünger to distinguish between the genuine question of nihilism from certain more polemical conceptions of nihilism. Polemical conceptions of nihilism attend all the stages of nihilism as an historical process; but they all turn on characterizations of nihilism either as a *disease*, an *evil*, or *chaos*. Jünger presents these polemical notions as falsifications or simplifications that overlook the constitutive character of the nothingness at the heart of nihilism. Above all, their failure to come to terms with this nothingness also leads to an inability to appreciate the potential *stability* of nihilism as the formation of an *order*. It is thus useful to consider these polemical notions in some detail, in order to frame the question of the coherence of the catastrophe of nihilism as a closed phenomenon.

Let us first take up the idea that nihilism is chaos, which Jünger describes in § 7 of his essay. The nihilists, this first polemicist tells us, have no goals or purposes, they fight for nothing and create for nothing, they thus threaten us with chaos and disorder. This obfuscates what Jünger takes to be the real

home of nihilism, which is in fact order itself; nihilism does not necessarily imply the dissolution of order, but instead has to do with a particular manner in which order is set into place, or the way in which the world *comes to rest* in an order. Thus nihilism does not mean that the order breaks down; it remains, but out of a nothingness that now belongs to ordering itself. That nothingness belongs to ordering means indeed that there is a failure of an ordering, but this is not the same as the failure of an order. Ordering becomes a catastrophe which continues to inhabit an order, as the principle of the latter. Insofar as an order continues to function, nihilism is not the same as chaos. This for Jünger characterizes the essence of modern rationalized society: such a society is above all an order of efficiency, in which things are made manifest as distinct patterns of purposiveness that serve to fit everything together into a common network of relations. Yet it is order for the sake only of order; the "purpose" that is thereby put into place, its very purposiveness (or, to use another phrasing, the very *reality of the real*) is precisely *nothing.* Thus if, again, we are to speak of nihilism as a "catastrophe," it is not the same kind of catastrophe that we would face when confronted with "chaos," since the elements of order maintain themselves in its wake—and are even *affirmed* by nihilism as the very style of their manifestation: " [. . .] not only is order acceptable to nihilism, but it belongs to its style [*Stil*]."[12]

Another kind of polemicist would have us believe that nihilism is a disease, that it threatens society with decadence. This polemicist identifies nihilism with a retreat from life, from strength, from productivity, resulting either in a will to destroy or an aimless hedonism and aestheticism. This conception of nihilism as breakdown and decadence can be found in novels such as Dostoyevsky's *The Demons* or in psychological essays such as Paul Bourget's *Essais de psychologie contemporaine.* Bourget himself adduces, as examples of this "nausea" and hatred of the world, "the murderous rage of the St. Petersburg conspirators, Schopenhauer's books, the furious arsenies of the Commune, and the implacable misanthropy of the naturalist novelists."[13] One is reminded of Huysmans' character Des Esseintes from his 1884 *À rebours*, just such a "naturalist" study of the gradual moral unraveling of an aristocrat who progressively becomes obsessed with ever more bizarre experiments in dark mysticism and moral degeneration.

Yet for Jünger this form of polemic is also an instance of a fundamental misunderstanding. For nihilism resembles more the beginning of a new health than some debilitating disease of the mind; it is more like a new standard of normality than an encroachment of decadence. Above all, it presents itself as a new health that can be directly measured by physical development and the rapidly expanding *capacity to expend energy.* Des Esseintes has no such capacity; he fails to overflow the norms that he works so diligently to dissolve, or better, he fails to survive his own death, his own collapse as a man of his class and station in life, and in that sense fails to be an expression of the nihilism of the modern age.

This points to an important aspect of Jünger's discussion, one that will be developed in important ways in Heidegger's response. The attempt here is to recalibrate the notion of nihilism to fit what Jünger takes to be essential to the twentieth century, thus in a sense to lift the concept from its nineteenth century context in which it had found its classical formulation. Nihilism for Jünger is now to be understood not simply as a collapse of values, but also as the ground for the expansion, development, and continual transformation of the real. Instead of the decadent aristocrat Des Esseintes, the more pertinent example is something like industrial production, medicine, city planning, cybernetics and the growth of the formal sciences, even (or perhaps especially) war itself, all of those vast regions and landscapes of human existence that can only be tangentially explored in relation to the individual psychological types that populate nineteenth century literature.

Take the example of medicine, which Jünger considers in §9. There is, Jünger argues, a "nihilistic" medicine that takes the form of a maintenance of life in the state of illness, where disease itself is suspended in a pattern of existence in which the body is neither being healed nor yielding to the possibility of death, or of any such passage from its state of chronic weakness. Such a medicine is nihilistic in the form of a technology of extension that generates a sustained existence under the full brunt of weaknesses and infirmities; it does so by instituting an artificial constancy, a stability, that mimics the stability of the properly healthy, all the while remaining undeniably "other." To embrace such a medicine is thus not to *reject* infirmity, but to effectively assimilate infirmity into an order that allows us to avoid having to distinguish infirmity from health at all. Thus in embracing such a medicine we do not *choose* health, but instead follow strategies of preservation that no longer serve to articulate a meaningful difference between "health" and "sickness."[14] This again follows a pattern of expansion and increase, which is the only standard that is relevant to or expressed by these strategies; thus in this sense medicine expresses "power" and "order," though again in a purely "nihilistic" fashion—the result being that those who embrace it live lives that are not lives, replace what is not given with simulacra generated from out of a boundless will to power.[15]

The third polemicist that Jünger takes issue with is the one who would argue that nihilism is an evil. One might say that for Jünger the polemical characterization of nihilism as an evil is not only an obfuscation or a confusion, but an outright lie, or at least an act of bad faith. For nihilism to be an evil, there would have to be some counterpoint, some possibility of an exception that would condition the very encounter with the question of nihilism itself; there would have to be, in other words, an operative will to value that would be able to affirm the very essence of evil.[16] But then nihilism would not be nihilism; if we could possibly have the resources to perceive it as evil, it would not be for us the problem that it is. The bad faith here is to assume that calling nihilism "evil" amounts to taking it seriously, but for Jünger this can at best descend into a mere self-parody. However

distortive, the polemical notions of nihilism as "disease" and "chaos" come closer to an honest attempt to express the sense in which nihilism represents the peculiarly corrosive aspect of modern existence, that feeling of life slipping away from its own promise. What the conception of nihilism as evil attempts not to recognize or admit, again in bad faith, is the fundamental absence of a positive presence of a directing value that sets itself up as the "highest"; for it is only in the effective presence of the highest values that the difference between "good" and "evil" in turn becomes effective. When the height of values collapses, even if the value itself continues to order from nothingness, "good" and "evil" become in effect exchangeable quantities. Thus the pernicious quality of the polemics of evil: to call nihilism evil today is just as cheap as to call it good tomorrow. Pascal expresses this characteristic of interchangeability, as is his practice, succinctly (though of course not in a discussion of nihilism): having lost the good, anything can for us become the good, "a trifle upsets us because a trifle pleases us."[17] If we want to pretend that we are affirming something about ourselves by having the courage to stand up and call nihilism "evil," then at most what we have in mind can only be a trifle.

Nihilism for Jünger falls outside of these polemical representations (as disease, evil, or chaos), in that it is not a state that could be opposed to another state, but represents the "reduction" of all those mechanisms we employ to define the existential character of the state of things as such. Nihilism is a catastrophe that takes the form of a contraction that is characteristic of what, in another sense, is an expansion. The more this world is set free into its development, the more it is reduced, the closer it comes to the null point of its reduction: "The nihilistic world is in its essence a reduced and ever more reduced world, necessarily corresponding to the movement to the null-point."[18] In the specialization and technization of science, for example, the more knowledge is extended, the less it serves to provide us a basis for who we are; the more wisdom becomes a program, the less it functions as a way of life. Wisdom, the true, the good, and the divine all become reduced, in that they become at most instruments or patterns to be deployed; or, better, their very capacity to order becomes instrumentalized for the effectiveness of the advanced mobilization of energies. This reduction and expansion ultimately shapes the whole of world-experience itself, including the political: "World-views and the sects flourish; it is a time of apostles without portfolios. Finally political parties also lend themselves to taking part in deification, and that which serves their doctrines and changing goals becomes divine."[19]

Jünger in these pages tends to understand this reduction, or what we just called a contraction, as a kind of *simplification*. This is perhaps a questionable way to look at the matter. The contrast Jünger tends to fall back on is quite familiar: we often distinguish between relations as they appear in accordance with their formulation as causal nexuses in the sciences, and those same relations as they are captured in descriptions that emphasize the

look they have in immediate, concrete experience. We distinguish between the way that addiction appears when observed as a set of chemical processes in the brain, and the way it appears to an individual struggling to break its hold on his or her life. In this way we are open to taking seriously the distinction between a culture that functions more and more on the level of impersonal abstractions, that becomes so to speak addicted to the formulation of life as a set of causally or functionally determined relations, and a culture that would instead strive to live in accordance with its own particular concrete "style" of "subjective existence." In this essay, as in many other of Jünger's writings, the contrast is made in explicitly aesthetic terms,[20] or in terms of a difference of *form*: a life that pursues its own style embraces itself as a relatively inchoate mass of gestures and contingent effects that are, despite their incompleteness and obscurity, deeply satisfying, while the technologically oriented pattern of cultural existence seeks to reduce the whole of life and culture to a simplified, elegant presentation of basic, well-defined constitutive principles.

Again, this whole opposition is questionable at its root. If the question is one of form, of life dependent on form, then what does it matter if that form is the contingently formed historical promise of a people (its "genius"), or the reduced, simplified form of a functionally determined order of relations elucidated in cybernetics? If it is ultimately only a sensitivity to form that gives us pause, why should that result in nihilism suddenly finding itself halted at the threshold of a complete simplification? Simply by virtue of the fact that simplified life somehow proves distasteful to some deep human sensitivity to form? Does the aesthetic protest not simply beg the question, once we have made the argument that the modern age is no longer sensitive to such differences of form, but instead tends inexorably towards the acceptance of a reduced simplification?

Taking such a contrast seriously does not seem to respect the force of Jünger's own following observation:

> What is the basis for that ill-feeling, which among others threatens to overwhelm the radical parties and which separates in such a meaningful way the years since 1945 from those after 1918? The reason is probably that in the meantime we have not only passed the null-point ideologically, but in the fundamental condition that lies at the foundation of ideology. This then brings with it a new direction of the spirit, and the perception of new phenomena.[21]

This gets to the heart of the basic issue of nihilism in Jünger's essay—that is, the question of whether or not nihilism closes off an historical opportunity, or on the contrary opens one up, yielding a "new direction of the spirit." In this connection the comparison with the situation just after the First World War with the situation after the Second World War is particularly poignant (especially given that Jünger is writing in 1950). Thus the doubts we should

have about the efficacy of the themes of "reduction" and "simplification" to frame the question: does the idea of the "Nullpunkt," of the line itself, correspond to the point that would divide a simplification from the richness of life that it somehow excludes? Is it simply that, after 1945, Europe is living in an ideologically simplified world, and because of that fails to experience the revolutionary fervor, the demand and hope that a palpable possibility for change can be acted upon, that a new world can arise out of the ashes of the self-destruction of the old? Can we really understand the radicality of the situations of 1918 and 1945, *and their difference*, in terms of the victory of a *simplification*?

Such a criticism is perhaps not all that fair to Jünger, who is in fact more concerned in this essay with the enormity of the destructive power of the war machine after 1945, thanks to the emergence of nuclear weapons, than he is with any debate over the "aesthetics of modernity." With the advent of nuclear weapons the scope of the possible destruction of war had for the first time become genuinely planetary; the potential scope of the expression of force was no longer a national, but a global phenomenon. Thus the "reduction" in question is not a mere cultural tendency, but is driven by the specter of a potential destructiveness that gives it its force and ordering power. In a sense, the absurdity of the political instrumentalization of nuclear weapons is the deeper meaning of the reduction or simplification that Jünger is describing: the threat of nuclear annihilation suddenly restricts the horizon of political engagement as such. For, as Arendt argues in the beginning of *On Violence*, the fact remains that nuclear war is politically useless. Such a war could only be the instrument of something very different from politics.[22]

To pursue a deeper understanding of what is at play in this simplification, Jünger revisits an old theme from his 1930 essay, *Der Arbeiter*, that was much admired by Heideggger: the idea that modern technological civilization and, more importantly, the mobilization potential that it represents has given rise to a new existential *Gestalt*, one in which power represents itself in the increased dynamics of intensified destruction and pain constitutive of the modern age:

> The industrial landscape, as we know it, essentially rests on flattening the old forms down to the ground in favor of the greater dynamics of the labor process. This includes the entire world of machines, transportation, and war with all their destructiveness. The flattening reaches the highest intensity in horrific images such as the burning of cities. Pain is immense, and yet in the midst of historical devastation the *Gestalt* of the age is realized. Its shadow falls on the uncultivated earth, on the sacrificial ground. The new order follows.[23]

Following the pattern of "doubt, pessimism, then action" that, as we have already noted above, he discerns in the classical representations of

nihilism, Jünger goes on to formulate something like a problem of action: "What is to be done in such a position?"[24] How are we to be, how are we to comport ourselves, in an age in which nihilism—having reached its *Nullpunkt*—has become a normal condition (*Normalzustand*), or where the *Gestalt* of the worker has come to determine the reality of the real? Jünger, repeating a move from his earlier writings from the 1930's that had drawn the attention of Heidegger on a number of occasions, explores the idea that the answer comes from the line itself: "Within the transformation the question of fundamental values can only be posed on the line, at the null-meridian."[25] That is, the answer to the question of action is contained in the very transformation that occurs in crossing the line. What is this supposed to mean?

The image of the line represents for Jünger the null point of the reality of nihilism itself; it is the closure of the figure of a reality that, in generating the forms of war and the state, has become totalizing—the self assertion of the real in the form of total mobilization. The state asserts itself as the Leviathan: more totalizing than war itself, to which all phenomena of the space of appearance are subordinate, including all ideology, and against which it is no longer possible to organize a struggle, to react as a group, to damage or even to touch. The capacity of the state to threaten thus knows no limits: "Total mobilization has entered a phase that surpasses in its threatening nature that of past phases."[26] One could perhaps add that the difficulty in formulating a successful theory of the state is a function precisely of its totalization, that is, once the character of its reach is understood not simply as an expansion of power, but as a phenomenon that is grounded in the nihilism of the age: the state is total, not because it surpasses all limits, but because these limits have ceased to function as barriers to the overwhelming presence of the state.

Yet Jünger does not merely point to the line as something given, but asserts that its crossing has a recognizable consequence. There is, in other words, an "afterwards" to totalization, which is anticipated by what Jünger calls certain "oases in the desert" that beckon us *trans lineam*. First there is death itself, or rather a new attitude towards death that takes the form of an absence of fear before death. Jünger believes that there is evidence that the hold Leviathan wields over human beings in the form of the threat of death is weakening, which points to the possibility that the state may no longer be able to exercise absolute dominance over the individual, even as the individual can no longer find in the world any resource, untouched by state power, from which to draw in order to resist. This is an idea that we will turn to in the next chapter on Patočka, who develops this Jüngerian theme in an important direction. The second oasis *trans lineam* is that of eros, including friendship and art; and a third that Jünger seeks to include here, paying homage to Heidegger, is philosophy—itself understood as a kind of eros, though one that is pursued in the form of an experiment, a *Holzweg*.[27]

The entire discussion at the end of Jünger's "Über die Linie" turns on the idea or assumption that something, in having come to a close, is by that very closure overcome. To be finished with a form is to be *finished*, to already be beyond it; and it is precisely this anticipation of closure as a passage that Heidegger will challenge. But what is this claim based upon? To appreciate the force of Heidegger's critique, we need to have a sense of what is compelling about Jünger's thesis in the first place. This is difficult, for in looking back over the logic of Jünger's reflections on nihilism, it is difficult to evade the sense of a paradox: Jünger wants nihilism to be something totalizing and closed, but at the same time something that we pass beyond. Does this paradox undermine the cogency of the reflection, or is it rather an insight that Jünger more or less succeeds in formulating?

I would argue that, if there is any value to Jünger's reflections at all in "Über die Linie," it lies in the attempt to adapt what is essentially a Nietzschean argument to the task of a metaphysical diagnosis of the nuclear age—and that, by extension, the real debate with Heidegger is in effect over the legacy of Nietzsche. It is clear from a literary point of view that Nietzsche is a very large presence in both essays, and it is useful for our purposes to take a moment to elucidate the paradox of nihilism in question in terms that are more explicitly Nietzschean.

A NIETZSCHEAN FORMULATION OF THE PARADOX OF NIHILISM

In order to attempt to elucidate the Nietzschean core of Jünger's argument, let us in effect start over, and take as our point of departure Nietzsche's formula of nihilism as the state in which the "highest values devalue themselves."[28] It is worth reflecting on this formula, for it allows us to not only return to the important theme of affirmation with which we began this chapter, but will also allow us to pose the question in a way that will fix more precisely the paradoxical character of nihilism that Jünger explores in his essay.

What does it mean, that the "highest values devalue themselves?" As in Sartre's analysis of violence, the question of nihilism here involves the themes of *order*, *affirmation*, and *nothingness*. From Nietzsche's perspective, a value amounts to an ordering of things; it is an instance of giving shape to the relation that holds between life and the things life encounters in its world, including life itself. When we speak of an order, we usually have in view something that comes about as imposed on things, an imposition thanks to which things are shaped in accordance with a form that stamps them with a definite character and being; the idea of a value in this sense thus already implies the idea of a *will*. What is at stake in Nietzsche's discussion of nihilism and the will to power is an attempt to describe the manner in which "the world" emerges in the form of an order, of things

that are related in definite ways. Life, in other words, is a "will" to the extent that it wills and lives its world in the form of an order.

Value, as the emergence of this order, is thus an instance of a willing of order—order "just is" the imposition of the will. For Nietzsche, this entails the exercise of a differentiation between what is *over* and what is *under*, or what is *strong* and what is *weak*. What is forming and what is formed thus stand to one another in this relation of over and under, even in those instances where the relation in question may be ultimately a self-relation: life not only shapes *things*, but also, and perhaps above all, *itself*. The will to order, or the "will to power," is for Nietzsche in itself neither strong nor weak, neither above nor below; but its exercise in the context of a multiplicity of wills, or of instances of valuing, entails a distancing and tension within this multiplicity in terms of above and below, over and under.

Accordingly, the "highest values" are those instances of will, of the ordering of things, that through the struggle of the multiplicity function "over" other instances of ordering, other points of force or will. The will to order, or will to power, is in this way refracted through a multiplicity that necessitates its coming up against itself, or its problematization of itself in the form of a complex emergence that frustrates as much as it releases, or denies as much as it affirms. This idea of order as a "rank ordering" of a multiplicity of instances of value allows us to consider the possibility that in both our discussions of Sartre and Jünger we have been working with a rather oversimplified conception of affirmation. For the Nietzschean approach implies an idea of form or essence thought as a composite of affirmation and denial, or rather: an emergence of an ordering that is what it is only if it also suspends other attempts at order, subjugating other distinct possibilities of the exercise of an ordering in accordance with a ranking of "over" and "under," higher and lower.

This also means that the ordering represented by the "highest values" is affirmative only if it affirms the distance manifest in their very "above-ness," in their very modality of *standing apart*. Things are ordered by the highest values only to the extent to which these values stand apart from things, as that from which they receive the stamp of their determinateness—highest values *value* only from this height. Thus the "true world" is *necessarily* transcendent, if seen from the perspective of its success as a ranking of opinion and insight. This is again a function of the very multiplicity of wills: the order comes together, things belong together within a life, when the distance that separates values takes on a definite character, whereby this distance is the expression of the *Herrschaft*, the dominance willing is capable of.

With this brief sketch of a Nietzschean approach to the problem of affirmation,[29] we can now suggest a reading of the thesis that in nihilism the "highest values devalue themselves." In the fragment from 1887 referred to above, Nietzsche himself suggests two senses in which this can be taken. The first is that the highest values recede in the wake of the growth of a new

ordering power, of an "increased power of the spirit."[30] Here the old yields to an emergent new, denies itself by subordinating its claim on life to the self-affirmation of the coming values. This is what Nietzsche calls "active nihilism." The second sense is passive: "Nihilism as the decline and decrease (*Niedergang und Rückgang*) of the power of the spirit."[31] Here it is not a question of the relative force of the weaker ordered by the highest, but of a weakening force; here value is a weakening power that pulls back from its affirmation, but without quitting the field. It is this second sense of nihilism that deserves some reflection, since it gets to the heart of Jünger's paradox.

What happens when a will weakens, or when the ordering of the highest values loses its force? The values in question are not simply devalued, or lacking in value; the thesis is not simply that we have ceased to believe in values, and therefore no longer believe that we live in a value-ordered world. Rather, the point—and this will be essential to the difference between Jünger's and Heidegger's understanding of nihilism—is that *we continue to live in a world ordered by "highest values."* It is just that the highest values are values that now "devalue themselves."

The reflexive formulation is of particular interest here. What does it mean, for a value to devalue *itself*? A value is an instance of a will to order that orders the world. What is negated in a value that devalues itself? The value is not negated as an instance of a will, which means that for Nietzsche nihilism must be understood as a manifestation of the will to power. A weak will, even a self-negating will, is still a will. Yet nor is value negated as an order of the world. That is, the world, life, remains an "order" in the sense of a multiplicity of wills that is brought together, held to itself as a whole. And more, value is not negated as a will to order—though now there is a difference. What is willed in this order is of an essentially modified character.

Let us look at this more closely. To say that a value devalues itself, but still results in an order, and in that sense remains precisely a *value*, implies that the order of the world takes the form of its own devaluation. The impossibility of a value, of its impossibility as an instance of a self-will, is *affirmed* in the order of things, stamped on the very character of their being. This is something that could be deduced from Jünger's brief consideration of "nihilistic medicine" that we considered above, with its peculiar affirmation of health that takes the form of the technical maintenance of infirmities that can never as such be eradicated. It is as if, in its very emergence as an instance of will, a value were to assume the form of its own suspension, its own lack of force precisely as a form of imposing itself. Adopting Nietzsche's vocabulary, we can be more specific: what is suspended is not the ordering itself, but that distance between "higher" and "lower," strength and weakness, over and under, or that necessary tension that emerges in the world when it is a question of the dominance of the strong. Instead, in nihilism, the "highest values" order in such a way that they do not stand apart from or above the instances of value that they

nevertheless subordinate; they fail to stand above and separate as something to which beings are to be referred in order to emerge within the order, to "be" in the way of the ordered. The frame of being that values offer as the highest collapses into the expression of what lies "under"—to the point where "nothing" appears as the highest.

This means that, even if "nothing" appears as the highest, ordering as such has not been suspended. This, in a more succinct form, is the point of Jünger's arguments against the polemical notions of nihilism (where, as we saw, nihilism is represented either as chaos, disease, or evil). In nihilism, the will continues to order, but now as a will to nothing. This is an *affirmation*, but only insofar as ordering is at the same time the explicit *denial* of its own height. The will rules from out of this denial as such, which now becomes fused with the togetherness of subordinate being that is perpetually held fast, negated in its own possibility of "rising upwards," even in the form of a reference to the highest values themselves—for these, in their very exercise, have *become nothing.* Thus the ideological fabrications of falsehood rule as the surrogates for a truth that no longer stands in genuine opposition—or as in the example of nihilistic medicine, the technically sophisticated maintenance of disease takes the place of a health that no longer provides the norm or standard of a life worth living. Nevertheless, there is a unique, affirmative tension here. Nietzsche is taking seriously, so to speak, a "nothingness" that carries with it an affirmation, a weight, insofar as it remains an instance of a willing. Again, the lesson here is that affirmation is not a simple matter, but a complex phenomenon that draws on the resources of negativity just as much as it does on those of positivity; and if the positive is lacking, if the highest values cease to order the world from their height, then the will wills such values precisely in their *lack*. This is because, as Nietzsche puts it, "the human would rather will *the nothing* (*das Nichts*) than *not* will at all [. . .]."[32]

This does not mean that there is not a failure of the will implicit in nihilism, yet nor does it mean that nihilism is just the threat of a kind of weakness that may compromise an otherwise functioning reality. Instead, utter failure can be a form of power. Nietzsche's insight lies in a profound recognition of the potential *supremacy* that failure can assume, precisely as a will. A lack, a failure to stand above and apart in the struggle of the multiplicity of wills, can take the form of the denial of all height, all distance necessary for mastery, and for all that (or because of all that) secure the mastery of all things, though now as the universal denial of the potential will of all things. Denying everything is a modality of bringing everything into view, a perspective that takes the form of a life that is at the same time the denial of all life; the denial itself, as an embrace of nothingness, lords above the "lesser" values (instances of will) as "judge and condemner:" "It is a miserable story: man seeks a principle through which he can despise men—he invents a world so as to be able to slander and bespatter this world: in reality he reaches every time for nothingness

and construes nothingness as 'God,' as 'truth,' and in any case as judge and condemner of *this* state of being."[33]

Nothing condemns all to nothingness. Commenting on these passages in Nietzsche, Wolfgang Müller-Lauter points to an aspect of nihilism that will prove to be of decisive importance in the confrontation between Jünger and Heidegger:

> In all this, the will to nothingness is a will to power that hides itself as such. In order to rule, it demands that the will to power that admits itself as such must abdicate. It acts as the absolute opposite of life in order to work against life within it.[34]

One could perhaps understand by "the will to power that admits itself" as synonymous with the case of highest values that do not devalue themselves, that are not instances of a "will to nothing." A will to power that does not admit itself as such, that runs against an order from within the ordering of that order itself, is in important respects *invisible*. That is, it is invisible thanks to the fact that it is also the exercise of an affirmation, pursued as a way in which things are held together in one world, one reality; yet as an affirmation of nothingness, it is a reality thanks to a share in "nothing," it is its own negation, its own devaluation.

More, if nihilism is the result of a weakening, of a willing of nothingness that arises out of the failure of values to maintain their height, as positive self-affirmations of will to power, then this invisibility of the will to nothing is the result of a process—a process of its own disappearance. This raises a question that we can pose to Jünger: if nihilism is a process, a movement of the cessation of power, then at what point is it "complete," at what point do we encounter a line that demarcates, at least on one side, the fulfillment of the will to nothingness? And what is the significance of this line, if what is brought to completion is something that does not admit itself as such for what it is? If we are looking for a basis for the critique of a nihilistic age, then the question becomes even more pressing: what could it possibly mean, to in criticism bring a will to nothing face to face with the nothing it wills?

Now we can perhaps formulate, more succinctly, what is potentially compelling regarding the paradoxical character of Jünger's reflections on nihilism. The paradox that we discerned above had to do with how nihilism can be both totalizing, thus a closure or completion of the mastery (*Herrschaft*) of nothingness, but also a passing beyond itself, or an historical opening towards a self-overcoming. The line both brings us to a close and opens us to a beyond of the closure. The Nietzschean heritage that influences Jünger's essay so strongly can perhaps point to what is potentially compelling about this paradoxical figure of closure/opening: namely, if we take seriously the idea of a "will to power," then both the closure and the opening, the totalization and the line such a totalization crosses, come

together as mutually founded in the *being of the will*. There are no exceptions to ordering, because there is no reality without its being affirmed by a will; and that includes the totalization of the will to nothing.

Before we turn to Heidegger's critique, which is directed not only at Jünger's essay but Nietzsche's metaphysics of the will as well, we can also perhaps begin to see what is at stake in this debate with respect to our attempt to understand the problem of the constitutive character of violence. For the distortions of violence emphasized by Sartre can be seen, in their very futility and weakness, as phenomena wholly inscribed within nihilism as Jünger describes it. Yet this means in turn that they are inscribed in a successful totalization of being, one that for Jünger takes the form of the worker which, as an expression of power, is indistinguishable from the soldier, for both metaphorically capture the patterns of mobilized energy constituting technological civilization and its vast orchestrations of violence witnessed in two world wars and the looming specter of nuclear annihilation. But if so, if mass violence is inwardly governed by the organized expenditure of energy *for nothing*, then the distortions of violence do not stand out in any way as constitutive. What is essential is only the orchestration itself, or rather the very inessentiality of the end, of the value of nothing affirmed in nihilism by the will to power. This means that if violence, as Sartre conceives it in the *Notebooks*, entails nihilism, it is not because it sets itself apart from the world as the nihilistic affirmation of the inessentiality of things, but rather because it is inscribed within the orchestration of the inessential that is the world itself, or what the world has become in a nihilistic age. This does not reduce the world to violence, it only suggests that the emptiness or nothingness of violence has no special significance as an exception to the order of human things, but is always already potentially mobilized by this order which is itself metaphysically characterized by the instrumentalization of all exceptions, distortions, discontinuities and failures, without exception. In other words, if "violence entails nihilism," then the nihilism of violence ultimately entails its *instrumentality* in a world that constitutes itself nihilistically.

Nevertheless, this does not contradict the fact that the idea of an exceptional status of violence remains essential for Jünger's rhetoric. A fascination with the transformative potential of violence in fact lies behind the motivation to look at the closure of nihilism as if it were a turning point. The destruction of old forms, the extreme violence of two world wars and their countless victims, the looming shadow of the ultimate catastrophe of nuclear war—Jünger brings all of this together in an attempt to impress upon us the sense that the line is after all a line that separates, and that in it we catch a glimpse of the possibility of escaping what is coming to a closure, of "getting out just in time" before the fire consumes everything. In the very title of the essay Jünger is evoking the figure of violence, as if it carried with it the promise that, in bringing matters to a head, some kind of passage must be inevitable. If this is questioned, if instead we find that *nothing* in violence

comes to a head, that the extremities of war yield or signify nothing, that catastrophe takes us nowhere but only abandons us to a spiritual desolateness that is in the end indifferent to all the suffering we witness in its wake, then all the shaking of violence is perhaps indeed wholly futile. Then, if we were still to argue that violence entails nihilism, that would essentially amount to a proof of its complete spiritual insignificance.

To develop the implications of this either/or (either violence changes everything, or it affirms nothing), we need to again turn to the theme of the line, though now without taking it for granted that it can be thought in terms of a passage over or beyond, or in the sense of *trans lineam*. Instead, as Heidegger argues, it is necessary to question *ad lineam*, or to question what it is that the line brings into play, or sets into motion in terms of the essential possibilities of the age.

ÜBER "DIE LINIE"

Heidegger's strategy in his remarks on Jünger's essay is to remain within what he calls the "Zone des sich vollendeten Nihilismus:"[35] the zone of self-completed nihilism. Thus the proposal is to engage a reflection, a thinking, "on" the line. This move allows Heidegger to preserve precisely the sense in which Jünger is employing the metaphor of the line, but at the same time move the investigation in a very different, and ultimately incompatible, direction. What Heidegger preserves is the sense of the line as marking the movement of a passage, thus of a transition beyond nihilism announced by the closure of nihilism itself. This in turn preserves the sense of completion found in Nietzsche's reflections on nihilism, according to which nihilism finds a lasting confirmation in the cry "God is dead!," since the death of God is the beginning of the end that is nihilism. The culmination of the revaluation of all values, the "end" of nihilism proper, is at the same time a passage from the failed transcendence of absolute values to the possibility and task of the revaluation itself, or in short the passage from *Mensch* to *Übermensch*. Heidegger's orientation at the beginning of his letter to Jünger does not amount to somehow situating us before this transition or passage has occurred, as if to arrest it at a particular moment of its becoming (just at the point where we "cross the line"). The point is not to reflect on what has passed and what will come. Rather the point is to affirm the whole phenomenon, the whole unity of this transition, and with that the idea of an end that is also a new beginning, yet in such a way that we do not allow its flow to set the tempo of our thinking, we do not follow it to where it is taking us or into what it affirms or denies. Instead, *ad lineam*, we question it, in a provisional (*vorläufig*) manner.

Heidegger understands this provisional questioning as the attempt to answer the question of the *essence* of nihilism. The essence of something is its how, its manner of manifestation, or that which determines its look

and presence; traditionally this is both differentiated from and related to existence, or the sense in which something "is" in its extantness, its "that-ness." In Scholastic philosophy types of being are interpreted in terms of the varying ways in which existence and essence can be thought as coordinated with one another, or specifically, whether existence or extantness can be taken to be included in the *essentia*, the whatness of a given type of being. Heidegger pushes this language in a different direction, though in a manner that engages this tradition in a variety of ways. For Heidegger, the differentiation of the question of being into *essentia* and *existentia* arises originally from an experience of the questionability of being as such, of the being of beings. How something is, is intimately bound with the manner in which something is as extant, or as a *that*. The themes of "that" and "how" point to a common origin or site in which they emerge as a unity and a difference. Heidegger's questioning of essence attempts to situate itself at this common origin, asking in effect not after the concept of something (what makes it what it is), but how it is that the conceptuality, reality, and manifestation of something arises as a theme at all.

So what then is the question of the "essence of nihilism"? This question is not a simple matter, for nihilism itself is already an answer to the question of essence in general. Nihilism answers the question of "how" things are grasped in their being, their whatness and extantness. The answer of nihilism is, as we have already seen, that the "essence" of things comes down to nothingness; the manner of manifestation that defines what it is to be, the mutual determining of "what" and "that," finds its form in nothing. "What" the world is—is nothing; "that" the world is—is nothing; and it is as this nothing that the will takes up residence among things, illuminating them in their being. Nihilism is the will to nothing, yet this willing is nevertheless itself a movement, and with that a passage towards its own fulfillment, closure, and surpassing. That nihilism *is* at all, is just that there is such a passage marked by the null-meridian of the nothing that is willed, of that line where it most fully comes to itself in its completion.

Again, nihilism originally takes the form of an *answer*. This is equally true in both Nietzsche and Jünger: the full elaboration of the essence of nihilism just is the experience of this passage that marks the closure of an answer. Nihilism, considered as a spiritual optics, or a point of view from which we grasp the meaning of being, is not the experience of a question, but that sense of being borne along by an insight, and with that an establishment of the truth of things.

Yet Heidegger insists on a question, one that takes as its cue the "nothingness" of nihilism itself. The essence in question is, so to speak, the essence of an answer to the question of essence, of what it means in nihilism to answer "nothing" to the question of what it means to be. Heidegger's question could be thought, perhaps, as the question of the force of this answer, of the ground from which it draws its power—yet with the suspicion that this ground of nihilism is not easily discoverable, not even as a question.

For in a sense, nihilism, precisely in the culminating force of its completion, does not reveal its essence so much as direct our attention away from what could make it questionable. Heidegger makes this point more explicitly in his Nietzsche lectures from the 1930's: "Perhaps the essence of nihilism consists in *not* taking the question of nothing seriously."[36] That is, perhaps nihilism asserts itself in such a way that the nothingness it affirms takes shape as something of which there is precisely *nothing to say* or to think. Here we can perhaps understand why for Heidegger nihilism is "metaphysical," for the thought is not all that different from Parmenides' assertion that there is nothing to be thought in nothing, thus that nothing should be left outside of our sphere of concerns as something eminently "not serious."

If so, then nihilism, again thought as passage, is an understanding of the essence of things (an "answer") that pulls itself into the circuit of nothingness only in order to pass it over, or to pass it by, like a spacecraft using the gravitational pull of a planet to catapult itself deeper into space. The grip that nothing has on us in nihilism is thus for itself nothing, since in nihilism nothing is willed and affirmed, but is not for all that understood or questioned. The answer that nihilism represents allows us to understand things, but the nothing that allows this answer, or that "is" this answer, is itself not understood. It is as if nihilism were an answer to a question that we do not know how to ask, but accept (or "will") both the unaskable question and its answer anyway. This means that the completion of nihilism, or the culmination of the hold of nothing, is in fact the manner in which the nothing recedes from view, pulling back from any opportunity of its being questioned.

That nothing recedes from us is an essential aspect of nihilism, one that allows thinkers such as Nietzsche and Jünger to project the horizon of possibility that opens in the wake of nihilism as something other than nihilism, other than the nothing itself. That is, for Nietzsche and Jünger the question we are faced with in the culmination of nihilism is not the question of nothing, but rather: the task of a new valuation, a new answer that will take the place of nothing. The movement of the closure of nihilism for these thinkers is thus the basis for a countermovement, a counterstroke of a new emerging answer for what it means to be; the more the closure of the devaluation of the highest values is experienced, the stronger the pull of the countermovement of a new valuation, a "revaluation of all values." In an important text from 1946–1948, Heidegger, in a succinct presentation of his mature critique of Nietzsche, describes this gesture of Nietzsche's thus:

> [Nihilism] must, as the process of the devaluation of the highest values, as the murder of God, lead to the revaluation of all values, if everything is not to end in the empty nothing of what only negates [*im leeren Nichts des nur Nichtigen*]. But the revaluation of all values can only be realized as the countermovement to the devaluation of what had hitherto been the highest values if the process of devaluation is experienced, that is, if its symptoms are recognized in contemporary history.[37]

We will not treat Heidegger's critique of Nietzsche in detail. It suffices to emphasize that the basic thrust of the critique is Heidegger's argument that the passage to the *Übermensch* is to be understood metaphysically, as the radicalization of the subjectivity of modern metaphysics, one that culminates in technological civilization. On Heidegger's account, the revaluation of all values supposedly takes the form in Nietzsche of an unlimited subjectivity that seeks purely to secure and fix all formations of order solely out of its own self-assertion as will, thus ultimately taking the form of a pure will to will—which, for Heidegger, heralds the historical emergence of man as that gathering point of being in the form of what he calls the "standing reserve" (*Ge-stell*).[38] What is of more interest to us here is a question that this passage raises with respect to our discussion of Jünger: namely, the question of whether the metaphor of the "line" really amounts to a kind of descriptive device that gathers together those indications or symptoms (*Anzeichen*) of the process of devaluation. If so, then the line would simply amount to the culmination of nothing other than the aptness of a kind of *description*. It would not be a "mere" description, but one intended to motivate the basis for a change of attitude towards the whole as it is described; nevertheless, as a description, it need not for all that involve an experience of the essence of nihilism. Heidegger is ultimately suspicious of this kind of descriptive diagnosis: to recognize the signs of the coming to an end of the old values in the emergence of a will to nothing, and from that to call for "new values," for a future that is the only conceivable alternative if there is to be value and not nothing, is not yet to get at the heart of the question of nihilism.

One could say that Heidegger is suspicious of the ultimate worth or philosophical significance of descriptions in general (e.g., descriptions of the "spiritual condition of the age," of the "moral situation of humanity," of the "rise and decline of civilization," and so on). More, this suspicion lies behind Heidegger's attempt to distance himself from the perspective that Jünger articulates in his essay on nihilism. To be sure, this is not to suggest that Heidegger does not rely on descriptions, and Jünger's in particular—the descriptions of the latter in works such as *Der Arbeiter* and *Über dem Schmerz* are an important, perhaps all too important, resource for Heidegger's reflections on technology in essays such as "Die Frage nach der Technik" and "Die Zeit des Weltbildes."[39] This is why this essay on Jünger is so important for understanding Heidegger's critique of modernity.

Let us take a closer look at this suspicion that Heidegger casts on descriptions.

The two essential aspects of Jünger's essay *Der Arbeiter* are announced, Heidegger tells us, in its subtitle: *Gestalt und Herrschaft*: Form and Mastery. Heidegger emphasizes that this essay, in which Jünger describes the emergence of what he considers to be a "new reality," draws directly from his personal experience of the "Materialschlachten" of the First World War.[40] Yet the descriptions in question are not mere reportage, but themselves

bear the stamp (*prägt*) of a metaphysics of the will to power and, above all, they involve a positing of values. Jünger himself, Heidegger emphasizes, describes his project in terms of the adoption of a framework, or optics (*Optik*, *Gesichtskreis*), in which the entirety of beings show themselves: "Being [*Seiende*] as a whole however shows itself to you [Jünger] in the light and shadow of the metaphysics of the will to power, which Nietzsche interprets in the form of a doctrine of value."[41] To be sure, such an optics expresses what is essential, but it leaves out of view, perhaps necessarily, the question of the "how" of this framework itself, the manner in which it exercises its ordering force. What is left unaccounted for, in other words, is the essence of the optics employed; more, it is part of this essence as such that it be left out of the view that it nevertheless makes possible: "For it belongs to the essence of the will to power not to allow the real that it dominates [*bemächtigt*] to appear in *that* reality as which it itself is [*west*]."[42] If the will to power is the power, the setting into place that grounds both the movement of devaluation (*Entwertung*) and the countermovement of revaluation (*Umwertung*), the setting into place of this ground is itself not in question, and in that sense not visible; it is not itself a "value."

This suggests another way to understand what we have already characterized as the "invisibility" of nihilism. From Heidegger's point of view, one could argue that this invisibility is essentially metaphysical in nature. The culmination of nihilism is also the completion of metaphysics, or a coming to an "end" of metaphysics. Yet the coming to an end of metaphysics should be taken in the specifically inconclusive sense that Heidegger wants to stress, in order to hold open the possibility of a questioning of being. But that means, in the Heideggerean context, that the "end" is marked by a retreat of the essence of possibility, or the retreat of that out of which possibilities emerge in the form of an historical becoming. This retreat itself is Heidegger's attempted point of departure for his thinking. The idea of a retreat of the ground complicates the very idea that nihilism represents a closure, a completion, leading Heidegger to distinguish in his remarks between the "fulfillment" of nihilism and its "end," a distinction that Jünger, following Nietzsche, does not make.

What does fulfillment mean, if not the end? "Fulfillment [*Vollendung*] means the gathering [*Versammelung*] of all the essential possibilities of nihilism, which as a whole and individually remain difficult to grasp."[43] That is, nihilism is fulfilled when it is no longer simply a tendency that can be brought into view from under a particular descriptive optics. Again, we need to take seriously Heidegger's suspicion of descriptions: they fail to grasp what is important about the fulfillment or completion of nihilism, since they themselves are intrinsic to its essence. Nihilism is complete when the optical figure has itself become concrete, as the very site or place where we relate to beings out of an understanding of what it is for them to be. It is complete when the form (*Gestalt*) of the worker becomes our natural point of departure for thinking. Yet this coming to a completion is not at the end, but rather in an important sense at the beginning of the end of nihilism:

The fulfillment of nihilism is nevertheless not already its end. With the fulfillment of nihilism only first *begins* the end-phase of nihilism. The zone of the latter is presumably unusually broad, because it is dominated by a condition of normality and its solidification [*Verfestigung*]. For this reason the null-line, where fulfillment comes to an end, is in the end not visible at all.[44]

What comes to fulfillment in the completion of nihilism is only the process of its "Verfestigung," and with that its being-established; this means that its completion takes the specifically metaphysical form of coming to rest. That is, the essence of nihilism, precisely in this image of a "closure" and "totalization," follows the metaphysical form of recognizing the figures of beginning and end as descriptions of what it is to-be-secured as opposed to secured. This is at the heart of Heidegger's comments on Jünger's concept of *Gestalt* as it is employed in his earlier work *Der Arbeiter*: the language of *Gestalt* expresses the being-formed, being-stamped of things with their being, of *existentia* with *essentia*, in accordance with a classical metaphysical framework that has its origins in Greek thinking:

> That which brings-forth [*das Her-vor-bringende*] is now and then from Plato thought as that which gives shape [*das Prägende*] (*tupos*, cf. *Theataetus* 192a, 194b). You [Jünger] also think the relation of *Gestalt* to that which it "shapes" as the relation of stamp and giving-shape [*Prägung*]. However you understand giving shape in a modern manner, as the bestowal of "sense" on that which has no sense. *Gestalt* is the "origin of sense-giving."[45]

In nihilism, the origin of the formation of meaning, of the stamp of meaning on beings that are what they are given this being-stamped by their being, is nothing less than the metaphysical power of subjectivity itself. Here Heidegger's critique of Jünger reflects the critique of Nietzsche cited above, and it follows a very similar path. First is the identification of this metaphysical power with humanity itself, with the subjectivity of the subject as the form in which the emergence of beings in their being is given a definite style. The question of the subject for Heidegger turns on the original relation, as an openness, that human beings have with this emergence of beings in their being; here as elsewhere he designates this relation with the term *Transzendenz*: "*Transzendenz* is that relation between beings and being that passes from the former to the latter."[46] Yet this relation is in itself nothing "settled," nothing secured, though it is originary, insofar as the very establishment of the function of the subject as "maßgebendes *subiectum*," standard-giving *subiectum*, is situated in a site, a locus, that makes possible this particular form of the gathering of essence. *Transzendenz* is thus essential and originary. In nihilism, precisely given its metaphysical character, this essentiality of *Transzendenz* disappears or recedes in the emergence of that topos of being (*res*) represented by the *Gestalt* of the worker:

> *Transzendenz*, understood in a manifold sense, inverts into the corre-
> sponding *res*-cendence [*Reszendenz*] and disappears in it. The stepping
> back of this kind through *Gestalt* is fated [*geschickt*] such that its pres-
> ence is represented, its forming is again present [*answesend*] in what is
> formed [*Geprägten*].[47]

The world *as something shaped* becomes the representation of the *Gestalt*,
the shape of things represents the power of this shaping. Here Heidegger
quotes the following from Jünger's *Der Arbeiter*: "'Mastery' is today no
longer possible than in the representation of the *Gestalt* of the worker,
which claims planetary validity."[48] And the manner of its representation,
the manner in which the *Gestalt* of the worker lays claim to things as rep-
resentatives of its will and force, is *technology*. Heidegger again quotes *Der
Arbeiter*: "Technology is the manner in which the *Gestalt* of the worker
mobilizes the world."[49]

If Jünger identifies technology as that by which the *Gestalt* of the worker
mobilizes the world, it again needs to be emphasized that the analysis
remains within the confines of a description. Thus Heidegger's suspicion
remains: how far can a description reach, specifically with respect to the
essence of nihilism? Only as far as the borders of the reality description
brings into view. But all bringing into view, all optics, is already stamped
with the *work* character of beings, of something that has the value of the
real only to the extent to which it has been shaped. Thus the metaphysics,
or the optics, that Jünger brings to bear in his descriptions are in no way
exceptions with respect to what is being described, but fit into the very
pattern of things: the description and its interpretation as such have the
character of work.[50] Jünger himself is fully aware of this, and Heidegger, in
order to emphasize this aspect of Jünger's work, cites the following passage
from *Der Arbeiter*:

> All these concepts (*Gestalt*, type, organic construction, total), are *nota
> bene* readily comprehended. We are not concerned about them. They
> may be immediately forgotten or put to the side, according to whether
> they have become useful as instruments for the comprehension of a par-
> ticular reality which exists despite and beyond every concept; the reader
> must look through the description as through an optical system.[51]

Heidegger pushes this further, asking whether or not the "reality" in ques-
tion here is itself determinable through concepts such as form, type, or
organic construction only insofar as it itself is already determined as having
a work-character, thus only insofar as the optics and the reality towards
which it casts its vision are *together* shaped, thus have the being of "Arbe-
itsgrößen." Both Jünger's comment on the relative, provisional weight of
descriptive concepts and Heidegger's extension of the question to the rela-
tive weight of the conceived, point to a necessary blind spot in this optics,

so to speak, namely an apparent impossibility of taking the essence of nihilism, its nothing, seriously. The description has weight only as the employment of the conceptual resources that allow the formation of an optical landscape, a literary representation, itself the reshaping of a reality that is in itself only a shape; the reality described has weight only again thanks to its work-character, only thanks to that employment of the world itself in the expression of the form of the worker. Nothing here has no weight, nothing is not mobilized, nothing falls outside—not of this particular optics, but of the optical character of concepts in general.

This is the crux of Heidegger's critique—if nothing is not taken seriously in the description of nihilism, then Heidegger is going to attempt to take it seriously in a thinking of the essence of nihilism. But what would it mean, to take nothingness seriously? Heidegger approaches the question by effectively inverting Jünger's formulation of the metaphor of the line. Remember that, for Jünger, if the line represents the culmination of nihilism, then it is a point at which there occurs an opening towards the beyond of nihilism. Jünger captures the idea of the opening of this "beyond" with the phrase "Zuwendung des Seins," or the turning-towards of being; what he seems to mean here is that to cross the line is for human existence to turn away towards something new. Heidegger asks whether the opposite is not the case: that only in a new turning of being would it be possible for the line to be crossed by humans. For perhaps the turn is possible only from out of that essence of nihilism that is obscured by the fulfillment of nihilism itself; perhaps it is possible only from out of the receding of being into the nothing. If so, then this would seem to promise a potential justification for taking this nothing "seriously:" perhaps the nothing, the abandonment of being itself, holds in itself the potential for a gathering of possibility that, in a turn of what withdraws, passes beyond what has otherwise come to rest "on the line." If so, then the nothing must be taken up on its own terms, if it is indeed only out of the withdrawal of being that any "turn" of being will emerge: "But does not such turning-towards still occur and in a strange way under the dominance of nihilism, namely in the way that 'being' turns away and withdraws into absence? Nevertheless turning-away and withdrawal are not nothing."[52]

What comes into question here (if not "into view"), when the nothing of nihilism is taken seriously? Nothing less than what a human being *is*. For Heidegger, this is in fact just what is at stake—the possibility of understanding our being as something that belongs to the essence (*Wesen*) of being, that thus relates fundamentally to its turning-away, its receding, as well as to the inner potential of its turning-towards the play of its essence that is gathered in this withdrawal itself. Such a turning would amount to a kind of release from the pattern of nihilism, in that what recedes in its nothing is *not nothing*.

Yet the possibility of questioning into the nothing of nihilism in this way does not contradict or reject the descriptions of the totalizing character of

nihilism, on the contrary it confirms them. Heidegger accepts that the self of the human being is fully assimilated into nihilism, without remainder; though it is a self that is taken up and mobilized precisely insofar as it is something that relates to being, that stands out from beings towards their being (only in this way can it be a will to power, or radical subjectivity). Nevertheless, this totalization is not without its questionability; the nihilistic self is not the full closure of the question "who am I, who are we?" Fully used, employed, consumed by the transcendence that comes to rest in the *Gestalt* of the worker as an expression of power, the human being is also irrevocably situated, belonging to the event of the abandonment of being to and by total mobilization. This means that, in the case of the human being, we can say on the one hand: "In truth however his Self is nothing more than the utilization of his ek-sistence in the mastery of that which you [Jünger] characterize as the total work-character."[53] But on the other hand, as a more fundamental consequence of the essence of nihilism, we can say: "The essence of the human rests much more in the fact that it at any given time lingers and dwells in such and such a way in the turning-towards and turning-away."[54] Thus even in the total immersion and formation of selfhood according to the metaphysical logic of nihilism, the human being never ceases to occupy, as its ownmost if also implicit horizon, the questionability of this "nothing" that looms ever more profoundly by the very turning away (*Abwendung*) or abandonment of being (*Seinsverlassenheit*).

If so, then the "crossing" of the line, as entering the zone of the fulfillment of nihilism, can in no way amount to an escape, a transcendence of the situation; the nothing remains the very essence of transcendence itself (as *Reszendenz*, the total mobilization of being). Which also means that to take the "nothing" of nihilism seriously, to approach it in search of the placement or gathering of being that is at stake here, is not somehow to approach something that needs to be set off and apart from the condition of nihilism. The turning of being is for Heidegger not a question of turning towards a new configuration of value, a new *Gestalt* of existence that beckons us from beyond the line. It is instead to in an important sense remain within the question of the essence of being, or to what is hinted at in the questionability of essence—the questionability that illuminates the very emergence of the meaning of essence/existence. That is the first key step: only if we accept this notion that humans belong to being can the nothing of nihilism be taken as something serious. The second step is to recognize this relation as a question, and not an answer, or a schema that would project a relation thanks to which the relata would be coordinated in a stable, coherent fashion (such as the subject-object schema, or schemas such as forming-formed, shaping-shaped, producing-produced and all their metaphysical variants). The third key step is to argue that the question of being comes into view, or into its event, only from within the turning-towards (*Zuwendung*) itself—where we discover (or not) this event as a

place, as a site for the gathering of humans and being, in this case the place or gathering that is the presence of nothing itself.

What are the consequences of this? If the essence of nihilism is "nothing," then the human being belongs to this nothing. If the essence of nihilism is the place where nihilism gathers in its essential possibilities, then the event character of this place, as the nothing or retreat of the event-character of possibility itself, is both preserved and inhabited by humans. But that means that "the human is not only affected by nihilism, but essentially participates in nihilism."[55] This means that the line, the point of completion, is not something we face on one side in order then, in passing over, to take what it is to be human to the other side; the line is not something we as human beings cross in order to live under a different sun, one more suited for that promise of being that we supposedly represent. The "human being" does not historically pass from one form of existence to another; rather, what the human being "is" essentially belongs to nihilism and its fulfillment. That we can speak at all of its completion is due to the fact that in the essence of nihilism the essence of the human being functions as the relation to being, yet again where "being" is not something that lies "over there" on the other side of the line. On the contrary: in the fulfillment of nihilism, of the "nothing," the line itself marks the culmination of a withdrawal of being, one that in turn raises the relation to the withdrawn itself into a distinct prominence.

Let us take a closer look at this. Heidegger, in order to avoid what he calls the "habit" of understanding by the term "being" (*Sein*) something that "stands over against" human being, adopts the rather peculiar convention of crossing out the term "*Sein*" altogether.[56] (Instead of an X, we will use the double strikethrough, e.g. ~~Sein~~.) Despite the awkwardness of this convention, the point is clear: Heidegger is not after a description of a relation or coordination of "man" and "being" from within some whole, nor in accordance with some principle. He is after an insight into the manner in which the being of humans is deployed as the zone in which a relation to being emerges in the form of the *impossibility* of a *trans lineam*:

> As that being [*Wesen*] employed in ~~Sein~~, the human constitutes the zone of ~~Seins~~, and that means simultaneously of the nothing [*Nichts*]. The human being not only stands *in* the critical zone of the line. He himself, though not for himself and not altogether through it alone, *is* this zone and with that the line. In no case is the line, thought as the sign of the zone of fulfilled nihilism, something that lies before the human being as what can be stepped over. Now however falls away also the possibility of a *trans lineam* and its crossing.[57]

The human being does not stand *on* the line; he *is* the line, the zone of the emergence of the possible which itself cannot be crossed.

Both the completion of this zone, as well as its origin, are for Heidegger *metaphysical*—nihilism just is the completion of metaphysics: "If with that the nothing holds sway in nihilism and the essence of the nothing belongs to being, yet being is the destining of surpassing [*Geschick des Überstiegs*], then the essence of metaphysics shows itself to be the essential site [*Wesensort*] of nihilism.[58] Thus the overcoming of nihilism can only take the form of a turning against metaphysics, a displacement of the site of its emergence, though in essential respects remaining within, and accepting, the force of its grip.[59]

A deeper consideration of metaphysics from the perspective of the history of being in Heidegger would take us too far afield from our problem. What is important to emphasize is the *reticence* of the question of nihilism, and Heidegger's unwillingness to succumb to the lure, so to speak, of Jünger's optics that would seem to promise a clear description of the spiritual condition of the age. This is particularly the case if we take description and clarity of the situation to be a kind of *intensification*, even a radicalization of consciousness that "must" somehow bring a resolution—as if insight, or a more profound knowledge of our condition would by itself catapult us across the line, as the first necessary step towards a reconstitution of human existence in accordance with something "new." In an important sense, the Heidegger of this letter to Jünger, unlike the Heidegger of the late 1920's and 1930's, has no real use for such things. Instead, Heidegger is seeking here to formulate a very different kind of task under the title of "thinking." As thinking, the human belongs to being; and as thinking, something like an overcoming (*Überwindung*) of nihilism can take form, but only as an inner torque of resistance (*Verwindung*) to metaphysics.[60]

But if we have no use for radical descriptions that bring clarity and purpose, then we have no use for catastrophes either.[61] Two world wars, Heidegger remarks, have not brought us "over the line." [62] Both the clarity of description and the shock of catastrophe fail to hold open what is being closed; neither the one nor the other represents the kind of gathering of the emergence of the possible that Heidegger sees as essential to the task that nihilism represents, if it is to represent a task *at all*.

THE NIHILISM OF VIOLENCE

The conception of nihilism that emerges from Heidegger's discussion of Jünger is of an ordering that absorbs all being into the form or pattern of mobilization. It absorbs the very sense of what it is to be, thus functions as essence, or that which provides the sense of what it is to be manifest. This includes the "sense" of violence, which is not excluded but, one could say, most easily absorbed by nihilism. Insofar as nihilism mobilizes "for nothing," the destruction of violence is easily incorporated into the orchestration of an ordering that embraces indifferently all differentiation and expression.

   If violence itself is absorbed, then its negativity can in no way signal the refusal, much less the collapse of the ordering of nihilism. What Sartre calls the "decomposure" of violence is from this perspective metaphysically insignificant; it does not, and cannot, set into motion the problem and question of emergence as such. Thus the genuine question of the line, of the fulfillment of nihilism and the end of metaphysics, is for Heidegger something that must be freed from its association with violence.

   The distortive character of violence emphasized in the last chapter, which seemed to have secured for violence the right to be affirmed as a kind of "exception" to the order of things, now seems to be seriously questionable, and in such a way that involves precisely the subjectivity of this distortion or decomposure. The more the order of things is generated "for nothing," or the more convinced we are of the grip of nihilism as an affirmation and closure of a global "inessentiality," the less violence appears to be an exceptional modality of affirmation. The dominance of the will to ordering in nihilism is that of the will to will, which for Heidegger amounts to a completion of metaphysics in the technological domination of the globe, the mastery (*Herrschaft*) of a radicalized subjectivity that has become immune to the potential collapse of order that one witnesses in cataclysms such as world wars, mass murder, and politically orchestrated starvation. Heidegger seeks to emphasize the fact that we live in a world that does not cease to be what it is, to manifest being in a particular manner, in the wake of such events. Violence, if it is anything in this context, is simply another modality of the total assimilation of human being into nihilism; it would thus be a mistake to identify violence as "constitutive," if by that we mean something other than the constitutive character of nihilism itself as an answer to the question of essence. Violence, death, and the limitless dismantling of the human order is orchestrated in nihilism in accordance with the total work-character of the real, in all "essential" respects indistinguishable from the life and limitless expansion of technological civilization. The more we build in the horizon of a nothingness that has seized the very origin of human possibilities, the less the historical eruptions of negativity in the forms of our catastrophes have any real significance at all.

   This means that, *contra* Sartre, if we take the "nothing" of nihilism seriously, then the nihilism of violence turns out to be constitutive of a peculiar instrumentality—it is not a pure negating-nothing, a radically disconnected subjective affirmation of the inessentiality of things, but in the age of nihilism it is organized and deployed, like everything else, *for nothing.*

   Yet, even if we follow this Heideggerean line of reflection, this is not the end of the story. For Heidegger's notion of the human being "standing out into the nothing" is not altogether free of a conception of violence that, recalling our discussion of Arendt, we could despite everything call uniquely "originary," and with that constitutive in a way that cannot be determined from within the logic of nihilism.[63] This is not to claim, *contra* Heidegger,

that we do in fact have a need for catastrophes in order to be shaken out of the stupor of the normalcy of self-destruction. But it is nevertheless the case that, if we are to understand the essence of the human being, we cannot avoid speaking of a catastrophe, and with that the inscription in the event of appropriation of a figure of violence that promises to be beyond the control of nihilism. This is in fact the idea pursued by the Czech philosopher Jan Patočka in his *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, which is the subject of the next chapter.

4   Violence and Responsibility
(Patočka)[1]

RE-OPENING THE QUESTION OF THE LINE

As a result of the reflections on nihilism in the last chapter, the possibility came into view that any distinctive phenomenality of violence—grounded in its subjective negativity, or its capacity for temporal distortion—effectively dissipates in nihilism. If violence mobilizes the resources of negativity in order to affirm the inessentiality of things, then this alone would not set it apart from nihilism as a whole, which draws indiscriminately from the same resources without itself being a violence. The generality of this argument about the nihilism of violence should be emphasized: it does not limit itself to any debate about the putative decadence of the age, but instead insists that "violence" and "affirmation of the inessentiality of things" are not equivalent, or at least not necessarily so. Even if one does not accept fully, or at all, the accounts of a Jünger or a Heidegger that would characterize the contemporary age as "nihilistic," the larger point remains: if violence is not the root or originary instance of the affirmation of the inessential, then the possibility remains open that it is inscribed in a horizon that is not itself violence, but something that must be thought in a different manner from those reflections on violence that we followed in Sartre's *Notebooks for an Ethics*. This in turn bears directly on our problem of whether or not violence could be said to be constitutive of its own meaning instead of instrumental: for if one were to track the consequences of Sartre's argument that violence implies nihilism, then it could very well turn out that the "nihilism" of violence in the end justifies the purely instrumental interpretation of its sense; more, as a result of a deeper reflection on the nihilism of violence, one may very well be forced to affirm the principle of the "stupidity of violence" discussed above in the Introduction.

Nevertheless, such a conclusion is not the only possible one, as will be seen in this chapter. Here we will be considering the themes of nihilism and violence as they are developed in the later writings of the Czech philosopher Jan Patočka.[2] Patočka accepts the broad outlines of the conception of nihilism found in Jünger and Heidegger, and he accepts as an essential task the formulation of an appropriate conceptual vocabulary that would allow us to

articulate how the nihilism of the contemporary age mobilizes the resources of negativity. Patočka also accepts, to a great extent, the implicit inference that nihilism implies the instrumentality of violence. Yet even as Patočka emphasizes this instrumentality, he will also argue for another sense, another dimension of violence that is radically non-instrumental in character.

To do this, Patočka will once again appeal to the metaphor of the line, and in doing so once again draw on Jünger's metaphorical image of the violence of trench warfare. He will also draw on Heidegger's descriptions of the metaphysics of technological civilization and its total mobilization of being. Yet he will do so in order to re-open the question of what is and is not possible in the wake of this mobilization, and with that seek to uncover something inherent to violence that is obscured, but not negated by its nihilistic instrumentality. The argument will be that there lies, so to speak in the eye of the storm, the potential for responsible life to reclaim itself, specifically in the form of a *sacrifice*. This moment of sacrifice, and the deep ties that bind together sacrifice and violence, proves for Patočka that violence represents the potential of human beings to be set apart from the totality, even where human existence is reduced to the orchestrations of the hegemony of nihilism. Human transcendence, as a technologically organized and refined expenditure of energy, is from the perspective of the totality wholly irrelevant, a mere instrument for nothing; but on the line, violence opens for human life a horizon of existence that, embracing its own sacrifice, is uniquely constitutive of meaning.

In this way, Patočka's reflection will again open the question of the line, though now the theme is taken up neither in the sense of *trans lineam* nor *de lineam*, but in terms of the question of a figure of sacrifice that is constitutive of a logic of responsibility, one that appears on the other side of its own radical instrumentalization. More, this complicated hybrid of complete instrumentality and originary meaning, and its deep roots in the question of what it is to be a human being, will lead us to a far more philosophically sophisticated challenge with respect to the question of violence than what, in Chapter One, had been formulated under the heading of "Schmitt's challenge."

The goal, in other words, will be to formulate what could be called "Patočka's challenge." This will amount to an argument for the constitutive character of violence that draws on a number of elements that have been, in a provisionary manner, uncovered in the course of the foregoing reflections.

The central text we will consider is the last of Patočka's *Heretical Essays*: "The Wars of the Twentieth Century and the Twentieth Century as War."[3] This text is a complex, difficult essay on the spiritual and metaphysical legacy of the twentieth century. The intention here is not to speak to the merits of Patočka's remarks on the history of the world's wars in the twentieth century; above all, it is beyond the scope of these reflections to evaluate his brief account of the origins of the First World War, which frames much of his subsequent discussion. Suffice it to say that one of the most striking

aspects of his remarks is the relative silence on the more recent history of the Second World War, the Holocaust, and the emergence of communist dictatorships in Eastern Europe, including in Patočka's native Czechoslovakia, and the subsequent consolidation of Soviet and American dominance in Europe. To be sure, personal experience with these events are assumed; the essay is addressed to Patočka's fellow citizens and those intellectuals who, like himself, had found themselves grappling with the historical and political meaning of events such as the 1956 Hungarian revolt and the 1968 military suppression of the Prague Spring—often with the result of a deep dissatisfaction with their ability to come to terms intellectually with the politico-historical situation. Still, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that there is much that does not, but should, find its way into Patočka's remarks. The reasons for this are complex. The motivation may be external: perhaps Patočka is attempting to find some neutral ground, by limiting his focus on a more distant conflict; or perhaps he is evading direct commentary on the current situation for political reasons. Or the reason may be internal to the argument itself: perhaps Patočka is pursuing an argument for the originary character of the First World War, as that first cataclysm that set the stage for so many others. I believe it is a combination of both; but again, it is not my intention here to explain the essay itself, since the intricacies necessary for such an explanation would take us too far afield. For our purposes, one need only emphasize that the meaning of the "history" in question here is in no way settled, neither in Patočka's mind, nor for his readers—then (1975) or now.

Instead, the aim here will be to pursue Patočka's philosophical reflections on war. Following the orientation of "The Twentieth Century as War," the problem of violence will once again be reinscribed into the larger question of the meaning of war, as had been the case with Clausewitz and Schmitt above. However, unlike the reflections pursued in Chapter One, the point of orientation here will be Patočka's thesis that, in the twentieth century, war takes on a unique significance that it had never had before, or at least not to the same extent. That is, Patočka's thesis is that, in the twentieth century, war became a culminating spiritual moment in the history of humanity.

War has always had the potential to challenge our beliefs about who and what we are, to serve as a touchstone of insight into what we can and cannot expect of one another. Yet what Patočka argues is something much more extreme: his argument is that the very shape of things, both human and material, has taken on the pattern of war, or has become the expression of force—in short, that the wars of the twentieth century had turned the twentieth century itself into the very expression of war. Though Patočka does accept the conception of nihilism found in Jünger and Heidegger, he does not accept their tendency to present war as just one expression of nihilism among others—for Patočka, war instead stands out as a kind of summit of the human condition, driving its possibilities to a decisive point of realization.

Patočka's claim is provocative, to say the least; it is also deeply disturbing, since it seems to forgo, all to easily, the possibility that it would still

make sense for us to put some distance between ourselves and war, that we still have some choice in the matter. Yet that alone is not sufficient for Patočka's claim to be rejected out of hand. It may not even be a settled matter that, at the end of the day, most of us would even be tempted to do so. For Patočka is not speaking in a vacuum; the pessimism of essays such as "The Twentieth Century as War" reflects in its essentials that suspicion, common to the last century, that a line had been crossed, that somewhere civilization had gone beyond a point of no return, unleashing unimaginable forces and chains of events the consequences of which could scarcely be imagined. This suspicion pre-dated the development of nuclear arms, and it represents one of the most fundamental philosophical challenges of the legacy of the twentieth century: the idea that our wars have opened a great chasm that separates us from the rest of human history.

To face this challenge, it is important to consider seriously thinkers like Patočka. More, it would be a mistake to think that the discussion of nihilism between Jünger and Heidegger that we followed in the last chapter either exhausts or even articulates the broad outlines of this suspicion. Even if, in important respects, Patočka relies on the terms of the discourse of nihilism as it was developed in the tradition of Nietzsche, Jünger, and Heidegger, in the end what drives him is a deep sensitivity to the consequences of the sudden, powerful rift of war that shaped and continues to shape the contemporary situation. The result is that Patočka's handling of the theme of nihilism is arguably much more subtle, and above all more suspicious, perhaps in a positive sense. Patočka in effect challenges us to ask just how far the moral and social categories from the nineteenth century, such as "nihilism" or "decadence," can help us to grasp the meaning of two world conflagrations that consumed millions in the twentieth. In fact, one of Patočka's main points in the *Heretical Essays* is the inherent limitation of the entire discussion of nihilism, or modern decadence in general. From Patočka's perspective one could even say that, for all of their attempts to formulate a philosophically sophisticated perspective on nihilism, both Jünger and Heidegger are ultimately driven only by a rather myopic conviction concerning the fundamental decadence of the contemporary world, of the fact of its failure. The entire scope of their discussion begins and ends with an emphasis on this failure; the result is that both Jünger and Heidegger, each in his own way, ultimately beg the question as to whether or not the best way to formulate the task of our existence is in terms of a recovery from a failure, or of a new beginning that sets itself apart from the failed legacy of an old beginning. Each, in different ways, fails to initiate a discussion that is genuinely about *us*, about *our situation* as it appears to us in the wake of our wars, all the while keeping the pressure and focus on a traditional world that has failed to justify itself.

Patočka's suspicion about this type of discourse can be seen in his discussion of European decadence and decline in the fifth of the *Heretical Essays*, "Is European Civilization Decadent, and Why?," which forms

the basis of his discussion of war in the sixth. Here it becomes clear that Patočka's ultimate concern is not so much to provide us with a diagnosis of what ails Europe, as to illuminate the fact that the central question of European nihilism, what is at stake, is the manner in which we are to relate to ourselves. All of this talk about nihilism, decadence, failure, and new beginnings is ultimately interesting only to the extent to which it allows us to approach, in a potentially fruitful manner, the theme of how human beings take up the historical task that they themselves are. This means that the decline in question is measured in accordance with the standard of a life that is called to relate to itself as a task, that holds itself to itself thanks to an insight into its truth. Thus the focus is not on the effectiveness of abstractions, such as "values," to provide a world for human existence, as in Nietzsche or Jünger; nor is the focus the relation to the existential ground or site of the origin of history itself. Such broad strokes do not get to the heart of the matter; they belong more to reflections on the history of philosophy than they do to reflections on the contemporary situation. They tend to obscure the fact that the question is about "us," that we are talking about ourselves, by substituting a discussion about "Europeans" and "civilization" and "world history." It may be true that, in order to talk about ourselves, we need to understand what is articulated in these broader strokes; but the point stands that one needs to be cautious of the tendency for such an understanding to obscure the question of what ultimately needs to be understood, or what calls for understanding in the first place: "our" existence.

This reluctance to embrace the vocabulary of nihilism too quickly can be articulated best by considering Patočka's attempt at a definition of decadence in the fifth essay: "A life can be said to be decadent when it loses its grasp on the innermost nerve of its functioning, when it is disrupted at its inmost core so that while thinking itself full it is actually draining and laming itself with every step and act."[4] Patočka is here trying to conceive of decadence as above all a kind of distortion, one that obscures from us how we harm ourselves in what we do, by substituting a narrative of existence that fails to address, or even to pose adequately, the fundamental question of who we are. Empty, we continue think ourselves full—this is not far from Jünger and Heidegger: there the attempt was to think oneself empty, so to speak, as a countermovement to nihilism, and in this way approach what is essential. Yet Patočka's formulation also expresses his attempt to put some distance between his conception of decadence and such a thought. For if this "thinking" of a Jünger or a Heidegger amounts to nothing more than a polemics aimed at a world that refuses to recognize its failure to be full, then how would such posturing bring life any closer to a "grasp of the innermost nerve of its functioning?" Do we not, in following such a thinking, become seduced by the idea that to "think oneself empty" amounts to a kind of fulfillment, even a fullness of purpose? Patočka's suspicion—and this is one among many "heretical" features of

his reflections on history—is that such pronouncements about civilization, history (even the "history of being"), and metaphysics do not necessarily enable us to pose and pursue the question that we are. "[P]erhaps the entire question about the decadence of civilization is incorrectly posed. There is no civilization as such. The question is whether historical humans are still willing to embrace history."[5]

The elucidation of such an embrace of history, and the spiritual conditions that make it possible, is Patočka's real aim in these essays. This means that, in approaching again the question of the line, the division that it marks, and what is at stake in its approach, must be thought again, though this time in terms other than the more narrow circuit defined by the discourse on nihilism. This is again what brings Patočka to the question of war. For it is in war, and not nihilism per se, that the question of the "innermost nerve" of the human function is brought into view.

A DISTINCTION BETWEEN TWO DISTINCTIONS

To approach the question of war, Patočka brings to bear two essential distinctions. These two distinctions, and the distinction between them, is the subject of the fifth essay on European decadence, which (to stress again) forms the basis for the discussion of war in the sixth essay. It is thus important here to have a clear sense of these distinctions in view, in order to fully understand how Patočka re-opens the question of the line.

The first is the distinction between the *sacred* and the *profane*, or between the exceptional and the ordinary.[6] The profane is the world of toil and labor, the daily striving for the procurement of life's needs; here is opened the horizon for an engagement with the world as the sum total of involvements and affairs that make up encounters with others (family, friendship, cooperative existence with its mutual dependency), and the relations with things and materiality in general (the world of nature as that which sustains us, supports or consumes us in our corporeal existence). The profane is life itself in its existential density; it is existence rooted in a place and held fast by a heavy saturation with the worldly. When we want to evoke the heaviness of experience, its reticence, opacity, or stupidity, we seek to express the profane. We seek in such expressions to capture the friction we encounter when we pursue our projects, the drain on our energies and capacities when we struggle against the resistance of things and the contrary wills of persons, the exhausting tasks that characterize the duration of any finite being that needs to shoulder its own burdens, chart its own paths towards the fulfillment of its own pressing needs. This opacity and stupidity of the profane is the origin of that sense of our existence as being borne along by a great flood of being: our society, our world, the very horizon of the meaningful itself is lent a completeness and permanency, a place and a face, in the form of the profane.

The sacred, or the demonic, is on the other hand that which suddenly seems to escape the closure and completeness of the profane, suddenly negating it, annihilating its hold on us. The demonic stands outside and apart from that heaviness and density that would seem to always already have everything already spoken for. The sacred, which Patočka also calls the orgiastic, disrupts the cycle of the everyday, throws off the burden of preparing for the tomorrow that belongs to the reign of a life composed of an infinity of tomorrows and the necessities they imply. We evoke the demonic when we wish to express the sense that there is somehow, against all reason and expectation, an escape from our existence, from that self that always finds itself burdened with its mundane tasks. The demonic proves that the self, which is what it is only in its being consumed by the flow of existence, saturated with world, is nevertheless something from which we can part ways. Expressions of the demonic betray a sense of surprise, of wonder at a sudden negation of and exemption from what had seemed to be impervious to all protest, all exception.

The other distinction Patočka brings to bear is between *authenticity* and *inauthenticity*, or between a responsible life in truth and the flight from responsibility.[7] This distinction can be read, at least in part, in straight Heideggerean terms of *Eigentlichkeit* and *Uneigentlichkeit*. Patočka's point, like Heidegger's in *Being and Time*, is to contrast the possibility of the self-clarity that accompanies an embrace of historicity against the tendency of historical existence to obscure itself to itself.[8] The obscurity of inauthenticity arises from the tendency human beings have to grasp themselves, to understand themselves, in the pre-given terms of the world as a horizon of sense, a world we navigate by assuming this or that role. Assuming the horizon of an articulated role is *uneigentlich*, a kind of alienation from the sense of life as something that we ourselves must *lead*; in turning towards a role, thus being led by "what one does," we turn away, in an important sense, from ourselves. An historical existence that reads its own history as a reflection of patterns and meanings already in place, already articulated as constituting the horizon of the world, implies a covering over of the being of historical existence in its primordial form of something that is one's own. This means that to be historically, to embrace history, is not simply to act out a story; it is to grasp, to recall Patočka's phrasing already cited above, its own innermost source of functioning: the unique manner in which the human being exists as the origin of its own possibility.

If we pause to compare these two distinctions—the sacred and the profane on the one hand, the authentic and the inauthentic on the other—one might conclude that we have here two versions of the same distinction. Perhaps the profane is just another way to describe inauthenticity, insofar as both describe the ossification of possibility in the normality of a given world. Both rely on the sense of the world as something unmoved, irrevocable, and dead to any future that it has not already determined in accordance with some necessity or other. One's role, after all—as a parent, a citizen,

even a human being in general—is often aptly described as a burden, a fate or a destiny. Likewise, perhaps the sacred is simply another way to describe authenticity, insofar as both represent a fundamental break with the reductive patterns of the pre-given horizon of sense we call the world. Both rely on the unanticipated potential of a moment of realization, one in which we discover in ourselves an unexpected surplus of existence that transcends the ordinary everydayness of our roles. Both express that profound connection between the human potential to choose one's own being, in a manner that neither takes nor can take the world, or a role, as its guide.

There is something to this, but nevertheless Patočka's central thesis in the fifth essay is that there is an essential distinction between these two distinctions. He wants to convince us that there is a difference between the sacred and the responsible on the one hand, and between the inauthentic and the profane on the other. And it is the difference between these two distinctions, I wish to argue, that will prove essential to understanding Patočka's thesis in the sixth essay that the twentieth century is war. But first let us take a closer look at what this distinction between distinctions amounts to.

The distinction between these two distinctions is best illuminated by pointing out that the concept of responsibility, as it is developed by Patočka in the *Heretical Essays* and elsewhere, does not map completely onto the concept of authenticity or *Eigentlichkeit* in Heidegger's *Being and Time*. Patočka's relation to Heidegger is a complex issue in Patočka scholarship,[9] and for my purposes I wish only to emphasize one aspect of this question, namely with a view to their very different assessments of both the history of philosophy and the role of theology.

For Heidegger, the question of responsibility is one that is deeply problematic to its very core, to the point to which even the question itself, the question of the very possibility of authentic responsibility, has no real definite shape for us. This is in spite of the fact that such a possibility is not only essential to human existence, but represents a source of tension, a pull as it were, towards its realization. There is thus something that stands in its way, and for Heidegger this includes our traditions, whether philosophical or theological, which are characterized by the obfuscation of any insight into the possibility of authenticity.[10] This is the case even in those instances, not few, in which there is a clear attempt at a positive engagement with and appraisal of the problem of responsibility. The obfuscation of the tradition, both in its general approach and its very vocabulary, lies behind Heidegger's taking great pains in works such as *Being and Time* to liberate the ontological question of Dasein from its analogues in theology and philosophical anthropology—the goal is always seen as requiring a fundamental radicalization of the question of Dasein's being, in order to bring the *very question as such* into view at all.[11]

Patočka, I would like to suggest, is not nearly as suspicious. For him, there is a very definite way in which authentic responsibility has taken shape within the European tradition and experience, namely in the form

of the *care for the soul*,[12] whether in its Greek manifestation or Christian. Where Heidegger situates the problem of responsibility in the raw possibility of the historical moment, in Dasein as the "lighting" of being (*Lichtung des Seyns*), Patočka accepts at face value, so to speak, the claims of philosophy and religion to have expressed this ultimate in the figure of a disciplined self-relation. To be sure, for Heidegger the historical moment of Dasein is necessarily shaped by the philosophical tradition; and likewise, the philosophical tradition for Patočka is far from grasping its own historical essence; yet this overlap does not reduce the one approach to the other. For the idea of the care for the soul, as Patočka presents it, implies that authenticity is not a singular event that, despite all our efforts, remains essentially hidden from view; instead, Patočka suggests that it has been articulated as a task, which means that it can be engaged in the form of an abiding acquisition—in fact one that Patočka argues lies at the very heart of the idea of Europe. Now, it may be, as Patočka suggests in the 1973 lectures posthumously published under the title *Plato and Europe*, that the historical meaning of the care for the soul may in the final analysis be completely lost to us, that the ruin of Europe may precisely lie in the fact that any form of life that would be guided by the ideal of the care for the soul has long been rendered impossible.[13] Here one must again be sensitive to the fact that to a great extent Patočka subscribes to the conception of nihilism articulated in Jünger and Heidegger; in particular, he basically accepts the idea that the reductive pressure of nihilism, to adopt Jünger's idiom, threatens to reduce the very notion of "care" to the machinations of technique and the maintenance of an empty life. Be that as it may, Patočka's contention remains that the heritage of the idea of Europe represents an at least partially formulated possibility of our existence, and his trust in the meaningfulness of its basic conceptual vocabulary—including concepts such as "soul," "sacred," "person," "truth," and "politics"—enables him to develop a conception of authenticity that is arguably thicker and richer than the one we find in Heidegger.

An important part of Patočka's alternative to Heidegger is the difference between the two distinctions sketched above: namely, between authenticity and inauthenticity on the one hand, and between the demonic and the profane on the other. For Patočka, at the core of the question of the care for the soul is a struggle, and with that a *choice*, that is defined by the difference between these two distinctions. Let us look at this more closely.

The question of authenticity for Patočka is the question of responsibility itself, its ground and possibility. More, responsibility represents a break, a transcendence, a countermovement with respect to the acceptance of the everyday, to the profane and the inauthentic. We need to be precise, however. It makes some sense to characterize responsibility as an original transcendence, if all we have in view is its counterpart, namely irresponsibility or inauthenticity. But the point here is that responsibility is not for all that the first disturbance of the everyday or the profane. Nor is the acceptance

of the everyday, of the pre-given horizon of sense in a flight from responsibility, the first concrete institution of the profane. Even if the pre-given world we embrace, the role that we assume, appears to us in the specific form of a burden, this is not in itself the grounding emergence of the profane; to embrace a burden is not the origin of the burdensomeness of the burden, which is always indifferent to the very issue of its acceptance. The profane, in other words, is just as little a *role* as is the burden of old age, or the need for water.

For Patočka, it is the sacred, and not responsibility, that first challenges the profane. More, this originary struggle is presupposed by the very question of acceptance that responsibility first articulates (the question of whether to take life as it is, to become immersed in the opaque rhythms of natural existence, or instead to exist historically, "authentically"). The task of responsibility has a context, in other words, in which emerges its own possibility as an exception to everydayness; it enters a field that is already in turmoil, already set into motion thanks to the exceptionalism represented by the orgiastic or demonic.

This also means that the sacred puts responsibility itself, its possibility, into question. For responsibility can be formulated as the task of the care for the soul only if it meets the implicit challenge represented by the experience of the demonic. And it is a formidable challenge, for the demonic has already proven that the meaning of things, of the world, is not without exception; it has shown that *everything* can be given up by giving in to the exception of mystery. This possibility of giving up the world, this surprise discovery of an otherwise hidden fragility of an all-consuming burden, is a pre-given, already experienced phenomenon faced by any emergence of a consciousness that seeks to solidify itself in the form of a responsible subject.

Authentic, responsible life, as historical life, must not only pull itself away from the world, but also away from the annihilation of the world promised by demonic mystery. This in effect yields a new conception of the line, one that can be contrasted with those of Jünger and Heidegger. In Patočka, the line is constituted by a choice around which responsibility takes shape, a choice that takes the form of a *double refusal*. The soul is responsible, only as that double refusal of the oblivion of succumbing to the overwhelming flood of worldly being, as well as the oblivion of its destruction: to be responsible means neither to be consumed, to suffer without hope, nor to embrace the divine devastation of a release from bondage.

The very distinction between the two distinctions in fact emerges out of this double refusal of responsible life. It is only given this choice that a distinct line can be drawn between the demonic and the responsible. Or better: the demonic and the responsible emerge as distinct, only given the integrity of the double refusal of the demonic and the profane on the part of responsibility. To grasp the conditions for this integrity of the position of responsibility "on the line," it is important to keep in view just what

responsibility rejects in the demonic (that is, it rejects the loss of self implicit in demonic transcendence), and what it does *not* reject. It does not, namely, reject the *violence* of the demonic. For in the end, responsibility shares with the demonic a violence, a disruption that tears asunder the tyranny of the profane; and the demonic will always, in a sense, remain a secret ally of responsible life, even in the wake of its own rejection by the latter.

The bond between the responsible and the demonic can potentially lead to confusion, above all if one fails to grasp the fact that the task of responsibility includes the rejection of the demonic. From Patočka's perspective, something like this confusion could be said to occur with Heidegger's analysis of responsibility or *Eigentlichkeit* in *Being and Time*. There, authenticity or responsibility is described as the possibility to stand apart from the everyday, to deny its pre-eminence in the understanding of oneself, or to guard oneself against the self-obscuring tendencies of a fallenness into a received meaning of being. For Heidegger, all of this takes place in the horizon of one's resoluteness towards death, a drama that plays itself out only in the confines of the historical existence of Dasein, thus ultimately of the self, whether individual or that of the historical community. The line between the authentic and the inauthentic separates a somebody that could be anybody from that fundamental encounter with oneself out of the nontransferable being towards one's own death, as the possibility of one's own impossibility. For Patočka, if one were to limit the question of responsibility to this Heideggerean analysis of authenticity, an essential dimension of responsible being would remain invisible. For the demonic involves a very different source of problematicity than either inauthenticity proper or the call of Dasein's conscience. The drama of the demonic for Patočka does not unfold between different existential modalities of what amounts to an understanding, a grasping of the self, but between the task of the self and what pre-exists this task as a primordial force of the *nonself*. The demonic is a force, an exteriority, that is within us only to be against us; it is an outside that intrudes in such a way that does not assume the form of an understanding that would articulate the possibilities of the being of the self. It does not articulate at all, but remains radically other than knowledge as such, in any form in which knowledge can be said to constitute the parameters of a self, including everything that Heidegger understood to be included in the *Seinsverständnis* constitutive of the being of Dasein. The demonic does not articulate possibilities, but subjects them all equally to force, effectively releasing that being that "is" its possibilities precisely *from itself*.[14]

The task of responsibility for Patočka is thus more complicated than the task of Heideggerean authenticity alone, for it involves bringing this force of the nonself under the power of responsibility. The demonic, as Patočka stresses, cannot be annihilated, only mastered, overpowered by a life that is able to graft onto itself that which nevertheless remains radically contrary to it.[15] But it is not the understanding alone that allows for such a mastery,

or better: to master the demonic is not simply a question of rejecting one modality of self-comprehension for another, but involves coming to terms with the annihilation of all comprehension as such. By emphasizing this theme of the demonic, Patočka is seeking to pursue an analysis of human existence that is structured in terms of a care, a concern for and of itself, but in such a way that illuminates a sense in which this concern is more than the resoluteness of a choice—the choice of responsibility is not simply existential resoluteness, holding fast to itself, but is above all a being-situated on the line that divides responsibility from the night of the demonic. And this line, from Patočka's point of view, can only come into view by way of a more serious reflection on responsibility, one that not only turns to philosophy as a spiritual tradition or even an ethical possibility, but also to *religion* as a fundamental dimension of historical existence.

PLATONISM AND THE CHRISTIAN REVOLUTION

The idea that the demonic represents an overwhelming transcendence, one that even once it is incorporated into responsible life functions in a state of tension with responsibility, is at the heart of Patočka's understanding of religion. Religion is precisely a powerful attempt to bring together the orgiastic with the responsible, the sacred with a newly fashioned care for the soul that orders itself in such a way that respects the violence of the demonic.[16] The history of the various incorporations and suppressions of this self-forgetting, which result in a defeated but not extinguished irresponsibility at the heart of responsibility, is at the core of Patočka's reflections on the "unthought" essence of Christianity that has gotten some attention thanks to Derrida's reading of it in the first chapter of *The Gift of Death*.[17] For the purpose at hand, it is necessary only to emphasize that for Patočka, a thick conception of responsibility must take into consideration that front line, so to speak, which is conditioned by the violent breaking open of the profane, the everyday, by the demonic. The idea is that we cannot fully understand what responsibility is, and with that what the tradition of the care for the soul promises us, unless we grasp the significance of the disruption implied by that enormous release from bondage, from the identification with life, that the demonic represents. Yet the converse is also true: we do not understand the significance of this line, until we learn to see it through the prism of responsibility itself, or from the point of view of an attempt to care for the soul in a world transfigured by the violence of the demonic. The demonic, the exception, does not in and of itself emerge as problematic, not even from the point of view of the everyday; violence does not originally take the form of a problem, by simple virtue of the fact that it destroys. It is a problem first and foremost only in the rise of a subject that crystallizes around the choice of self that draws a line between itself and both everydayness and the "orgiastic leap into darkness."[18]

In both *Plato and Europe* and the *Heretical Essays*, Patočka traces this idea of the subject to Platonism.[19] In Plato, on Patočka's account, the soul is ultimately understood in terms of its relation to the Good, or a transcendent identity that defines the proper foundation of a life in truth. The Good provides a foundation, in that it defines precisely what life as such most is—thus the concern of the soul is to orient itself towards the Good, to the extent that the Good is that which makes the soul, and with that everything in nature, what it is. The result is that Platonic ontology expresses the conviction that there is a definite choice, a secure end that forms a clear direction for the progression of a life. Platonism also asserts that, ultimately, there are within the soul the resources for making a positive choice for an order of existence that, taken in itself, is given as a whole, a One. Responsibility here emerges as fused with a stability that cuts itself off from the falsity of the inauthentic; authenticity is a light that belongs inwardly to a soul that accepts and encounters its essence in its capacity to know and to be. The means for the subjugation of the demonic, therefore, belong properly to the soul's resources of insight—and they are presented in Platonism by way of a metaphysics of the soul in which the vision of the Good, and the purity it implies, brings the subject to itself. The vision of the Good shapes and holds fast the subject to its self-responsibility, in a kind of field of force in which the demonic is incorporated as an erotic mystery of the light.

Yet what is of more interest to us here is Patočka's account of the Christian modification of this Platonic conception of the responsible subject.[20] In Christianity, again on Patočka's account, the ontological stability of the choice of the soul for itself in authenticity is complicated by the emergence of a peculiar form of historical consciousness. This consciousness has its origin in an existential instability that fundamentally disrupts the ontological stability afforded to the soul by the Platonic One. Instead of the vision of the Good, in Christianity the relation to a Love that is both self-giving and self-receding forms the unique ground for embracing the choice of responsibility. Love is not the Good, the principle of the unity of all things that requires only to be seen in order for the soul to become assimilated into the order of things, but a Person with whom the soul stands in a relation defined not by insight, but by an *abyss*.

Among other things, for Patočka this abyss renders death problematic in a manner different than had been the case in Platonism. In Platonism, the problem of death always turns on the question of whether what we are in life approaches or turns away from the Good, from what makes us what we are in truth. Thus in the myth of Er at the end of Plato's *Republic*, the question of self-responsible being is identical with the question of the possibility of wisdom—that is, of the possibility of *choosing well* so that one can be in a position to choose one's destiny well, to be able to aim true at a future at that point when one's choice will be woven into the very fabric of the order of the cosmos, and with that becoming a strange blend of freedom and necessity.[21] The abyssal character of the relation to the divine, on the other

hand, problematizes and destabilizes this Platonic relating of the soul's destiny to its capacity for wisdom. Knowledge, and the insight of the wise, no longer determines the manner in which the soul is to be held to itself; to be responsible is no longer to be held to what one sees, or to be called to seeing more clearly who one is. The care for the soul in Christianity is not founded on a relation to being, but to the soul's own properly historical truth that lies in the abyss. Here "destiny" takes on a very different form, since the soul cannot turn to self-knowledge in order to orient the trajectory of its existence; more, there is no cosmic order in which this destiny is somehow fused, making the soul something in the end eminently natural. The abyssal character of responsibility shapes in this way the contours of an existence that is historical through and through: "—the idea that the soul is nothing present *before*, only *afterwards*, that it is historical in all its being and only as such escapes decadence."[22] It would be a mistake to take this emergence of the historical as a rejection of the Platonic theme of the care for the soul, as if in historicity, or thanks to original sin, such care no longer has any sense. For Patočka, on the contrary, this represents a deepening, though an abysmal deepening, of the very meaning of *care*.

This Christian moment further complicates, and problematizes, the question of responsibility. Above all, it complicates the theme of escape, of release. As we have already seen, the task of responsibility can be likened to a refusal of two possibilities of escape: on the one hand, inauthenticity is the escape from the knowledge of the task of oneself as such; it is the tendency for human life to understand itself in terms of the given world or context of things and persons, or as a history that has somehow already been told. Likewise, the demonic is another kind of escape, not from the task of responsibility as such, but originally from the monotony, the bondage, and the self-closure of everydayness. With the Christian radicalization, both of these escapes, as it were, are illuminated by the abyss, and as a result there comes into view a peculiar nothingness that had been concealed by both. The escape of inauthenticity now takes the form of a reduction of possibilities to a "commonality" that conceals the groundlessness of historical existence, while the escape of the demonic, the great relief of the holiday, conceals but nevertheless expresses an ever-increasing *boredom* with everyday life. Inauthenticity pretends to embrace a world, but what is given is groundless, without foundation for such an embrace; the demonic pretends to release us from suffering and burden, but in doing so only expresses how tired we have become with our existence.

This abyss, illuminating the nothingness of life that is distorted by both the sacred and the inauthentic, is in historical consciousness the true resource of responsibility. This is also, *mutatis mutandis*, Heidegger's thought, but in Patočka it is situated in a far more dense account of the different lines of force that define Dasein's relation to this nothing. The sacred orgiastic is a "problem" for responsibility, because again responsibility is for Patočka also a kind of escape from this grip of the everyday.

Both the sacred and the responsible hold the everyday in contempt, both express an admiration for what stands apart, out "into the abyss." Thus even the demonic, from this perspective, expresses a necessity, a drive to break from the everyday. It is not merely a tendency towards a mute obscurity of darkness, but is a conscious impulse towards the moment of exception, and with that it can be identified as the consciousness of a kind of truth—though it is a truth that here takes a form that responsibility must deny. This does not change the basic fact that the authentic and the orgiastic, though opposed, are two forms of standing apart from the everyday, responding in two different ways to its leveling character; and in Christianity, more so than in Platonism, they are opposed to each other more distinctly as fundamental alternatives, the difference between them sharpened by the Christian experience of the resourcelessness of being abandoned to oneself, helpless before the violence of the demonic and the burden of the profane, yet for all that more open to the possibility of a genuine self-responsibility.

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY AS WAR

With Patočka's two distinctions (sacred vs. profane, authentic vs. inauthentic), the distinction between them, and the interpretation of Christianity as a radicalization of the care for the soul through the emergence of an historical consciousness, we have the essential background to the discussion of war in the sixth of Patočka's *Heretical Essays*. The next step is to consider Patočka's thesis that the twentieth century represents a radicalization of a new kind, one that takes place in terms of neither the logic of the demonic nor of responsibility, but of profane everydayness itself.

For Patočka, the burden of the everyday, as a closure that threatens to ossify the scope and sense of human possibilities, is not something contingent or static, nor is it arbitrary. Its dominance is characterized by an evolving absolutization, a progressive and inexorable closure of the possibility of the exception; more, it adapts its form to assimilate the emergence of new such possibilities, including both those that find their origin and ground in the demonic as well as in knowledge and responsibility. What Nietzsche, Jünger, and Heidegger see in the contemporary age as a radicalization and with that a culmination of this closing off of the origin of the new, Patočka discerns the figure of a re-emergent power of the profane.

This resurgence of the everyday is a complex matter, as is the suppression of the possibilities of the exception represented by the demonic and responsibility. The dawning closure of the resurgence of the everyday does not simply cut off the exception, but *intensifies* the demonic impulse to the exception, and with that its violence. The more the everyday binds us to lives in pursuit of things, the more boredom sets the pace of the course of our lives, the more powerful the orgiastic looms as an exception to everything

that is: "A new flood of the orgiastic is an inevitable appendage to addiction to things, to their everyday procurement, to bondage to life."[23]

The bondage to life, the core of the very sense of the profane, had never been eradicated by the demonic; the demonic only stands apart, keeps its distance thanks to violence. But what is new in modernity is that the demonic is allowed free reign by an order of profane life that is no longer even shaken by its violence. Something similar is true with the potential for the self to be responsible. The dominance of the everyday, of this addiction to things, also draws on those resources of the self that had previously allowed it to pursue the task of responsibility, above all its capacity for knowledge. This is the significance for Patočka of modern technology: a knowing that operates solely on the level of organization and manipulation, technology is the form thanks to which everydayness has been able to appropriate knowledge as an instrument of its self-closure.

This might seem to fall short of being an assimilation of responsibility itself into a modernized realm of the profane, above all if one takes seriously Patočka's idea of the Christian revolution that has displaced knowledge of the Good as the ground for responsibility. The very theme of the vanity of the world and the Pauline distrust of the *sophia tou kosmou* would seem to disrupt such an appropriation. Yet for Patočka the promise of this displacement amounts only to an unrealized potential of Christianity; at most, the consequence of the Christian revolution and the break with Platonism was a more problematic relation between knowing and responsibility, but not their complete separation. In the end, insight and self-understanding remain hallmarks of the Christian subjugation of the orgiastic; responsibility remains something real, something concrete, only for those who realize a potential for self-clarity—however much it may also be the case that such clarity is relativized by historical consciousness and the abyssal relation to the ground of responsibility and care. The situation remains for Patočka where technoscience, fully alienated by the revolt of profane everydayness from any task of self-clarity, Platonic or Christian, threatens to unravel the responsible dominance of the sacred: for the technization of knowledge does not stop at the manipulation of things and the material world, but includes self-knowledge as well. To fix in view "who" the self is, who we are, now takes the form of a technology that fashions for us an "historical understanding" limited to the conceptualization of roles or positions in a totality of social relations, utterly heedless to the insistence on the exception represented by both the demonic and the responsible.

Patočka argues that the orgiastic is not simply allowed to freely express itself outside of the confines of responsible life. It is also appropriated, taken up as a resource for ever new forms of the dominance of the everyday. The violence of the demonic, which now takes the form of an increasing assertion of the impulse against boredom, is shaped within technological civilization into expendable and employable energy or force. Thanks to such forces, to boredom and the fear of boredom, our addiction to things drives us to

increase our ability to transform things, to render them radically manipulable by an organizing knowledge. Here the care for the soul degenerates into a new kind of decadence, one where the orgiastic is unleashed from its responsible constraints, but where it is given a place, even a *purpose* within the everyday. This takes for Patočka a definite form: the addiction to things becomes a generalized addiction to the expenditure of energy. Such expenditures are not limited, but include even conflict itself, insofar as conflict represents a means for organizing and expending resources. Such an addiction to conflict is primarily a social phenomenon, one that assembles and deploys (Jünger would say "mobilizes") our very bondage to life as the bond of self-interest, which is in turn "compressed" into the mobilization of conflict: the result is that we pursue our conflicts in the same way that we pursue the consumption of an endless quantity of things, that is, as addicts who can never be finished, never be satisfied with the extent or intensity of the destructiveness of the fight. "The entire earnestness of life, the entire interest in its own being, becomes compressed into the realm of social conflict. Everydayness and the fervor of the fight to the finish, without quarter, belong together."[24]

Patočka is here trying to understand the "deep addiction to war" that he believes is definitive of the twentieth century, and which leads him to characterize the twentieth century *as* war. At the center of his effort is this idea of a "revolt of the everyday," of an everydayness that shapes itself by employing the very possibility of its own transcendence, of its own exception, represented by the choice of responsibility and the violence of the demonic. In this revolt of profane everydayness, the human being becomes the manifestation of Force itself, and war the ultimate expression of an ontological state that no longer relates to the fundamental question of being in any other way than from within the horizon of this new shape of the whole. Thus "[i]n this century, war is the full fruition of the revolt of the everyday,"[25] but only because war is no longer a free exception; the violence of the demonic is no longer distinct from the order of life against which it is turned: "[t]he same hand stages orgies and organizes everydayness."[26]

This brings Patočka to the point where he articulates what we have been calling throughout the thesis of the constitutive character of violence. This is also one of the most important "heretical" theses of the *Heretical Essays*, namely, the idea that "war itself might be something that can explain, that has itself the power of bestowing meaning."[27] Patočka argues, at the beginning of the sixth essay, that this possibility has been consistently overlooked by all philosophies of history that were employed in the last century to tackle the problem of the First World War, for they all approached war from "the perspective of peace, day, and life."[28] We could perhaps extend the criticism to those philosophies that sought to explain the Second World War, or even the meaning of war at the dawn of the twenty-first century. Let us take a closer look at this thesis.

At the core of Patočka's thesis is that a variation of the argument of the decadence or decay of Europe, and the inevitable reaction against nihilism

itself in the form of the self-assertion of will, had been generally accepted before the outbreak of war in 1914: "[t]he 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."²⁹ This idea was shared by both those who willed to change the *status quo* and those who fought to preserve it—the shared assumption was that "nothing" guided history as such, "nothing" formed the bedrock of an order that was what it was independent of the force that humanity was capable of unleashing. Patočka's point, as with Jünger and Heidegger, is not simply that people no longer believed in values; the issue has more to do with a decision with respect to the question of just in what sense a value "is" a value at all, or something that orders the world. The conviction was that the ordering character of valuation is just a kind of violence, an expenditure of force aimed either at an opposition to or a defense of a given order of things.

This shared conviction in turn implied a certain economic perspective. After all, forces, in themselves only given quantities of energy, can under the proper circumstances be harnessed and deployed at will. They may be in some cases locally irrational and "demonic" (such as the fear of boredom), but perhaps in a global sense they are constitutive, that is, give rise to order. More, the transformation of the world, the emergence of its future—those infinite tomorrows being produced by the everyday—is according to this perspective possible at all only if all available forces are set free, and not unduly kept in check by economically unprogressive structures that would prevent the conditions for their proper exploitation—that is, their *release*. Here the attraction to war, and how it could be addictive, begins to come into view: "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."³⁰ That is, if profane everydayness, revolting against its own marginalization, has taken on the radicalized form of a self-production that feeds on anything that has force; if our understanding of the kind of beings that we are is that we are just given material available for a will to create; then war becomes the very archetype of that moment of a willful break from the given situatedness of life towards a new world, uniquely shaped by force, though for all that essentially bound to the profane.

This also begins to bring into view a potential explanation as to why *any* kind of mobilization could be addictive, even a mobilization against such empty and meaningless expenditures of energy. This even includes what could be called the "war against war"—the coordinated outrage against the human waste of war itself. For what is addictive about war is not what war brings, the dividends it pays, for no addiction is driven by results; rather what is addictive is the sense that the violence of war could fortify the hold that our life has on us, giving it meaning, as if the eschatological rush to

war were really only a rush to a more complete embrace of the mundane itself. In this way the violence of war, at its most extreme a violence that is directed against the very existence of the world itself (as in Jünger, we need to keep in mind the ever present specter of nuclear annihilation that forms part of the backdrop of Patočka's reflections as well), can fold back into the service of an ever expanding exuberance of peace and life. Thus even the war against war, that powerful call to finally admit and face the devastation of war and, in recognizing it for all that it is, in all of its horror, finally break free of the stupidity of its violence—this, too, is assimilated into the economy of the profane, or what Patočka calls the "service of the day." For it, too, sets into motion an eschatology that ultimately serves only life:

> 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 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.[31]

I take this complicity of the everyday in war, of the profane, to be the core of Patočka's argument that the twentieth century is war. For Patočka, war has become mundane, as "normal" a condition as nihilism was for Nietzsche. As such, war is in the end neither authentic nor demonic, though it relates to both in essential ways. The orgiastic is not alone constitutive of the violence and ferocity of the wars of the twentieth century; the cataclysm of war is not a mere function of the sacred breaking free of a rationalized, industrialized society that has established a realm of "mere life" that refuses to stand apart from itself, to transcend the forces that would reduce all experience to its self-bondage. Rather, for Patočka, war has become in the twentieth century something altogether different. It is as if in war the profane imitates, or perhaps even participates in the "standing apart" of transcendence, of its other in the demonic and the responsible, and thereby governs the tension between itself and its other, between the day and the night, in the service of the ends of the day. War has become normal, in that in our wars everyday life has learned to press death into its own service; the threat is used to increase the hold of mere life on the living.

The essence of the profane is its grip on life; our wars represent an intensification of this grip in the form of a unique modality of the addiction to things, namely, where this addiction is heightened by its very conditions, life itself, being fundamentally *threatened*. Here we have an extension of an idea that we have already seen above in Jünger, namely how fear becomes a newly refined instrument of warfare in the modern age. In Patočka, the threat of death is not simply a means of combat, an instrument of war, but a veritable technology of rule: "How do the day, life, peace, govern all individuals, their bodies and souls? By means of death; by threatening

life."³² *Without war*, individuals tend to slip through the grip of mere life, which without war can be nothing but an empty superficiality in the face of the transcendence of the sacred and the responsible. *With war*, the grip of mere life becomes total, for *threatened life* is a seemingly inescapable spiritual trap for those who are addicted to things. To face one's death as a threatened life, thus from out of a radicalized bondage to mere living, is also to be bound to war itself: war usurps the place of the refusal of the sacred, of facing death in a manner that does not force it to be translated into a bondage to life. The consequence of the revolt of the everyday is that war has become the paradoxical normalization of something that cannot be normalized, that can never alone be a confirmation of life, and it does so through force alone.³³

SACRIFICE AND THE LIMITS OF ECONOMY

However, at the heart of this normalization or economization of violence, where the demonic becomes a mere expenditure of energy, death the trivial-izing turn back to a mode of existence that ultimately rejects any real mean-ing for any death, Patočka discerns a disruption or ungovernable point of departure expressed by the image of the front line itself. Unlike Jünger, the front line for Patočka is not a culmination and a passage; unlike Heidegger, it is not a zone of emergence, of an encounter with the origin of the mean-ing of transcendence itself. It is first and foremost a *disruption*: the front line disrupts the paradoxical economy of war waged for peace. And here it is important to stress that the "line" in question is a *front* line, that is, the line that marks the extremity of an advance, one that puts distance between those who are out in front and those who remain "behind," "in the world." The front line sharply divides those who *go* and those who *stay*; it puts a distance between those who die, who are sacrificed for peace, and those for whom an endless future of mere life is promised. This difference, embodied in the reality of the front line, points to the fact that a life lived only for life does not, in the end, close off all possibility for transcendence—for this possibility of sacrifice indicates, as a kind of open secret, the impossibility of an ultimate closure of mere life to all possibility of a transcendence that it cannot in principle employ for peace, or the day. That is, the distance of the front line, the endurance that is demanded by the everyday from those who fight along its line of advance, "indicates a dark awareness that life is not everything, that it can sacrifice itself."³⁴

Here we have a third distinction that Patočka relies upon in order to understand the essence of responsibility. It is a distinction between two faces of sacrifice.³⁵ The mobilization of force, the hand that sends the war-rior to fight, grasps the meaning of this sacrifice relative only to life, to peace: one is given for a world, a way of life, a home, an idea. The warrior is us; his being endangered is the consequence of the danger, the risk, that

threatens us all, that binds us to peace, and for the sake of which we must submit everything that we have and love. But on the line itself, sacrifice is not illuminated by the day, by the categories thanks to which the world makes sense, but takes on an absolute, non-relative significance. For Patočka, on the line, where the danger is no longer equivalent to the manipulation and mobilization of life, but the very self-identification with one's own death, the act of sacrifice crystallizes into an *absolute freedom*. On the line, there is a total dissolution of the day in the firestorm of destruction that it itself had generated; at the culmination of the line, where the everyday has thrown in everything it has in accordance with an inexorable if incalculable outcome of its economics, lies a null point or meridian of motive. "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."[36] Here the motives of the day no longer hold sway, at least not unquestioningly, and death, however orchestrated and chosen it may otherwise be, here stands apart into its own.

Patočka sees in this reign of death and absurdity of the front line, not a *loss* of the self, but a *peak* of the self. Here the sacrificed stand apart; they bear the mark of the orgiastic in its violence, but also of the authentic in its self-gathering. Here night, the eternal, the radically other to life, the end horizon of all possibility, "comes suddenly to be an absolute obstacle on the path of the day to the bad infinity of tomorrows."[37] More, the peak is historical, in the sense that what is grasped is the inner historicity of the choice one is, and not the span of life that one has been assigned and saddled with in the world of "life:" "[the front line] is to comprehend that here is where the 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."[38]

What are we to make of this idea of a "peak"? First let us emphasize that its essential structure reflects that basic choice of responsibility as a rejection of both the profane, the everyday, and the demonic. Yet it is also different. What is unique, in a century that has become war, is that the demonic is now in the service of the everyday. The historical moment for Patočka is characterized by the fusion of the two alternatives to responsibility, resulting in an overwhelming reality that no longer bears any trace of limit or restraint on what can be asked of us. Even sacrifice itself, and everything that comes from this "gift of death," has already been calculated, already assumed to be given. This peak, this crest, rises above an all-consuming reality that demands the unceasing sacrifice of life for the sake of an increasingly meaningless existence. But what can be seen from this peak? What is there to see, at this zenith of violence and nadir of motive?

There is a passage in Patočka's *Plato and Europe* that might help us frame this question more precisely. At one point in his account of the origin of the idea of Europe, Patočka discusses the origin of the guardians

in Socrates' city in speech, as it is presented in Plato's *Republic*.[39] The guardians become necessary, on Socrates' account, when the "unbalanced, passionate polis," intoxicated with its own wealth (a clear allusion to the rise of the Athenian empire), drives it into a state of war with other cities. The guardians, a professional class of soldiers, are those who will put themselves on the line, risking their own lives as well as "giving death" to enemies. Patočka's characterization of Socrates' guardians is interesting, especially when considering the treatment of the theme of the front line that we have been following in the *Heretical Essays*. Namely, the guardian for Patočka represents the fusion of "extreme insight and extreme risk."[40] That is, the class that does not live for itself but for the whole, for the *polis*, rests on a double foundation: *knowledge* and *extremity*. Both coalesce in the ability to live apart—that is, not in the context of the *polis* itself, but to a great extent in isolation from the ordinary, where nothing of life is as such identified for itself as what consumes it and charts its future. Insight and risk are constitutive of that constant "living on the battlefield," or in situations of extremity that characterize a "political" class *par excellence*—here the status of such a class is defined not in terms of privileges and the use of power, but in terms of those who participate in risk and have a view of the whole for which they die and kill.

Thus the question of the peak could be reformulated in this way: is there some equivalent insight with which the extremity of the front line can be said to be fused? If so, then does it have a Platonic form—that is, is it a vision that brings us back to ourselves, holds us fast to existence in responsibility, from out of a view of the whole—the whole *polis*, but ultimately once the philosopher becomes necessary, the whole of the cosmos? Or would insight here take some new, radically non-Platonic form, perhaps a Christian form? Does it relate to an abyss in which the soul discovers itself as a destiny, a pure self-transcendence that finds its home in the pure nothingness of violence that rages against the now, against the present reality addicted to its own destruction?

In the context of Patočka's essay, these are in fact the only two options: either the extremity is fused with an insight into the nature of things human and cosmic, or it is fused with a revelatory relation to an abysmal destiny of the soul. Either way, the peak, the experience of human distance made uniquely possible by the violence of the line, is a moment around which the possibility of an authentic responsibility for our times crystallizes; and if Patočka rejects the Platonic option, it is only because he holds out a hope that this extremity is the basis upon which a post-Christian responsibility, governed by an insight all its own, becomes an historically *actual* possibility.

The peak is the origin of what Patočka, in a phrase that has been often quoted without full understanding, calls the "solidarity of the shaken." Solidarity here is already a kind of understanding, an insight, though one that only serves to extend the experience of extremity into history itself, into the spiritual situation of the age as a great tension between mere life and life at the extreme:

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 the future but sees clearly that the everyday, its life and its "peace," have an end.[41]

It is important not to cheapen Patočka's notion of the solidarity of the shaken—either by simply identifying it with the solidarity of those who have suffered from war, revolution, and repression during those darkest hours of the past century, or by claiming that only those who have seen "real combat" know what war means, or have an insight into its truth. Solidarity requires more resources than suffering alone; but more importantly, the point about the significance of "life at the peak" is that it reaches far beyond the confines of an individual's experience. What is shaken is ultimately a world, and Patočka's claim is that those who are capable of understanding are those who find themselves grappling with the meaning of the legacy of the cataclysm of the front line, whether they were there or not. Patočka was not there, unlike Jünger and Teilhard de Chardin, who were; but as a philosopher, seeking to formulate the question of his times, he found himself irresistibly drawn to the problem of the line.

PATOČKA'S CHALLENGE

How compelling is all of this? It should be emphasized that this essay stands apart from all of Patočka's other writings, even those that treat similar themes.[42] Nevertheless, this does not lessen the difficulty of coming to terms with such a text, nor does it mitigate the bewilderment that one experiences after reading it. Why does Patočka seem to expect so much from war? Why does he believe that, at its most extreme, war can somehow shake us from being the dupes of force, that it can free us from the bondage and enslavement to a lifeworld gone insane with its addiction to mass violence?

The question is not merely an historical matter. Patočka is not blind, and readily admits that the extremes of war have not freed us from the life that gives birth to such cataclysms:

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?[43]

Patočka continues: "To that the answer is not easy." But where does the real bite of the question come from? Part of this has to do with a kind of faith in some decisive moment, a flash of clarity that suddenly illuminates a landscape that had been hidden from us—and the hope that this illumination can continue to exist in a different form, allowing the one who experiences it to bring it back home, as it were. One could perhaps say that what Patočka is hoping for in war is the emergence of a question, a shakenness of the human spirit, that realizes in concrete form a kind of radicalized negative Platonism, a new experience of insight that is free of both metaphysics and the hegemony of nihilism.

But what if this is precisely what is unique about war: that it never comes to a head, that an insight is never formed, that a peak is never reached? And even if some sense of having hit the rock bottom of absurdity and the night were possible, that such an experience cannot be brought home, back to the living? What if in war the question of responsibility takes a shape that has no place outside of the landscape of violence, implying that perhaps it cannot represent the beginning of *any* kind of lasting concrete acquisition or accomplishment? What if *neither* of the options hold—neither Platonism nor Christianity—since they both fail to provide any alternative to the sense of an accomplished life, which is in fact ultimately at the heart of Patočka's conception of the care for the soul? If war is to be the twentieth century, or: if war is to be that around which the task of the care for the soul is to be experienced, then war itself must in some sense carry the function of a self-accomplishing existence. However abyssal, this component must be in place; otherwise, the front line would simply represent the utter dissolution of the self, however illuminating it may be. For that is what it is to be a self: it is to endure one's own movement, incorporate one's own insights, extend the light that one has initiated. That this is a desideratum is already announced by Patočka's phrase cited above, striking and full of pathos, of the "solidarity of the shaken"—even if it is a solidarity that is deeply questionable, uncertain, unbalanced, and opaque.

In other words, is this not a case of expecting *too much* from violence? Yet Patočka's challenge remains, and can be easily reformulated as a response to this potential critique: one expects *too little* from violence, if one does not recognize its central role in the constitution of the very sense of the question of responsibility for contemporary humanity. We could perhaps think of this challenge in terms of the following conditional: if responsibility means more than the assumption of a role, or the acceptance of a function in the totality of the human world, then we must recognize in the extremity of violence something more than a means for the manipulation of

the situation. For only violence represents the hope of an exception around which a radical responsibility can crystallize; only violence provides the possibility for the sacrifice of the soul, thus to be something more than an appropriate expenditure towards the procurement of the ends of life. In other words, violence must be recognized as uniquely constitutive—not of responsibility per se, but of the questionability of existence that opens the possibility for a life in responsibility, even in truth, that is not a mere function or role defined by an instrumental totality.

To be sure, this challenge is a far cry from Schmitt's concept of the political. "Constitutive violence" here does not limit itself to the question of the origin of political grouping, but of that solidarity of problematic life itself that Patočka argues is the very ground for responsibility. Yet both challenges, in different ways, help us in the larger task of delimiting the problems of violence; they also help, perhaps, in bringing into view just how it is that such problems could be taken for distinctively *philosophical* problems. The final chapter of these reflections will be dedicated to the elaboration of the horizon of at least some of these so-called "problems of violence."

Conclusion
Six Problems of Violence

THE PROBLEMS OF VIOLENCE

What can we conclude, after having followed this path of dialogues and reflections, which have taken us from war (Clausewitz, Schmitt) to violence (Arendt, Sartre) to nihilism (Jünger, Heidegger) to responsibility (Patočka)? To what extent are we in a position to formulate better the "problems of violence"?

First, there are a number of serious limitations to the above reflections that should be emphasized. They are organized in accordance with a selection of possible dialogues that do not, by any means, exhaust the full spectrum of perspectives that are available to philosophy, not even if one limits oneself to the twentieth century alone. Were we to engage the philosophical contributions to questions of war and politics offered by figures such as Foucault, Benjamin, Derrida, Habermas, Scheler or Bergson, the results would have perhaps been very different. More, the scope of problems has itself been quite limited. Nothing we have seen so far really serves as the foundation for a genuine philosophical approach to the questions of moral damage, symbolic function, psychological (or biological) origin, or forms of social practice that are associated with violence. Yet had we considered these questions and others, I would suspect that at least one factor would have remained constant: the importance of the opposition or tension between a purely instrumental conception of violence, and a conception of violence as uniquely constitutive of its own meaning, or sense. This opposition is perhaps not equally important for all the problems of violence (it may have little to do with the phenomenon of aggressive behavior in primates, for example), but I would still argue that these two poles fix the parameters of at least one essential dimension of any serious philosophical discussion of the problems of violence.

Given these limitations, we can only formulate the contribution that the reflections above could potentially make to the more general discussion of violence. They bear directly on the following five problems: 1) the problem of violence and *possibility*; 2) the problem of violence and *selfhood*; 3) the problem of the *legacy* of violence; 4) the problem of violence and *responsibility*; and 5) the problem of the *meaning* of violence.

There is a sixth problem that has not yet been directly discussed, but which nevertheless lies within the horizon of these reflections, namely the relation between violence and *evil*. We will close with a brief consideration of this question.

The strategy in previous chapters has been to develop, as much as possible, a genuine dialogue between often very different perspectives on the questions of violence, war, and philosophy, adopting the respective idioms of the authors under consideration in order to grasp as faithfully as possible what such perspectives allow us to see. Here, in considering each of these six problems in turn, the strategy will be somewhat different. Where before the attempt was more to assume the intellectual habitus of a Clausewitz or a Patočka, here the attempt will be to take steps toward developing the critical distance that is ultimately needed to take their thought seriously.

VIOLENCE AND POSSIBILITY

Schmitt's challenge is to insist that we must accept the significance of violence specifically in the form of its *possibility*. Such an acceptance is inevitable, though perhaps not for the reasons that Schmitt cites. For Schmitt, the possibility of violence finds its ultimate existential expression in the fusion of a group around the self-constituting decision of the sovereign; this is articulated by Schmitt essentially in terms of being gripped by the situation of *danger*. The question of the significance of this danger lies at the heart of a potential objection to Clausewitz. For Clausewitz, a polity is functional only if it is able, through the agency of its rulers, to make peace; this premise supports in turn a merely instrumental conception of violence, where violence is identified, along with diplomacy, as a means to be employed by the sovereign for shaping the peace. War is political, in that the sovereign does not simply preserve the peace, but pursues policies that shape the existing relations between political entities. War, as instrumental, is thus always a temporary suspension of one peace that is aimed towards the re-establishment of another.

Against this, Schmitt would argue that a polity is functional only if it is able to operate in the horizon of danger, or possible violence: peace is not what is temporarily suspended in order to be shaped in a different way; rather, it is violence that is suspended, and peace merely a manner in which the danger at hand is both kept in view and politically articulated. Thus Schmitt in a way inverts Clausewitz; this amounts to a unique affirmation of the possibility of violence as an origin, thus a principle that forms the foundation for the logic of political relations.

Yet there is more to this. Schmitt's challenge in the end relies on a theological anthropology, according to which the human being is a fundamentally dangerous being. This argument lies at the core of Schmitt's challenge: the human being is a dangerous being, thus he is a being who needs to be ruled, where to be ruled is precisely to be protected from the danger of

which he is himself the origin. The possibility of violence, in other words, is for Schmitt *guaranteed* by the given corruption of human nature.

Clearly, such an anthropology is deeply questionable; more, it effectively undermines the idea that the significance of violence lies in its form as a possibility. A guaranteed possibility of this kind is ambiguous at best—either it means that the possibility of violence is practically indistinguishable from its actuality (the threat will always, inevitably, lead to an attack), or that the possibility of violence is constantly re-discovered as an incorrigible horizon of human existence (once one source of possible conflict is resolved, another will always take its place). Neither option is sufficiently articulated within the theological anthropology that Schmitt invokes, without developing.

Nevertheless, even if we reject the narrow confines of such a "guaranteed possibility" and instead engage a more complex perspective on the question of human freedom and the "political," then violence remains significant, precisely in the form of its possibility. This was in effect the result of the progression from Schmitt's to Patočka's challenge above: the tentative elaboration of the philosophical promise of leaving behind Schmitt's theological anthropology for a richer manner of understanding the theme of possibility. From the philosophical perspective that lies behind Patočka's challenge, violence is not guaranteed by human nature; rather, the possibility of violence intersects seemingly disparate paths of human experience thanks to which the question of freedom takes shape. In the phenomenological tradition from Sartre to Patočka, freedom is the real connective tissue that binds together violence and possibility. It would be a mistake, however, to identify violence with freedom; violence undermines all entry into a world (Sartre), seeking instead to replace it with another, subjectively unstable order of relations, while freedom is an essential dimension for the originary unfolding of the world horizon itself. Instead violence reflects, in ways that are difficult to distinguish or understand, the subjective dimension of freedom, and it is this reflection that is of significance, since it opens the possibility of rediscovering, in an original manner, this very freedom as uniquely *our* possibility. This idea is the core of Patočka's challenge: violence reflects the origin of freedom (originary violence), the flight from the everyday (the demonic, the orgiastic), the nihilistic, and finally sacrifice or the peak of the self; and in doing so, it constitutes a unique condition for an insight into what it is to be a human being, or better: what it is possible for a human being to be. Whereas for Schmitt, violence is constitutive of meaning, because it is the immediate, irreducible expression of what a human being is, for Patočka, it is because the extremity of violence represents an unsurpassable modality of setting the question of what a human being is into motion.

The strength of Patočka's approach lies in his emphasis on the question of an authentic relation to human possibilities—or better, the question of the possible self-manifestation of a life in possibilities as such—and his

rejection of the idea that the disruption of given patterns of such relation or manifestation are irrelevant to understanding the question of human being. Yet to argue that violence is not irrelevant in such a context is not the same as to argue that it is uniquely constitutive. The question still remains whether the possibility of violence, as a phenomenon at the heart of the disruption or exception that confounds the meaningful order of the world, can be identified as the origin of a kind of cohesive insight, a genuine illumination of the horizon of human possibilities. To set into motion the question of human existence is not yet to form a sense for this existence, a perspective or view on what is at stake or even what is being aimed at in such a question. If everything is put at risk in violence, then perhaps this also includes just the manifestation of a life in possibility; perhaps in violence such a life is itself in danger, not only the danger of the obfuscation of insight, but of obliteration.

The problem of violence and possibility thus remains. If, after rejecting Schmitt's challenge on account of the narrowness of its theological anthropology, one is also not inclined to accept Patočka's conception of the solidarity of the shaken, it still remains to understand the relation between the subjective disruption of violence and the manner in which we grapple with the meaning of human existence. We could perhaps put the problem of violence and possibility another way: in a meditation on human existence, does it make sense to *begin* with violence, precisely in order to fully appreciate the relation between human freedom and the disruption that manifests itself as violence? Or is the opposite the case—that we *cannot* begin with violence, that there is no possible conception of "original violence" that would not also risk a fundamental distortion of the meaning of human freedom?

VIOLENCE AND SELFHOOD

Despite the limitations of Schmitt's theological anthropology—chief among which is the assumption that the meaning of human existence is something *given*, that the sense of its problematicity already takes a definite form—it does nevertheless introduce an important theme: the idea that the problematic character of human existence lies in its capacity to *create distance*. In *The Concept of the Political*, Schmitt does not pursue this theme apart from an approving reference to Plessner's *Macht und menschliche Natur*, but nevertheless the metaphor of distance promises a more nuanced and profound interpretation of the "dangerous" character of human beings, and ultimately of the friend/enemy distinction itself. It also potentially points to a more fundamental development of the analysis of a relation to human possibilities, above all to the question of *selfhood*. To what extent could one claim that the reflections that we have followed from Arendt and Sartre through Jünger and Heidegger to Patočka provide at least some elaboration of the potential of this theme of *distance*?

Perhaps the phenomenological emphasis, already found in Sartre's *Notebooks for an Ethics*, on the distortive character of violence can be cited as an important development of the theme of distance. The potential here is that the analyses we have followed suggest how the distortion of violence could be considered to be not simply a question of the distortion of a situation, or even of a "view of things," but that such a distortion immediately manifests itself in terms of a fundamental problem of the *self*. Violence can be constitutive of meaning, only by leaving in its wake, or at least promising, some cogency of the self, some sense of "who one is," precisely by bringing this question inexorably to a head. The peculiar space of exception that violence carves out of the world intensifies the problem of who we are by testing us in a radical manner, and in this sense promises to offer us a unique perspective on the essential outlines of who we are. If we are drawn to violence, whether violent acts (challenging a sexual competitor to a duel) or situations (volunteering for a dangerous mission), it is because of such a promise; it is the promise that, in stepping beyond the confines of the "normal," we will discover, at the other end of what is allowed and acceptable, the truth of who we are (I am for sure "the one;" I am brave, honorable, engaged, etc.). Such a promise is at the heart of the idea, already emphasized by Clausewitz, that there is a fundamental relation between *who we are* and *how we fight*—the point is not simply that certain cultural traits translate into specific and unique styles of fighting, but that "how we fight" is in part a function of the extent to which fighting provides us with an answer to "who we are."

This promise of violence is, however, fundamentally unstable; it is ultimately the promise of a distortion. Frustrated in a heated argument, failing to stand my ground on the point I wish to defend, I strike out, using my fist to reject a conclusion the occurrence of which I cannot otherwise prevent. I stop it from happening, but only by absorbing it within the fold of a distortion, stopping it cold—which means that the question, have I "stood my ground?," is not settled, even if it seems to be "answered." And moreover this distortion is pernicious—it is impossible to decide whether what violence shows us about ourselves (here, "where I stand") is something that can be taken back to a normal state of things, or whether all we have in our hands is merely an illusion. To prevent arriving at a conclusion through fists is to be left with an uncertain and useless hold on what it is that I wish to defend—for it may be that the distortion of violence merely obscures the fact that I have forever lost the possibility of defending the point I fervently wish to maintain.

This implies that to be drawn to violence is in its essence to begin giving up asking whether violence is at bottom just such an illusion; it is to begin to accept, without another word, the pretense that the fact of violence exculpates us from any need to expend more effort in deciding whether or not we are what we claim to be. Sartre, as we saw, described this distortion as fundamentally *temporal* in character—violence is a kind of collapse

of the question (where I stand, my honor, what I believe, what "needs to be done" to protect my interests, and so on) into a decisive moment in which the subject seeks to extricate itself from the process of mediations that inevitably comes with the determination of selfhood. If the meaning of the self is subject or at play in such a distortion, in violence as a peculiar phenomenological *distortio animi*, then the promise of violence lies in the possibility of summing up all of that which the self represents in a moment of pure breakage, of pure suspension of the need for an ongoing, open-ended self-articulation. I throw my fist, that ends the matter; I am who I am, as my fist has unequivocally shown, and I project this "who I am" as re-entering the flow of time, in the hope that it will be simply accepted as destiny, as pure "given being."

If we call this an "illusion," then the weight such an illusion can have should not be underestimated. Even if we accept the idea that the fact of violence has its origin in a temporal distortion that is in the end "subjective," then one should recognize that to merely emphasize this distortive character does not by itself minimize the potential role that the fact of violence can have in shaping the sense of things. However semantically unstable, potentially illusory, or questionable an act of violence may be, it often provides a real opportunity for coming to a conclusion about oneself that would not otherwise have been possible.

One could here think of Zarathustra's speech, "On the Pale Criminal," from Nietzsche's *Also Sprach Zarathustra*.[1] Here an act of violence, a murder committed by a suffering criminal, effectively delivers a meaning to a life, one that had never had the force, the strength, to provide itself with a fixed, definite value or form. Having murdered, the criminal is finally "someone," precisely the "one who did the deed"—at the hands, to be sure, of a legal authority that condemns, and in doing so completes the act of definition. The pale criminal finally has his center in the event of violence, not *despite* its opacity and unstable character, but *because* of it: thanks to this "answer" ("I am a murderer"), his formally intractable suffering of the task of his own existence can come to a close, he can in effect have the luxury of ceasing to exist, thus being relieved of the burden of his life altogether—after all, "murderers" must be destroyed. In other words, the act of violence enables him to put a distance between himself and the suffering of his own existence, of the question he is for himself; as a condemned man, that self that did not and could not decide "who he was" is now long ago and far away. This distance thus takes the form of a kind of relief: once the event of murder, the act of violence, has taken hold as "given being," the pale criminal is able to suspend the struggle, deaden the urgency of the burden of selfhood. "Distance" is much more than simply putting space between oneself and others; it is determinative of the very relation of human beings to those possibilities that are opened by the very questionability of existence itself.

The power of the distances that we create within lives and between the lives of individuals lies in the potential value of such suspensions in

allowing us to come to answers about ourselves that we would otherwise not be able to achieve, or at least not as immediately. This lies at the root of what makes the illusions of violence so difficult to penetrate, and their hold on us so difficult to relax. Violence simply promises us too much protection from having to continue to pursue the problem we are for ourselves; there is something too clean, too simple, all too *obvious* about the promise of this distortion not to risk the utter failure that violence exposes us to. Again, we can develop from this perspective a criticism of Schmitt's reliance on the theme of combat: the problem cannot be simply that human beings are "dangerous," this is just a *Schreckbild*, one that conceals the deep and perplexing relation between violence and illusion beneath a questionable gesture of seriousness. Philosophically, the problem is how human beings grapple with the question of their possibility; if we are to learn anything from violence in this respect, it can only be after we have avoided reducing human questionability to the empty form of violence and the illusions it generates. If we accept "danger" as constitutive of our being together as a polity, if all our discussions about "who we are" begin with the possibility of violence, we will only end up with violence as an *idée fixe,* a dumb fascination with our capacity to turn things upside down; we will see nothing but violence sitting in the middle of our common life, absorbing all out efforts and leading them to nothing, thereby relieving us from all those necessary confrontations that lead to the cogency of a genuine selfhood.

Still, something of Schmitt's challenge would still remain in the face of such criticism. For if the tension of the political, the seriousness of the question we are, does not have its origin in the acute existential danger that we represent to one another, then the challenge remains to articulate its *genuine sources.*

THE LEGACY OF VIOLENCE

To be sure, violence is not just a possibility, it is also a reality. The horrible odds are that as I write this, as my reader reads these lines, a prisoner is being tortured, a soldier is fighting for his life, someone is being murdered. Violence is a reality also in the form of a concrete legacy. As acts committed, events that have occurred, the legacies of violence are woven into the very fabric of our world. These legacies make themselves felt not simply in the form of narratives and memories, but in a much more subtle and intricate fashion that Sartre attempts to capture with his concept of the practico-inert: the inertia of the legacies of accomplished praxis that partially determine the horizon of signification itself. In the form of this inertia of the event of praxis, violence does not simply leave behind an effect; even once the damage has been repaired, the bombed cities rebuilt, the communities reconstituted and the traces of the lost all but erased, violence

remains as a potent given instability lurking just below a reconstituted façade of normality.

An awareness and struggle with the legacies of violence are in fact indispensable for understanding any human situation; to neglect them, as W.G. Sebald suggests in his lectures *Luftkrieg und Literatur*,[2] is not simply to neglect understanding the reality of the past, but the manner in which the present bears its trace. The legacy of violence is its continuing presence, and with that its influence on the shape of things. Peter Demetz, in his deeply ambivalent book about the history of his home city of Prague, a place haunted by more than one cataclysm of massacre, expulsion, and revolutionary war, begins with the striking image of Kafka walking along a Charles Bridge that has absorbed the echoes of so much human suffering and misery:

> In one of his rare lyrical poems, Franz Kafka speaks of walking across the Charles Bridge and softly resting his hands on the old stones, "*die Hände auf alten Steinen*." I always believed that he tried in that gentle gesture to keep the blood of many brutal battles from oozing out.[3]

This image is a powerful one, since we all understand that to live in a place, and with that to act in a situation, is to put oneself at risk of having to confront the legacies of a concrete violence that time and again asserts itself in the form of a dimension of confusion, distortion, and uncertainty that plagues our capacity to act and reflect in a clear, decisive manner.

Yet we must be careful in understanding the significance of this putative "concreteness" of "actual violence." Violence constructs nothing; nor is anything constructed with violence. The only concrete that counts is the actuality of our common life that opens up possibilities, that allows us to confront a future; there is no such openness in the practico-inert of violence. Sebald, in his discussion of why the extensive bombing of German cities in the Second World War never manifested itself in post-war German literature in a significant way, despite the fact that it had a direct and devastating effect on such a large percentage of the German population, recounts an interesting anecdote that perhaps helps illustrate this difference. Traveling on a train in any given bombed-out city in 1945 Germany, one could, Sebald tells us, always tell the foreign visitor from the native city dweller: the foreigner would always be looking out the window in wonder at the scenes of devastation, while the native would remain focused on the newspaper, or in conversation, or on anything, just to ignore the panorama of ruin just outside the window. Whatever else this anecdote may suggest (an unwillingness to confront the consequences of the politics of the past, an inability to directly assume responsibility for one's own suffering, or just the fear of having to face directly one's own shattered world), there is something basically rational about such an attitude: the ruins, inaugurating the permanent distortion of the legacy of violence (not the first in history),

do not in and of themselves open a future for a life that can only "be" as its own possibilities. At most they are an opaque check on the fluidity of existence, a burden that is either surpassed, or brings everything to a sudden end. For the foreigner, coming from another place, another situation, the ruins are a dreadful curiosity, difficult not to look at; for the native, they are the situation, but only to the extent to which it is finished, over.

Sartre's idea of the practico-inert is important to understand this problem of the legacy of violence, precisely because it allows us to articulate its distinctive *inertial* character. This inertial character of the legacy of violence is in exact inverse proportion to the apparent freedom, or escape that the event of violence seems to promise. It is as if violence sets everything into motion, changes all the rules and holds the future wide open, only to suddenly shut everything down, making movement all that more difficult in the thickening viscosity of its suffocating legacy. Vasily Grossman, a Soviet war correspondent who witnessed many of the major battles of the Eastern Front, including Stalingrad, writes about the passionate belief of many Red Army soldiers that the war would bring about not only victory (and vengeance), but the utter transformation of Soviet society itself—a hope that was quickly and brutally disappointed by the renewed suppression of the Stalinist state.[4] Like so many of the cruel ironies of history, a brief glimpse of light only signaled an immanent darkness. The exception of war, the apparent opportunity to stand outside of the confines of the situation, only served to make homeward bound Ivan more of a target for oppression, as if his very freedom served only to weigh him down with the inertial density of the exception that he once embraced with hope.

The problem of the inertial character of violence also raises some important questions with respect to the theme of mobilization that we pursued above through the reflections on Jünger, Heidegger, and Patočka. One could perhaps make the argument that, despite its remarkable facility to tolerate extreme disorder and chaos without collapsing, the modern world only *seems* to "orchestrate" violence under total technical control. Likewise, the fact of violence, the wars of the twentieth century themselves, perhaps only seem to have consolidated the grip of modernity on the lives of human beings. The legacy of violence may be concrete, but again this is not because violence constructs a reality—even if it is the reality of a nihilistic universe—since all that its concreteness amounts to is a mute inertia that obfuscates our subjective grip on the possibilities of the future, as so much dark mass that constricts our movements. The inertia of violence, according to such a critique, would not amount to a manifestation of the "nothingness" of violence—for the point would not be simply that violence is pursued "for nothing," but rather: that there is no "for" in violence at all, whether it be a "for nothing" or a "for something."

Perhaps the fact of the matter is that modernity merely provides a medium or a space in which violence and its legacies have the opportunity to appear, to be visible in ways and on a scale that is unprecedented in human

history—but for all that falling well short of the metaphysical determination of the contemporary age "as" war. Perhaps such visibility necessarily remains empty; in all attempts to subject violence to the expression of form, whether in the ancient Roman Coliseum or in modern Hong Kong action cinema, it comes into view only thanks to its being dressed up in a style or aestheticized appearance that is ultimately not its own. Violence, one could say, remains at a distance from its expressions; even in its inertial concreteness, it is never as such brought to expression, as if there were a form of expression that would allow it to stand on its own in human affairs. And if, in war, violence is practiced on an ever larger scale, in the form of battles stretching across the globe, from Midway to Tursk to Hiroshima, the fact remains that the "reality" it leaves in its wake is ultimately determined only politically, socially, and economically—perhaps even aesthetically. In the end, perhaps the inertia of violence is just another way to express the stupidity of violence principle without reducing the problematic character of this stupidity to a mere instrumentality. Violence, one could argue, is not even constitutive of its own perversity—even Sade would agree that this after all requires a touch of genius.

This does not settle the matter, since we still need to ask what we are to make of the idea of the legacy of violence as a motivation for resistance, so powerfully expressed by Sartre and Fanon in their analyses of colonialism and anti-colonialism. Any appraisal of these analyses requires that one take seriously the fact that the inertia of violence amounts to a reticence to meaning, which in turn renders its relation to motivation very complex. Violence makes itself felt in the fact that nothing in human life is in full focus; possibilities do not form a pure field of open realization which, in order to follow a certain path, we need only to adopt a certain definite pattern of action. Human freedom long ago (and here again perhaps we must take seriously the thesis of an *originary violence*) lifted off the hinges the world it had otherwise made possible, rending time and life out of joint, and the legacy of this primordial fact—the fact that humans first learned to speak and think in a world shaped originally by violence—can serve only to remind us of the ineradicable potential for another such exercise of the exception. This lies at the heart of the fact that the self is not given, but something that must, in perpetual uncertainty, be achieved. Violence in its essence is to strike against something that has already eluded one's grasp; but for us, the latecomers, the beneficiaries of its legacy, this is not an original experience at all, but an experience in which or for which such a strike, or the lifting of the world off its hinges, has always already taken place. When it comes to violence, we are in effect addicts, struggling with the temptation to once again lift things off their hinges, to break our already broken world, and, like all addicts, we tend to expect that somehow the outcome will this time be different.

The legacy of violence, then, is not simply that somehow the past has a hold on us, that its violence distorts the potential of our engagement with

the question of who we are, that our being in the world is riddled with obscurity. This is true, without question; it is also inscrutable. Perhaps the real legacy of violence is that this fact of the inscrutability of the world empowers us to lift it off its hinges, to reject its law, to meet on the field of battle those who seem to have, unjustifiably, profited from its legacy; or conversely, to hold onto a privilege we cannot justify, but can certainly fight to keep. But this legacy is infinitely complex. On the one hand, what could one hope to possibly gain, even in success? Fanon describes an FLN terrorist greeted in solidarity by a population that, just weeks before, he had indiscriminately bombed—how can that be anything but uncanny, impossible to reconcile? How could one expect to be welcomed back into a world that one has rejected—for the matter is not simply one of changing from one order of things to another, but through violence risking the general character of the world as a mediated whole? But if the world is burdened by the legacies of violence, then how can one *not* reject it—and with that open oneself to the madness of an unjustified right to violence?

VIOLENCE AND RESPONSIBILITY

This problem of the choice of violence, or what it means to be faced with a world indelibly marked by the legacies of violence, raises not only the question of the essence of selfhood but, perhaps more importantly, of responsibility. The reflections above chart their trajectory from an argument that the possibility of violence is constitutive of the political, to an argument that the event of sacrifice, at the heart of the orchestrated violence of the past century, is constitutive of a form of responsible subjectivity—what Patočka called the "solidarity of the shaken." What are we to make of this manner in which the possibility of responsibility is tied so closely to the experience of war?

Patočka's challenge is twofold. First, Patočka attempts, as a consequence of his assessment of the spiritual condition of the age (the critique of techno-civilization), to reaffirm an important aspect of the tradition of political philosophy, namely the idea that humans can live for something more than mere life. "Responsibility" is accordingly not something ultimately reducible to its functional articulation into a set of duties or requirements of membership in a community. This means that the "decision" that lies at the heart of responsibility is not something that can be described as simply the consequence of being informed of one's assigned role; it is not, broadly put, a question of understanding the conditions for fulfilling a specific function or task.

This is only the first part of the challenge. The second part is the argument that, if we are to be able to grasp just what such a decision entails, or what it means to argue that responsibility is not a question of understanding a role, then we can do so only if we realize that the very question of responsibility always emerges in a context that is marked by a *disruption* of life. This is the significance of the dimension of the orgiastic in Patočka's

essay that we considered above: the orgiastic, the demonic, represents the primordial fact that the world of life has always already been disrupted, knocked off balance. The very question of responsibility presupposes this disruption, it depends on it; this means that the "essential" character of responsibility, of the decision for responsibility, cannot be understood as a clean break with the simple naïveté of inauthentic, unbroken life. Responsibility becomes a question only in a world in which life is no longer naïve, but already shaken by the primordial violence of the demonic. Yet at the same time, this disruption of the orgiastic is not *ipso facto* the problematization of life—it is only a distance, an escape or leave that leaves intact the rhythms of natural existence. If anything, the possibility of responsibility is more sensitive to the disruption of violence than the profane; only the responsible in fact sense the full human significance of the demonic. Thus the inherent complexity of the question of responsibility. The idea here is that the problematization of the world, the affirmation of a life that is more than life, of a selfhood that is able to stand alone and apart, must nurture a complex relationship with that "force" of the nonself represented by the demonic, which has already disrupted the rhythms of life, death, pleasure, and suffering that constitute the natural world without thereby putting them into question.

For Patočka, the demonic in this way represents a potentially non-problematic relation to death that, at the same time, is not inauthentic—on the contrary, it functions in the figure of the exception; it accepts from the world precisely *nothing*. Yet nor is the demonic an authentic relationship to death—the possibility of the orgiastic is not a point of crystallization for self-consciousness, but merely a kind of primordial release. More, this turbulence of the demonic leaves its own violence fundamentally underdetermined; it is expressed and embraced in ritual life and ecstatic movements, such as the Children's Crusade or the flagellants of the Middle Ages,[5] but it remains curiously latent, and is prone to immediate dissipation. Fanon describes in *The Wretched of the Earth* what he calls the "permissive circle" of "dances which are more or less ecstatic," that is, pockets of what Patočka would call the demonic, which amount to nothing more than a kind of emotional catharsis, or a violence that vents itself out but leaves everything essentially in place:

> This is why any study of the colonial world should take into consideration the phenomena of the dance and of possession. The native's relaxation takes precisely the form of a muscular orgy in which the most acute aggressivity and the most impelling violence are canalized, transformed, and conjured away. The circle of the dance is a permissive circle; it protects and permits.[6]

Fanon is sharply critical of the dependency that the colonized have on such activities—the permissiveness of the circle, of the orgiastic itself, represents for him an enactment of violence that is empty and useless for raising the

consciousness of the colonized for the struggle against the colonizers.[7] This raises a problem for us: if we want to continue to interpret the demonic as a species of violence, the difficulty will be that it conforms to a pattern that cannot be identified explicitly with our actions—thus the temporal distortion relevant to demonic violence is not the same as that distortion which, following Sartre, one could argue is essential to the structure of what could perhaps be called "practical violence." It may not even make sense to identify the demonic as a "distortion" at all; for the counterpoint of demonic violence, the profane, is equally distortive, if by that we mean something that closes off the generation and articulation of sense. The closure of the profane is the receding of the very possibility of time, in that it levels out all "times" into repetitions of the same, slowly extinguishing the space of free movement as such.

It is important to emphasize in Patočka that the freedom of responsibility cannot be identified with violence, if by "violence" we mean practical violence (the willful distortion of the real). Patočka pursues the idea that the very possibility of responsibility (as a form of historical existence) is dependent upon a sacred turmoil discovered at the heart of the everyday or the profane, a kind of "permissive circle" of another kind than Fanon's, one that offers enough freedom of movement in which the possibility of responsibility can take form. But such a possibility is also under threat, from both the demonic and the profane; more, the spiritual constellation of technological civilization, as Patočka describes it, is (if accurate) a *unique* threat to the possibility of responsibility. For what is distinctive about the contemporary age is that the everyday mobilizes, so to speak, its own demonic turmoil in order to orchestrate its own closure: that which humans have always depended upon in order to embrace the possible horizon of a life for something other than mere life is perverted within a distinctively nihilistic pattern of existence. The hope that Patočka puts in violence is that this submission of the demonic to the everyday is illuminated by a dimension of violence that breaks the logic of the profane, that is, by a transcendence of sacrifice that can never be assimilated into the economics of mobilization and expenditure of energy. The permissive circle of the front line, Patočka would have us believe, has another side; there is another face to sacrifice, made possible by a violence, a shaking of existence, that has the potential to again open us to the possibility of a genuine historical existence.

Again our question from the last chapter: is this not expecting too much from violence? Patočka would have us believe that violence, despite all odds, is constitutive of a "peak" of the self, that it raises us above the very movement of existence, revealing an originary sense of sacrifice that cannot be assimilated and thus maintains itself in disequilibrium with the prevailing order. It is as if the distortion of violence itself ultimately reveals its redemptive power, once again opening for humans the question of how to die. But how compelling is this? Even if we were to accept Patočka's (or

for that matter Jünger's or Heidegger's) diagnosis of the spiritual condition of our age, would it not be perhaps equally compelling to assume just the opposite, that far from being a peak of the self, the extremity of violence represents its utter impossibility?

We would need to be careful in formulating this criticism. Patočka's argument is that the extremity represented by the mass violence of two world wars has a fundamental spiritual significance; if it represents a peak of the self, it is only in the sense that here violence represents an extreme form of the relation of humans to their world, one that potentially reveals the fundamental character of such a relation. The argument is not that individuals who have experienced the front line are somehow more noble, or capable of being a different kind of human being than those of us who have never had such an experience. Rather, Patočka's idea is that the very fact of this experience has had a profound impact on the spiritual conditions in which all of us today encounter the question of who we are; and this impact owes its distinctive character essentially to the deep relation between sacrifice (specifically, death as sacrifice) and violence. The experiences of the front, had by some of us, represent for all of us a constant source of pressure, unease, or slippage in the ability of the everyday to close within the superficiality of the mundane the contents, articulateness, and facticity of any and all experience. Even in a world in which extremes have become diversions, the wars of the twentieth century shake us, and continue to shake us, such that even peace has become something strange and suspicious. Because of this, the potential for the problematization of our existence, essential in Patočka's view for a genuinely philosophical conception of responsibility, retains its origin.

So let us rephrase Patočka's challenge in the following way: we expect *too little* of violence, if we do not appreciate the deep potential for disturbance it brings to our lives, or can bring; more, we expect too little, if we fail to appreciate the possibilities of what it sets into motion. This is not an argument for embracing violence; nor is it, as in Schmitt, the attempt to rest concepts of sovereignty, legitimacy, or authenticity on the back of the existential possibility of killing. But it is a call to take seriously the experience of the extreme as an originary source of meaning; for war according to Patočka has confirmed itself to be, as it was for Heraclitus, the father and king of all.

Still, a doubt must be raised here. To be shaken is one thing, to find a solidarity in shakenness is another. Perhaps we expect all *too much* from violence if we assume that experience can sustain both violence and those filaments of commonality that constitute our common existence; or more: perhaps it is too much to ask of an experience to draw from the disruption of violence what it needs for the accomplishments of that self-relation and self-possession that, in the end, make up an indispensable foundation for responsibility. It may be more *in spite of* than *because of* violence that, in extremity, we are shaken instead of simply dissolved.

THE MEANING OF VIOLENCE

The assumption that we have been working under throughout is that the essence of war is violence, and that violence represents a problem of meaning. This is in line with the fundamental gesture of phenomenological philosophy: if violence is a genuine philosophical problem, then it is a problem that can be approached as a problem of how its sense is articulated in lived experience. Yet the chief aspect of violence appears to be the disruption of sense, even of the suspension of its articulation. More, this disruption is intrinsically ambiguous. On the one hand, violence could be identified as the disruption of objective sense: when I smash the window in a fit of rage at not being able to install it properly, the project itself lies in pieces at my feet. This is something objective: I can demonstrate quite distinctly how these shards of glass fail to provide the means for the fulfillment of my end. Yet on the other hand, this is only an association with the objective, and does not demonstrate the objectivity of violence itself. Violence does not appear in that complex of accrued sedimentations of objective sense in and for itself; I cannot subject violence to a comparable analysis of success or failure (there is no project of violence that lays broken in pieces at my feet). I can only begin to orient an objective perspective to the fact of violence by starting off from the harm done, the scars and pieces of things that describe a suspended set of hopeful success, but which ultimately only fold around the indiscernible core of the happening of violence. The result is that phenomenologically, one could argue, violence, as a specific object of reflection, "has no sense;" it cannot be meaningfully pursued as a theme for consciousness. It can only be pursued indirectly, through the various permutations of the turbulence it causes in the world of sense.

The question of violence then becomes the question of the potential for the horizon of the interconnected meanings of the world to sustain the "irregularities" represented by violence, thereby lending violence a kind of second-order phenomenality. The pursuit of such a question might seem to be rather routine for phenomenological analysis, in particular if we bring to bear the descriptive vocabulary of founded meanings or objectivities. But things are in fact more complicated, as we already caught a glimpse of in our discussion of Sartre. For violence is not simply the disruption of an order of sense. It is not, for example, comparable to the suspension exercised by a doubt or a question. Violence is not a potential source of problematicity merely because it renders an order of sense doubtful, frustrating a positional consciousness that would otherwise be able to secure a "sense of things." On the contrary: the problematicity of violence can confirm as much as negate, if we remain on the level of objective sense; it can also fit seamlessly into an order of meanings, as long as their patterns of coherence are sufficiently flexible. Violence can confirm or affirm an idea or even an entire order of meanings as a symbol, a means for expression (something we have not discussed at all); it can also be domesticated, turned into a

sport or a diversion, locked within a permissive circle that can (as Fanon argues) in turn serve to preserve the status quo against which it otherwise rages. The distinctively problematic character of violence is not objective in character but subjective, and lies in a subjective-temporal distortion: the turbulence violence represents strikes at the very capacity of an experience *to articulate sense as such*—in violence, the very movement of lived experience as an articulation of sense dissolves, even if an order of sense remains, objectively, as possibilities embodied in the situation.

One could say that the question of the meaning of violence is the question of the possibility of experiencing this peculiar dissolution of experiencing, of bearing witness, as it were, not to a breakdown of sense, but to a breakdown of our function as conscious beings to articulate sense, and thus to live in and among beings that are accordingly made manifest in light of this breakdown. Here we can perhaps discern an argument as to why phenomenology, perhaps even transcendental phenomenology, is of particular relevance for a reflection on violence—for a philosophy that seeks to move beyond the subject would be unable to bring into view the subjective dimension native to violence, and would be wholly blind to the essential character of its problematicity.

Nevertheless, this in no way guarantees that phenomenology has the resources to achieve a coherent perspective on the problem of the meaning of violence. At the very least, it brings us to the threshold of the problem of time, as Sartre demonstrates in his *Notebooks for an Ethics*. Accordingly, we could formulate tentatively the question of the structure of such a disruption of experiencing that is nevertheless experienced in the following way: how is it that we experience the dissolution of the potential for time to make being manifest, all the while remaining within the world manifest thanks to time? Or better: how can we experience the dissolution of phenomenological time, without being able to provide for such a dissolution "a time," a place of self-showing, in which it would appear, thus be given a sense?

Such a line of reflection would in important ways follow Patočka's lead; likewise, a negative assessment of this possibility would be one way to meet Patočka's challenge. Patočka's challenge is precisely the insistence that the utter disruption of meaning has a place within the horizon of experience, that experience can bear, as it were, the complete withdrawal of its own ground; we can "be," we can "exist," in the wake of an utter abandonment of sense. To reject this idea would be essentially to reject the idea of the peak of the self, instead insisting that the resistance of violence to its own phenomenalization implies that violence can have no significance at all—we can take nothing from violence in our philosophical task of understanding the being of insightful existence, of what it is to live a life in truth. Either way, the essential point is that violence becomes an acute problem for a philosophy that seeks to realize itself in the form of a reflection on a subjectivity that articulates the sense of things.

VIOLENCE AND EVIL

Taking these five problems together—possibility (freedom), selfhood, legacy, responsibility, and meaning—could one not say that the problems of violence amount essentially to the problems of evil? There are a number of factors that would suggest that this is the case. One is the idea that violence represents a rupture with the coherence of the sense of things, with the conditions for meaningfulness itself. This alone brings to mind the traditional problem of evil—after all, theodicies seek to respond precisely to the apparent senselessness of evil; they seek to explain how it could be, or what it means, that a rational world is plagued by the evils of famine, war, disease, suffering, and vice. Another is the idea that it is freedom that grounds this disruption of sense: the contention that it is the *same freedom* that both opens a world of human possibilities and also shuts it down, or obscures its coherence from within. It is clear that any serious interrogation of either evil or violence must contend with a complex relationship to freedom.[8] And if we accept the thesis that the essence of war is its violence, does this not in itself lead to the conclusion that this violence is also its evil, that what war ultimately puts us face to face with is simply the problem of evil?

Consider a passage from a remarkable book written by Chris Hedges, a war correspondent who describes his experiences of reporting on wars from Central America to the Balkans:

> I learned early on that war forms its own culture. The rush of battle is a potent and often lethal addiction, for war is a drug, one I ingested for many years. It is peddled by mythmakers—historians, war correspondents, filmmakers, novelists, and the state—all of whom endow it with qualities it often does possess: excitement, exoticism, power, chances to rise above our small stations in life, and a bizarre and fantastic universe that has a grotesque and dark beauty. It dominates culture, distorts memory, corrupts language, and infects everything around it, even humor, which becomes preoccupied with the grim perversions of smut and death. Fundamental questions about the meaning, or meaninglessness, of our place on the planet are laid bare when we watch those around us sink to the lowest depths. War exposes the capacity for evil that lurks not far below the surface within all of us. And this is why war is so hard to discuss once it's over.[9]

This passage points to the fact that the reflections above have only skimmed the surface of the problem as to how something like war takes hold in human affairs, how it becomes what Hedges here calls a "culture"—that strange combination of distorted memory, corrupted vocabulary, sick humor, and what Orwell would call the mental slum

of the exuberance of war. The problem of evil belongs here as well; it is indispensable for any attempt to understand what it is that gives the culture of war its force and weight, despite all the misery and disgust that have surrounded it throughout history. Likewise, the question of violence belongs here too, in particular those reflections that we have pursued above in connection with the concreteness of violence, or of its legacy: the culture of war finds fertile soil in places such as the Balkans and former colonial territories that find it difficult to bear the weight of the legacy of past violence.

However, even if we accept that the essence of war is its violence, this idea of a "culture of war" would strongly suggest that violence does not constitute the full reality of war. But perhaps one should also conclude that the problem of violence is not the problem of evil. The question of evil asks in part why we are able to sink so low, or even why the world of violence opened by the culture of war is habitable at all for human beings; more, it asks why it is that the world does not simply disappear after the utter spiritual and moral devastation experienced in the wake of events such as world wars and the industrial liquidation of entire communities.

Given what has been developed above, perhaps we can be more specific about the way that the problems of violence are not the problems of evil. The fact that evil comes into view at all as a phenomenon, not to mention as a problem, implies our ability to ask "why?" I would suggest that violence is not so tightly bound to the question of why. This is why we are so open to being duped by violence in the form of expecting too little— it is often all too easy to be lured into believing that there is nothing to say about violence, that we have it in the clearest of views and with that exercise total control. Evil is not something that we can have in view in a non-problematic way; either we think and see it, and are in the grip of the question "why?" or we do not think and utterly fail to have evil in view. If we think, evil challenges us in ways that violence does not: we can never have evil in view, and be duped into thinking that there is nothing to ask about, no imperative to ask the question of why—even if we do not expect to be able to arrive at an answer. On the contrary: when evil is in view, the question "why?" becomes an overwhelming imperative, a crisis that we either attempt to avoid or face with courage. In the face of those harrowing images of stacks and stacks of stiff corpses flowing out of the death camps, or accounts of that sickening maelstrom of mass rape, destruction, and murder of civilians visited on East Prussia in 1945 by the advancing Red Army, the "why?" is no idle question of curiosity, but the very attempt to maintain composure, perhaps even survive as a rational being. Violence alone does not assault us in this way; given the proper scale, it may shake us, throw the very world off its hinges, risk death, distort the order of meanings—but for all that it remains in a far more indeterminate relation to the question of its "why?" than does evil. And because it is

only evil that is so immediately acknowledged in an inexorable "why?" when violence and evil come together, violence in effect becomes a mere lackey, a mere instrument in a way that evil could never be.

This also implies that violence both attracts us and repulses us in different ways than does evil. As we saw with Sartre, violence attracts us as a kind of escape from those choices that we must make in order to act in accordance with an order of things, natural or human. Violence is for this reason potentially exhilarating, promising a freedom that would have seemed to be excluded. Hedges describes this exhilaration as a narcotic, and we would again be expecting too little from violence if we were to underestimate just how potent this narcotic can be. On the other hand, violence repulses us because of its stupidity and senselessness, which becomes evident once we admit the impossibility of re-inscribing the exception of violence back into the order from which it wrested itself. Violence is a dead end: it either ends in death, or in its reduction to a mere temporary suspension of the inevitable. If our allegiance is with the order of things, or if we see ourselves as partisans of the horizon of possibilities that have been opened for us by what Arendt calls acting together in concert, then either way the end of violence is stupid, if also at times a necessary and justified stupidity. In our more rational moments we simply hold violence in contempt, as we do any narcotic, even those we are addicted to, and seek instead to limit and manage it in accordance with definite principles that define fixed and orderly constraints of use.

Evil, on the other hand, attracts us not as a possible suspension of an order, but as a fundamental perversion of the satisfaction of a self-willed freedom. Evil is not "decomposed" as is violence, but is a fixed drive that purposefully aims for the destruction of any principle of order that would mediate the pure exercise of freedom. Like Plato's tyrant, the essence of evil does not lie in the mere exhilaration of the fulfillment of forbidden desires, but in the perversion of a free subject that finds affirmation of its freedom in the radicalization of a life in pursuit of what is toxic to existence. Likewise, evil repulses us only when we find in ourselves, thanks in part to our capacity to ask "why?" the presence of mind to refuse that perverse affirmation of human freedom in evil, and instead take seriously the task of affirming what is *good*. Whereas we hold violence in contempt, evil we abhor, judge, and condemn.

Even if one is able not only to condemn evil but also to refuse it, problems remain. To call something or someone "evil" implies, if we are not merely throwing words around in a polemical fashion (or engaged in the corrupt vocabulary of war), a profound and dangerous confusion on the part of the speaker—and with that a crisis of understanding. Here again the problems of evil and violence seem to converge. For if in order to keep the problems of violence in view, precisely as problems, we must chart a difficult course between the tendencies of expecting *too much* and *too little*, then it seems that such a course would amount to a similar crisis of the

understanding. Perhaps the question of the *evil of violence* brings this crisis to its final form, namely as a kind of antinomy: to call violence itself evil would perhaps expect too much from violence, while to claim that it is not evil would expect too little.

* * *

What can we conclude from all this? In a way, we seem to be moving towards an affirmation of Clausewitz' basic attitude towards war. We have a fundamental need, both theoretical and practical, to attempt to fix war and its violence in definite conceptual frameworks that allow us to articulate rationally just what war is, and how it is supposed to fit into the order of human affairs. This is not something we can do without. And more, we can be remarkably successful in developing explanations, systems of rules that define precisely what is justified and unjustified, possible and impossible in the pursuit of violence, whether the context be moral, political, technological, social, or spiritual. Nevertheless, Clausewitz would tell us, when we actually come face to face with a situation that has set into motion violence unleashed either by ourselves or chosen by others, then we need to understand that our vocabularies have only a limited bearing on the reality that we must endure in order to pursue a reasonable course. And this is perhaps also why we can affirm that violence is a proper *philosophical* problem—for none of our answers, and there are many more than what we have been able to consider here, eradicates the fundamental problematicity of violence, safely shielding us from becoming its dupes.

Notes

NOTES TO THE INTRODUCTION

1. Simone Weil, "The Iliad, or the Poem of Force," in: Simone Weil, Mary McCarthy and Rachel Bespaloff, *War and the Iliad* [Iliade, ou, le poème de la force.] (New York: NYRB, 2005).

2. Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence* (New York: Collier Books, 1961), p. 60; Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1970), p. 35.

3. See Henri Bergson, *La signification de la guerre* (Paris: Bloud & Gay, 1915). For discussions on the intellectual response to the First World War see Philippe Soulez and Etienne Balibar, *Les Philosophes et la guerre de 14* (Saint-Denis: Presses universitaires de Vincennes, 1988), and Martha Hanna, *The Mobilization of Intellect: French Scholars and Writers during the Great War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).

4. See Max Scheler, *Der Genius des Krieges und der Deutsche Krieg* (Leipzig: Verlag der weissen Bücher, 1917), as well as the 1916 *Krieg und Aufbau* (Max Scheler, *Gesammelte Werke* (Bern: Francke, 1954), vol. 4), which provides a much needed balance to *Genius*, which was written by Scheler during the first months of the war in a state of virtual hysteria.

5. Here one can cite Thomas Hobbes, *Behemoth; Or, the Long Parliament* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1969), a much neglected but illuminating dialogue.

6. See Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001).

7. See Stephen Gaukroger, *Descartes: An Intellectual Biography* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1995). For an interesting counterargument that violence in fact plays a central role in Cartesian philosophy, and with that inaugurates the importance of violence for understanding modern philosophy generally, see Piotr Hoffman, *Doubt, Time, Violence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), and the same, *Violence in Modern Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989). My thanks to Jay Bernstein for bringing Hoffman's work to my attention; many of his theses overlap in a number of ways the line of reflection that is pursued here, though with important differences.

8. See Victor Davis Hanson, *Carnage and Culture: Landmark Battles in the Rise of Western Power* (New York: Doubleday, 2001); also by the same author: *Ripples of Battle: How Wars of the Past Still Determine How We Fight, How We Live, and How We Think* (New York; London: Doubleday, 2003); *The Western Way of War: Infantry Battle in Classical Greece* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); *The Other Greeks: The Family*

     Farm and the Agrarian Roots of Western Civilization (New York: Free Press, 1995); and *Hoplites: The Classical Greek Battle Experience* (London; New York: Routledge, 1991).

  9. Hanson, *Carnage and Culture*, p. 4.

10. Cf. John A. Lynn, *Battle: A History of Combat and Culture* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2003).

11. Hanson himself seems to explicitly invite such an exaggeration: "There is also a cultural crystallization in battle, in which the insidious and more subtle institutions that heretofore were murky and undefined became stark and unforgiving in the finality of organized killing." Hanson, *Carnage and Culture*, p. 9. It may be the case that, when Alexander the Great had virtually the entire population of Thebes slain and the city destroyed, sparing only the temples and the home of Pindar, something of a culture crystallized—but that by no means puts to rest the question of *why*, not to mention the question of *who* such an act made Alexander and his Macedonians.

12. Thucydides 7.77.7, quoted in Moshe Berent, "Anthropology and the Classics: War, Violence, and the Stateless Polis," in: *The Classical Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (2000), 257–289, p. 283. Berent, on 284, goes on to argue: "Thus it could be misleading to suggest that the polis *adopted* mass tactics, but rather that it *was* a form of mass tactics." Still, it is difficult not to see this as an exaggeration; for a more conservative account, see Yvon Garlan, *War in the Ancient World: A Social History* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1975). Also see W. R. Connor, "Early Greek Land Warfare as Symbolic Expression," in: *Past and Present*, no. 119 (May, 1988), 3–29, for an interesting discussion on the interface between ideas of citizenship and the military institution of hoplite warfare.

13. Cf. Plato, Symposium 219e-221b; for an interesting description of Epicurus as a hoplite, see Book X of Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*.

14. Cf. Leon H. Craig, *The War Lover: A Study of Plato's Republic* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994); also Claudia Baracchi, *Of Myth, Life, and War in Plato's Republic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), especially pp. 133–176.

15. Guerrillas were as problematic for the Greeks as they are for us. One example is the culturally indefinite and morally suspicious figure of the guerilla warrior that, in Athens, was institutionalized in the form of the *ephebe*. See Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Le chasseur noir: formes de pensées et formes de société dans le monde grec* (Paris: La Découverte/Maspero, 1983), especially pp. 123–208. Also see the fascinating use of the figure of the *ephebe*—the lone marauder who used guerrilla tactics against the enemy as opposed to the "open" cooperative engagements of the hoplites—in a reading of Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, in: "Sophocles' *Philoctetes* and the Ephebeia," Chapter VII of Jean Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece* [Mythe et tragédie en grèce ancienne.] (New York; Cambridge: Zone Books/MIT Press, 1988).

16. A very Platonic sentiment; cf. Republic 451 a-b.

17. Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations* (New York: Basic Books, 1977); Sydney Dawson Bailey, *Prohibitions and Restraints in War* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972).

18. For a convincing presentation of the argument that the pursuit of increased violence during the course of the First World War was political, thus that the origin of the military stalemate of 1914–1917 was not strictly a military phenomenon, see David Stevenson, *Cataclysm: The First World War as Political Tragedy* (New York: Basic Books, 2004).

19. It is significant in this regard to note that one of the more interesting reflections on torture and war to appear in recent years—Elaine Scarry, *The Body*

in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985)—does not include any extended reflection on pure violence as such. This is not a failure, but points to the fact that, if the goal is to understand the function of *injury* in the practice of power, or the moral situation that the vulnerability of the body or the person represents, then the proper point of departure is the destruction that violence leaves in its wake, and not violence itself.

20. There are of course important exceptions, and were this a more historical study they would be important to address individually. Apart from Scheler's *Der Genius des Krieges*, cited above, one should note Husserl's war lectures from 1917–18 on Fichte ("Fichte's Menschheitsideal," in: Edmund Husserl, Thomas Nenon and Hans Rainer Sepp, *Aufsätze Und Vorträge, 1911–1921*, *Husserliana*, Vol. 25 (Dordrecht; Boston: Nijhoff, 1987), as well as essays by Paul Natorp, a leading Neo-Kantian who was very important for the early phenomenological movement (see especially his *Der Tag des Deutschen, Vier Kriegsaufsätze* (Hagen i. W.: O. Rippel, 1915). For contributions to the literature on these works see Lembeck, "'Deutscher Weltberuf?' Natorps und Schelers Kriegsphilosophie," in: Max-Scheler-Gesellschaft, *Vom Umsturz der Werte in der modernen Gesellschaft* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1997), pp. 220–237; Sebastian Luft, „Germany's Metaphysical War," in: Themenportal erster weltkrieg, 2007, http://www.erster-weltkrieg.clio-online.de/2007/Article=2008; and James Dodd, "Der Schatten des Politischen," in: Giovanni Leghissa and Michael Staudigl, *Lebenswelt und Politik. Perspektiven der Phänomenologie nach Husserl* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007).

21. Not that a proper phenomenology of violence would be without value, on the contrary. For some interesting contributions to this field see Michael Staudigl, "Toward a Phenomenological Theory of Violence. Reflections following Merleau-Ponty and Schutz," in: *Human Studies* 30/3 (2007), 233–253, and "Zerstörter Sinn, entzogene Welt, zerbrochenes Wir. Über Gewalt im Rahmen der 'a-subjektiven Phänomenologie' Jan Patočkas," in: *Phänomenologische Forschungen* 12 (2007), 145–162; Antje Kapust, *Der Krieg und der Ausfall Der Sprache*, (München: Fink, 2004); Bernard Waldenfels, "Aporien der Gewalt," in: Mihran Dabag and others, *Gewalt: Strukturen, Formen, Repräsentationen* (München: Fink, 2000), pp. 9–25.

22. Carl Schmitt, George Schwab, *The Concept of the Political* [Begriff des Politischen.] (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1976).

23. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Notebooks for an Ethics* [Cahiers pour une morale.] (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

24. Martin Heidegger, "Zur Seinsfrage," in: Martin Heidegger and Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, *Wegmarken* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1976); Ernst Jünger, *Über Die Linie* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1950).

25. Jan Patočka, James Dodd and Erazim Kohák, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History* [Kacířské eseje o filozofii dějin.](Chicago; La Salle: Open Court, 1996).

NOTES TO CHAPTER 1

1. Carl von Clausewitz, Michael Eliot Howard and Peter Paret, *On War* [Vom Kriege.] (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); German: Carl von Clausewitz and Werner Hahlweg, *Vom Kriege*, 19th ed. (Bonn, Hannover, Hamburg, München: Dümmler, 1980).

2. See for example Peter Paret, *Clausewitz and the State: The Man, His Theories, and His Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); Panajotis

Kondylis, *Theorie des Krieges. Clausewitz—Marx—Engels—Lenin* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1988); and Herfried Münkler, *Über den Krieg: Stationen der Kriegsgeschichte im Spiegel ihrer theoretischen Reflexion* (Weilerswist: Velbrück Wissenschaft, 2002).

3. Raymond Aron, *Penser la guerre, Clausewitz* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976).

4. See in particular his study on Gustavus Adolphus' campaigns during the Thirty Years' War: "Gustav Adolphs Feldzüge von 1630–1632," in: Carl von Clausewitz, *Hinterlassene Werke über Krieg und Kriegsführung des Generals Carl Von Clausewitz* (Berlin: Dümmler, 1832–1837), vol. 9, pp. 1–106.

5. Consider the first sentence of Chapter One of Clausewitz' *On War*, p. 75: "I propose to consider first the various elements of the subject, next its various parts or sections, and finally the whole in its internal structure. In other words, I shall proceed from the simple to the complex."

6. For an interesting discussion of this issue see Michael Handel, "Clausewitz in the Age of Technology," in: Michael Handel, *Clausewitz and Modern Strategy* (London: F. Cass, 1986).

7. See in particular Chapter Three of Book Eight of *On War*, especially the following passage on p. 593: "We wanted to show that every age had its own kind of war, its own limiting conditions, and its own peculiar preconceptions. Each period, therefore, would have held to its own theory of war, even if the urge had always and universally existed to work things out on scientific principles."

8. On Clausewitz' relation to the Prussian reform movement see Paret, *Clausewitz and the State*, pp. 137–147.

9. Carl von Clausewitz and Werner Hahlweg, *Verstreute kleine Schriften: Festgabe des Militärgeschichtlichen Forschungsamtes zum 200. Geburtstag des Generalmajors Carl Von Clausewitz* (Osnabrück: Biblio-Verlag, 1979), p. 228. Cf. the discussion of this passage in Münkler, *Über den Krieg*, p. 82. The conservatives ultimately prevailed, especially by the 1840's; see Michael Howard, "The Influence of Clausewitz," in: *On War* (Introductory Essay), pp. 27–28; also the illuminating study of Eugène Carrias cited by Howard, *La pensée militaire allemande* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1948). For a modern exploration and defense of the thesis that political transformations are essential to the development of military institutions (and against Engels' thesis that developments are merely technological in character), cf. Hans Delbrück's classic 1908 (3rd edition 1929) *Geschichte der Kriegskunst im Rahmen der politischen Geschichte* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000).

10. The passage occurs at the end of Chapter One, Book One of *On War*, p. 89: "Our task therefore is to develop a theory that maintains a balance between these three tendencies, like an object suspended between three magnets." My thanks to Nicolas de Warren for emphasizing the importance of this passage to me.

11. Ibid.

12. Cf. Ibid., p. 593: "War, untrammeled by any conventional constraints, had broken loose in all its elemental fury. This was due to the peoples' new share in these great affairs of state; and their participation, in turn, resulted partly from the impact that the Revolution had on the internal conditions of every state and partly from the danger that France posed to everyone."

13. Ibid., p. 580.

14. Ibid., p. 605: "Its [war's] grammar, indeed, may be its own, but not its logic." And on p. 606: "Being incomplete and self-contradictory, it [war] cannot follow its own laws, but has to be treated as a part of some other whole; the name of which is policy."

15. Clausewitz, *Verstreute kleine Schriften*, p. 498. Cf. Münkler's discussion of this passage on p. 98 of his *Über den Krieg.*
16. *On War*, pp. 75–80.
17. Ibid., p. 75; *Vom Kriege*, S. 17: "Der Krieg ist also ein Akt der Gewalt, um den Gegner zur Erfüllung unseres Willens zu zwingen."
18. Ibid., pp. 76–77.
19. *Vom Kriege*, p. 21; *On War*, p. 78.
20. Here we can perhaps suggest a reformulation of Münkler's following suggestion (op. cit., p. 90): "What Clausewitz could of course not have imagined was a situation in which policy could lose control over war, in which war would no longer be the instrument of policy, but gains its own independence. It could be that this is precisely the case with the new wars that one observes proliferating since the last two decades of the twentieth century." That is, perhaps the problem is not so much the phenomenon of wars that are "out of political control," as a political phenomenon in which violence has come to define more and more what counts as "real politics"—that is, it is politics, not war that in these instances *sich verselbständigt.*
21. *Verstreute kleine Schriften,* p. 498; cf. Münkler, *Über den Krieg*, p. 98.
22. The ambiguity suggested here is effectively denied in the last sentence of the passage we have been quoting: "But obviously the political principle is lacking here just as little as it is with other wars, it only coincides with the concept of violence and destruction and disappears from view." *Verstreute kleine Schriften*, p. 498.
23. As for example in the following passage: "It can be taken as agreed that the aim of policy is to unify and reconcile all aspects of internal administration as well as of spiritual values, and whatever else the moral philosopher may care to add. Policy, of course, is nothing in itself; it is simply the trustee for all these interests against other states." *On War*, p. 606.
24. "Wenn wir uns die Enstehung des Krieges philosophisch denken, so entsteht der eigentliche Begriff des Krieges nicht mit dem Angriff, weil dieser nicht sowohl den Kampf als die Besitznahme zum absoluten Zweck hat, sondern er ensteht erst mit der Verteidigung, denn diese hat den Kampf zum unmittelbaren Zweck, weil abwehren und kämpfen offenbar eins ist." *Vom Kriege*, p. 644.
25. To be sure, this "philosophical" definition of the beginning of war is not without its problems. For one, it limits the consideration (without justification) to wars over territory, but perhaps more problematically it is connected to a *military* argument that Clausewitz wants to make, to the effect that defense is militarily superior to attack. Both contentions are of course disputable, and it is not my purpose here to defend either; it is sufficient that the instances of defense that Clausewitz has in mind are genuinely illustrative of the ambiguity of war as equally *instrumental* and *existential*. Thanks again to Nicolas de Warren for helping me to understand this unresolved tension in Clausewitz between the military and philosophical aspects of his argument for the superiority of defense over attack.
26. Carl Schmitt, Charles Schwab, *The Concept of the Political* [Begriff des Politischen.] (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1976). Schwab's edition also contains a translation of Leo Strauss' comments that originally appeared as "Anmerkungen zu Carl Schmitt, Der Begriff des Politischen," in: *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* 67/6 (1932). These remarks will play an important role below.
27. *The Concept of the Political*, p. 22.
28. Ibid., p. 27.
29. Ibid., p. 32.

30. Ibid.
31. Ibid., p. 33. It is important to stress that this extremity of killing, and the specificity it assumes in the encounter of fighting collectivities, lies at the heart of the interface between Schmitt's concepts of *sovereignty* and *the political*. See Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* [Politische Theologie.] (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985). One implication of this emphasis on killing is that not every extreme exception is equivalent to the exception of the extreme; a politics that economically or socially excludes specific groups, distorts the legal order for its own ends, or even employs the physical elimination of individuals or groups in order to shape the social world, is not necessarily an instance of either sovereignty or the political.
32. More specifically, as individuals who are by nature equal: "From this equality of ability, ariseth equality of hope in the attaining of our Ends. And therefore if any two men desire the same thing, which neverthelesse they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies; and in the way to their End, (which is principally their owne conservation, and sometimes their delectation only,) endeavour to destroy, or subdue one an other." Thomas Hobbes, C. B. Macpherson, *Leviathan* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 184. The danger of this is intensified by the natural right to everything possessed by individuals: "[. . .] every man has a Right to every thing; even to one anothers body. And therefore, as long as this naturall Right of every man to every thing endureth, there can be no security to any man [. . .]" Ibid., p. 190.
33. *The Concept of the Political*, p. 34.
34. Ibid., p. 35.
35. Strauss, "Comments," in: Ibid., p. 87; the passage is at *Leviathan*, p. 186, and continues: "[. . .] during all the time there is no assurance to the contrary. All other time is PEACE." For Schmitt, the significance of such "assurances to the contrary" is limited; for Hobbes, and we should also say for Clausewitz, they actually lie at the heart of the matter.
36. Strauss, "Comments," in: Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, p. 35.
37. Ibid., p. 37.
38. Ibid., p. 38.
39. Ibid., p. 44.
40. Ibid., p. 46.
41. Ibid., p. 49.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid., p. 57.
44. Ibid., p. 58.
45. Ibid., p. 60; Helmuth Plessner, *Macht und menschliche Natur. Ein Versuch zur Anthropologie der geschichtlichen Weltansicht* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1981).
46. The phrase is from Hobbes, *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury* (London: J. Bohn, 1839), vol. 5, p. 27.
47. *The Concept of the Political*, p. 70.
48. Ibid., p. 82.
49. Ibid., p. 90.
50. Ibid., p. 91.
51. Ibid., p. 97.
52. Ibid., p. 99.
53. Ibid., p. 103.
54. Ibid.
55. The attempt here has been to develop a reading of *The Concept of the Political* in order to frame a problem, not to present even a summary analysis of the

writings of the period to which this text belongs, such as *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, *Political Theology*, *Political Romanticism*, or even *Der Leviathan in der Staatslehre des Thomas Hobbes: Sinn und Fehlschlag eines politischen Symbols* (Köln: Hohenheim Verlag, 1982), which would be critical for a full understanding of Schmitt's relation to Hobbes. For a more detailed discussion of Schmitt's Weimar writings, including his relation to Strauss, see Heinrich Meier, *Carl Schmitt, Leo Strauss und der Begriff des Politischen* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1988), as well as John P. McCormick, "Fear, Technology, and the State: Carl Schmitt, Leo Strauss, and the Revival of Hobbes in Weimar and National Socialist Germany," in: *Political Theory* 22, no. 4 (Nov, 1994). For an astute critique of Schmitt's attack on parlimentarianism, which is an important consequence of Schmitt's conception of the political, see Bill Scheuerman, "Is Parliamentarism in Crisis? A Response to Carl Schmitt," in: *Theory and Society* 24, no. 1 (Feb, 1995).

NOTES TO CHAPTER 2

1. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Schocken Books, 2004), p. 576.
2. Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1970), Part II.
3. Ibid., p. 12.
4. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Notebooks for an Ethics* [Cahiers pour une morale.] (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). This issue has never ceased to exercise Sartre commentators. Cf. in particular Neil Roberts, "Fanon, Sartre, Violence, and Freedom," in: *Sartre Studies International* 10 (2004), and Ronald E. Santoni, *Sartre on Violence: Curiously Ambivalent* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003).
5. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness. An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* [Être et le néant.] (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), p. 628.
6. On the problem of Sartre's ethics see Linda A. Bell, *Sartre's Ethics of Authenticity* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1989), as well as Thomas R. Flynn, *Sartre and Marxist Existentialism: The Test Case of Collective Responsibility* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).
7. *On Violence*, p. 44.
8. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), pp. 175–207.
9. Ibid., pp. 199–207, especially p. 199: "Its [i.e. the space of appearance] peculiarity is that, unlike the spaces which are the work of our hands, it does not survive the actuality of the movement which brought it into being, but disappears not only with the dispersal of men—as in the case of great catastrophes when the body politic of a people is destroyed—but with the disappearance or arrest of the activities themselves."
10. *On Violence*, p. 44.
11. Ibid.
12. Here one thinks of Nietzsche: cf. *On the Genealogy of Morals* (New York: Random House, 1969), First Essay, section 10; especially p. 39: "To be incapable of taking one's enemies, one's accidents, even one's misdeeds seriously for very long—that is the sign of strong, full natures in whom there is an excess of the power to form, to mold, to recuperate and to forget [. . .]."
13. *On Violence*, p. 45.
14. Ibid.

15. Cf. Ibid., pp. 38–49.
16. Ibid., p. 45.
17. Ibid., p. 52.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid., p. 45.
20. Ibid., p. 46.
21. Ibid., p. 56.
22. Ibid., p. 55.
23. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 164.
24. *Notebooks for an Ethics*, pp. 170–171.
25. Ibid., p. 175.
26. Perhaps another, more obvious path would be to turn to Hegel, since it is clear that many of the discussions in Sartre's *Notebooks* (as well as in *Being and Nothingness*) are influenced by the sections on self-consciousness from Hegel's *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (G.W.F. Hegel, *Werke* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1969), vol. 3; see especially §§ 187–189): the insight that forms around the confrontation with the Other, and the meaning of violence that is illuminated in this insight, is that self and Other are instances of an existence that is not merely life, but a being who is open to *risking life*—and thus in turn of being conscious of the essentiality (truth) of life for self-consciousness. We will return to this figure of risk in what follows, where it will be important to bear Hegel in mind.
27. *The Human Condition*, p. 228. Also cf. pp. 130, 139–140.
28. Frantz Fanon, Constance Farrington and Jean-Paul Sartre (Preface), *The Wretched of the Earth* [Damnés de la terre.] (New York: Grove Press, 1968), p. 147: "Violence alone, violence committed by the people, violence organized and educated by its leaders, makes it possible for the masses to understand social truths and gives the key to them. Without that struggle, without that knowledge of the practice of action, there's nothing but a fancy-dress parade and the blare of the trumpets."
29. *The Human Condition*, pp. 120–121.
30. *Notebooks for an Ethics*, p. 171.
31. Ibid., p. 172.
32. Ibid., pp. 172–173. Sartre actually describes the universe of violence as an "intermediate term"—that is, between means-immanent and means-transcendent (p. 172).
33. *Being and Nothingness*, p. 40.
34. Ibid.
35. *Notebooks*, p. 172.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid., p. 173.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid., p. 176.
40. Ibid., p. 175.
41. Ibid., p. 176; cf. the analysis of the "look" in *Being and Nothingness*, pp. 340f.
42. *Notebooks*, p. 175.
43. Cf. *Being and Nothingness*, pp. 112–118.
44. *Notebooks*, p. 178.
45. Ibid.
46. Cf. Ibid., pp. 178–179; 185.
47. Ibid., p. 180.
48. Ibid., p. 185.
49. Despite the otherwise perceptive analyses of Piotr Hoffman's *Doubt, Time, Violence*, not enough attention is paid to this distinction—or at least to the

necessity of raising it as a problem. This is especially the case in the first chapter where Hoffman seeks to associate Descartes' "evil genius" hypothesis with violence, i.e., where the evil genius would represent the exposure of the subject to the violence of another power. One wonders whether ascribing violence to the evil genius misses the point—for the logic of the evil genius hypothesis is that finite subjectivity is possibly subject to a distortion, and with that a risk, of which it would be *completely oblivious*: any "damage" done by the evil genius would never be damage that the subject would experience *as damage*, thus in which the evil genius as violent force would somehow be visible. If such an act of manipulation were to be understood as a "violence," it would have to be a completely invisible violence that the subject would never actually "suffer."

50. Here we can ask whether Giorgio Agamben's extension of Schmitt's conception of the "state of exception" in *Homo sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), suffers from a distortion of the meaning of "decision," a distortion that perhaps also plagues Schmitt's argument in texts such as *Politische Theologie*. Or at least an ambiguity: for if the "state of exception" is founded equally on what we could perhaps call the *state of risk*, of a life at risk because it stands apart from nature, and the decision that does not constitute but at most affirms the meaning of this risk, then it is difficult to see how the decision itself and alone could mark the distinction between the political and the nonpolitical, or life and bare life, which seems to be the direction in which Schmitt/Agamben are moving. Agamben's project is of interest here, since the question of the "sacred" will emerge explcitly when we turn to Patočka in Chapter Four, though in a very different sense from the more legalistic approach of Agamben.

51. Kant's discussion in the *Groundwork* of the lie (Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* [Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten.] (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), pp. 63–67) is relevant here; also, as Elaine Scarry notes (Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, p. 134), Macchiavelli and Schopenhauer further emphasize an essential link between *force* and the lie.

52. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason* [Critique de la raison dialectique.], (London; New York: Verso/New Left Books, 2004), p. 718; cf. pp. 726–737.

53. *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 250.

54. Cf. Ibid., pp. 42f.

55. Carl Schmitt, *Theorie des Partisanen: Zwischenbemerkung zum Begriff des Politischen* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1963), pp. 26–28.

56. On the activities of the OAS from April 1961-February 1962, see Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria, 1954–1962* (New York: NYRB, 2006), Chapter 23: "The Suitcase or the Coffin." The OAS pursued a bombing campaign in France itself, which included attacks on Jean-Paul Sartre and André Malraux.

57. *Theorie des Partisanen*, pp. 65–70.

58. *Wretched of the Earth*, pp. 267–270.

59. Nicolas de Warren, "The Apocalypse of Hope: Political Violence in Sartre and Fanon," in: *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 27, no. 1 (2006), p. 24.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 3

1. *Notebooks for an Ethics*, p. 171.
2. Ibid.

3. The texts we will be considering are (1) Ernst Jünger, "Über die Linie," in: Ernst Jünger, *Werke* (Stuttgart: E. Klett, 1960), vol. 5: Essays I. *Betrachtungen der Zeit*, pp. 247–289. This text was originally published in *Anteile; Martin Heidegger zum 60. Geburtstag* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1950), and takes the form of a letter addressed to Heidegger on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday. (2) Martin Heidegger, "Über >>die Linie<<," originally appearing in 1955 and taking the form of a letter addressed to Jünger on his sixtieth birthday, and responding to Jünger's 1950 essay. This text of Heidegger's appeared in 1956 under the new title *Zur Seinsfrage* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1956), and again in 1976 in *Wegmarken*; the latter edition will be used here. All translations are my own. The reader can consult an English translation, which also reproduces the original German text: Martin Heidegger, *The Question of Being* [Zur Seinsfrage.] (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1958).

4. "Über die Linie," p. 249.

5. Ibid., p. 251.

6. See Delbrück, *Geschichte der Kriegskunst*.

7. "Über die Linie," p. 252.

8. Ibid., p. 253.

9. Ibid., p. 254.

10. Ibid., pp. 254–255.

11. Ibid. p. 255.

12. Ibid., p. 258.

13. Paul Bourget, *Essais de psychologie contemporaine* (Paris: Plon-Nourritt et cie, 1924), pp. 13ff, cited in: Wolfgang Müller-Lauter, *Nietzsche: His Philosophy of Contradictions and the Contradictions of His Philosophy* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), p. 198n7.

14. The idea is of course not new, nor is the aversion to such an attitude. See Socrates' criticism of the trainer Herodicus at Republic 406a-d.

15. "Über die Linie," pp. 262–263.

16. Ibid., p. 264.

17. Pascal, *Pensées* (London; New York: Penguin Books, 1995), section 43, p. 8.

18. "Über die Linie," p. 265.

19. Ibid., p. 267.

20. For a more detailed investigation of Jünger's aesthetic point of view, see Günter Figal, "Ästhetische Individualität. Eröterungen im Hinblick auf Ernst Jünger," in: Rudolf Boehm, *Individuum. Probleme der Individualität in Kunst, Philosophie und Wissenschaft* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1994), pp. 151–171.

21. "Über die Linie," p. 269.

22. Arendt, *On Violence*, p. 3.

23. "Über die Linie," p. 270.

24. Ibid., p. 271.

25. Ibid., p. 289. This is the title Jünger gives to §16.

26. Ibid., p. 280.

27. Ibid., p. 287.

28. Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke* (München; New York: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag; De Gruyter, 1980), vol. 12, p. 350 (Herbst 1887 9 [35] 27): "Nihilism: es fehlt das Ziel; es fehlt die Antwort auf das 'Warum?' was bedeutet Nihilism?—daß die obersten Werthe sich entwerthen."

29. I owe a profound debt for this way of reading Nietzsche to many seminar discussions and personal conversations with Krzysztof Michalski, who has recently published a book on Nietzsche in Polish: *Płomień wieczności. Eseje*

o myslach fryderyka Nietzschego (Krakau: Znak, 2007). However, these formulations should not be taken to be representative of Prof. Michalski's interpretation of Nietzsche, and do not directly reflect the theses of this book (given that I do not read Polish). Also cf. Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* [Nietzsche et la philosophie.] (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), especially pp. 147f.

30. Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 12, p. 350.
31. Ibid., p. 351.
32. Ibid., vol. 5 (*Zur Genealogie der Moral*), p. 412.
33. The passage is from a fragment written by Nietzsche in March-June 1888; here we are using Kaufmann's translation (Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* [Der Wille zur Macht.] (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), p. 253).
34. Müller-Lauter, *Nietzsche*, pp. 47–48.
35. "Zur Seinsfrage," p. 386.
36. Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1961), vol. 2, p. 53 (English: Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche* [Nietzsche.] (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979), vol. 4, p. 21).
37. Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1975), vol. 67, pp. 198–199.
38. See Heidegger, "Die Frage nach der Technik," in Martin Heidegger, *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1967); "The Question Concerning Technology," in: Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977).
39. Cf. Heidegger, "Die Zeit des Weltbildes," in: Martin Heidegger, *Holzwege* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1963); Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture," in: Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays* (New York: Garland Pub, 1977); and Jünger, *Der Arbeiter: Herrschaft und Gestalt* (Ernst Jünger, *Sämtliche Werke* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1978), vol. 8), and *Über den Schmerz* (ibid., vol. 7).
40. "Zur Seinsfrage," p. 390.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid., p. 393.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid., p. 395. (Heidegger is here quoting Jünger, *Der Arbeiter*, p. 148.)
46. Ibid., p. 392; cf. p. 397.
47. Ibid., p. 398.
48. *Der Arbeiter*, p. 192, quoted in ibid., p. 398.
49. Ibid., p. 150.
50. "Zur Seinsfrage," p. 401.
51. *Der Arbeiter*, p. 296.
52. "Zur Seinsfrage," p. 407.
53. Ibid.
54. Ibid., p. 407.
55. Ibid., p. 411.
56. Ibid.: "Die kreuzweise Durchstreichung wehrt zunächst nur ab, nämlich die fast unausrottbare Gewöhnung, >>das Sein<< wie ein für sich stehendes und dann auf den Menschen erst bisweilen zukommendes Gegenüber vorzustellen."
57. Ibid., p. 412.
58. Ibid., p. 414.
59. Cf. Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, in: *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 65 (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1989), where these reflections are pursued under the titles of "the other beginning" (*der andere Anfang*) and *Anklang*.

60. "Zur Seinsfrage," p. 416.
61. But cf. Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 53, p. 94.
62. "Zur Seingsfrage," p. 394.
63. To be sure, there are other places in Heidegger's corpus, in particular in a number of lectures and manuscripts from the 1930's, where he engages more directly the themes of violence and war. We could have taken up above all Heidegger's reflections on the concepts of *polemos* and *polis* in his lecture courses on Hölderlin, Parmenides, and Heraclitus to frame a discussion on violence (see Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe*, vols. 53–55). This, however important it may be to understand better Heidegger's position on these matters, would take us too far afield. We have sought instead to focus the discussion on the problem of nihilism, in order to set the stage for our discussion of Patočka's *Heretical Essays*; more, the exchange with Jünger is arguably Heidegger's most interesting and philosophically sound analysis of nihilism. Nevertheless, Heidegger's lectures on the *polis*, marked especially by his emphasis on the Heraclitean theme of *polemos*, have their echoes in Patočka's essay, thus it is important to keep this aspect of Heidegger's thought in mind. On these issues see Charles Gregory Fried, *Heidegger's Polemos. From Being to Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), a rather polemical treatment itself, but a clear and cogent reading of the texts in question, and Miguel de Beistegui, *Heidegger & the Political: Dystopias* (London; New York: Routledge, 1998), especially the excellent discussion at pp. 116f.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 4

1. An earlier version of the core of this chapter was presented in Prague at the conference *Jan Patočka (1907–1977)* in April of 2007. My thanks to the organizers and participants for their thoughtful questions and comments.
2. The past number of years have witnessed a growing interest in the work of Jan Patočka. For a general introduction, see Erazim Kohák, *Jan Patočka: Philosophy and Selected Writings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989). This volume includes a valuable introduction by Kohák, as well as Patočka's important essay "Negative Platonism." For an interesting treatment of a number of themes that we will be pursuing here, see Peter Trawny, "Die Moderne als Weltkrieg: Der Krieg bei Heidegger und Patočka," and Marc Crepon, "La guerre continue: Note sur le sens du monde et la pensée de la mort," both in: Cristian Ciocan and Ivan Chvatik, *Jan Patočka and the European Heritage. Studia Phaenomenologica*, vol. 7 (Bucharest: Romanian Society for Phenomenology and Humanitas, 2007); also: Ludger Hagedorn, "Von einer 'Philosophie der Amplitude' zur 'Solidarität der Erschütterten'," in: Jan Patočka, *Texte, Dokumente, Bibliographie*, vol. 2 (Freiburg; Prag: Alber; Oikoumenē, 1999).
3. Jan Patočka, Erazim Kohák and James Dodd, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History* [Kacířské eseje o filozofii dějin.] (Chicago, Illinois: Open Court, 1996), pp. 119–137. Cf. Jan Patočka, *Kacířské eseje o filozofii dějin*, Vyd. 1 ed. (Praha: Academia, 1990).
4. *Heretical Essays*, pp. 98–99.
5. Ibid., p. 118.
6. Ibid., pp. 98–100.
7. Ibid., pp. 97–98.
8. Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Sein Und Zeit* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2001), §§54–66.

9. For some interesting contributions on the topic of Patočka's relation to Heidegger, see Johann Arnason, "Heidegger, Patočka und die Hermeneutik der Moderne," in*: Dietrich Papenfuss and Otto Pöggeler, *Zur philosophischen Aktualität Heideggers* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1990); Tomasz Banaszak, "Historie und Ontologie in den Schriften von Heidegger und Patočka," in: Norbert Leśniewski and Ewa Nowak-Juchacz, *Die Zeit Heideggers* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2002); and Françoise Dastur, "Patočka et Heidegger. La phénoménologie et la question de l'homme," in *Les cahiers de philosophie* (1990/1991).

10. However, for a different assessment see Philippe Capelle, *Philosophie et théologie dans la pensée de Martin Heidegger* (Paris: Cerf, 2001).

11. *Sein und Zeit*, §§1–8.

12. *Heretical Essays*, pp. 82–83.

13. See Jan Patočka, *Plato and Europe* [Platón a Evropa.] (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 8–14.

14. It is here that there opens an interesting possibilty for a dialogue between Patočka and Walter Benjamin, in particular with respect to the distinction Benjamin draws in his 1920/21 *Critique of Violence* between a preservative violence, on which the maintanence of law depends, and a mythic, or divine, instituting violence. See Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," in: Walter Benjamin, Marcus Bullock and Michael Jennings, *Selected Writings* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1996), vol 1. Also see Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority'," in: David Carlson, Drucilla Cornell and Michel Rosenfeld, *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

15. "Thus the dimension of the sacred and the profane is distinct from that of authenticity-responsibility and escape, it cannot be simply overpowered, it has to be grafted on to responsible life." *Heretical Essays*, p. 99.

16. Ibid., p. 101.

17. Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death* [Donner la mort.] (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

18. *Heretical Essays*, p. 103.

19. Ibid., pp. 104–105; cf. *Plato and Europe*, pp. 27f.

20. Ibid., pp. 107–111.

21. See Republic 614b-620e.

22. *Heretical Essays*, pp. 107–108.

23. Ibid., p. 113.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid., p. 114.

27. Ibid., p. 120.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid., p. 121.

30. Ibid., p. 124.

31. Ibid., p. 127.

32. Ibid., p. 129.

33. "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." Ibid.

34. Ibid.

35. Cf. Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, pp. 66–81, where Derrida pursues an interpretation of Kierkegaard's reading of the sacrifice of Isaac. For a discussion of sacrifice in Derrida and Patočka, see Hent de Vries, *Philosophy and the Turn to Religion* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), pp. 166–171.

36. *Heretical Essays*, p. 130.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid., p. 134.
39. Cf. Republic 372e–374d.
40. *Plato and Europe*, 223, p. 118.
41. *Heretical Essays*, p. 134. Cf. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Écrits du temps de la Guerre: 1916–1919* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1976).
42. Apart from *Plato and Europe*, compare the early essay "Titanism" (1936), in: Erazim Kohák, *Jan Patočka: Philosophy and Selected Writings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 139–143, and also in the same volume: "Masaryk's and Husserl's Conception of the Spiritual Crisis of European Humanity (1936), pp. 145–156; "The Dangers of Technicization in Science according to E. Husserl and the Essence of Technology as Danger according to M. Heidegger" (1973, appeared as samizdat 1979), pp. 327–339; and "Negative Platonism: Reflections concerning the Rise, the Scope, and the Demise of Metaphysics—and Whether Philosophy Can Survive It" (1952).
43. *Heretical Essays*, p. 131.

NOTES TO THE CONCLUSION

1. Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 4; cf. James Dodd, "A Question of Inwardness: Zarathustra's Speech 'On the Pale Criminal'," in: *New Nietzsche Studies* 6/7, no. 1/2 (2006/2007).
2. W. G. Sebald, *Luftkrieg und Literatur: mit einem Essay zu Alfred Andersch* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 2001). These 1997 lectures have also been published in English, with supplementary essays, as: *On the Natural History of Destruction* (New York: Random House, 2003).
3. Peter Demetz, *Prague in Black and Gold: Scenes from the Life of a European City* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1997), p. xi.
4. Anthony Beevor, in the Introduction to his volume of Grossman's correspondence (Vasily Semenovich Grossman, Antony Beevor and Luba Vinogradova, *A Writer at War: Vasily Grossman with the Red Army, 1941–1945* (London: Harvill Press, 2005), p. xv), cites the following passage from Grossman's novel *Life and Fate*: "Ever since he had arrived in Stalingrad, Krymov had had a strange feeling. Sometimes it was as though he were in a kingdom where the Party no longer existed; sometimes he felt he was breathing the air of the first days of the Revolution."
5. See Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium. Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970).
6. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 57.
7. Cf. de Warren, "The Apocalypse of Hope: Political Violence in Sartre and Fanon," p. 48.
8. See Richard J. Bernstein, *Radical Evil: A Philosophical Interrogation* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), especially Part I ("Evil, Will, and Freedom") and the discussion of Levinas on pp. 174f ("The phenomenology of evil"). Cf. Susan Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).
9. Chris Hedges, *War is a Force that Gives Us Meaning* (New York: Public Affairs, 2002), p. 3.

Bibliography

Anteile; Martin Heidegger zum 60. Geburtstag. Frankfurt am Main: Kloster-
   mann, 1950.

Agamben, Giorgio and Daniel Heller-Roazen. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and
   Bare Life.* Meridian. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.

Arendt, Hannah. *The Origins of Totalitarianism.* New York: Schocken Books,
   2004.

———. *On Violence.* New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1970.

———. *The Human Condition.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958.

Aron, Raymond. *Penser la guerre, Clausewitz.* Bibliothèque des sciences humaines.
   Paris: Gallimard, 1976.

Bailey, Sydney. *Prohibitions and Restraints in War.* London: Oxford University
   Press for the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1972.

Baracchi, Claudia. *Of Myth, Life, and War in Plato's Republic.* Bloomington: Indi-
   ana University Press, 2002.

de Beistegui, Miguel. *Heidegger & the Political: Dystopias.* London; New York:
   Routledge, 1998.

Bell, Linda. *Sartre's Ethics of Authenticity.* Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama
   Press, 1989.

Benjamin, Walter, Marcus Paul Bullock, and Michael William Jennings. *Walter
   Benjamin: Selected Writings.* Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1996.

Berent, Moshe. "Anthropology and the Classics: War, Violence, and the Stateless
   Polis." *The Classical Quarterly* 50/1 (2000): 257–289.

Bergson, Henri. *La signification de la guerre.* Paris: Bloud & Gay, 1915.

Bernstein, Richard J. *Radical Evil: A Philosophical Interrogation.* Cambridge: Pol-
   ity Press, 2002.

Boehm, Rudolf. *Individuum. Probleme der Individualität in Kunst, Philosophie
   und Wissenschaft.* Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1994.

Bourget, Paul. *Essais de psychologie contemporaine.* Paris: Plon-Nourritt, 1924.

Capelle, Philippe. *Philosophie et théologie dans la pensée de Martin Heidegger.*
   Paris: Cerf, 2001.

Carlson, David, Drucilla Cornell, and Michel Rosenfeld. *Deconstruction and the
   Possibility of Justice.* New York: Routledge, 1992.

Carrias, Eugène. *La pensée militaire allemande.* Paris: Presses universitaires de
   France, 1948.

Ciocan, Cristian and Ivan Chvatik. *Jan Patočka and the European Heritage. Stu-
   dia Phaenomenologica VII.* Bucharest: Romanian Society for Phenomenology
   and Humanitas, 2007.

von Clausewitz, Carl, Michael Howard, and Peter Paret. *On War* [Vom Kriege.]
   Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984.

———. *Hinterlassene Werke über Krieg und Kriegsführung des Generals Carl von Clausewitz*. Berlin: Dümmler, 1832–1837.

———. *Verstreute kleine Schriften: Festgabe des Militärgeschichtlichen Forschungsamtes zum 200. Geburtstag des Generalmajors Carl von Clausewitz*. Bibliotheca Rerum Militarium. Vol. 45. Osnabrück: Biblio-Verlag, 1979.

———. and Werner Hahlweg. *Vom Kriege*. Bonn; Hannover; Hamburg; München: Dümmler, 1980.

Cohn, Norman. *The Pursuit of the Millennium. Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1970.

Connor, W. R. "Early Greek Land Warfare as Symbolic Expression." *Past and Present* no. 119 (May, 1988): 3–29.

Craig, Leon H. *The War Lover: A Study of Plato's Republic*. Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1994.

Dabag, Mihran, Bernhard Waldenfels, and Antje Kapust. *Gewalt: Strukturen, Formen, Repräsentationen*. München: Fink, 2000.

Dastur, Françoise. "Patočka et Heidegger. La phénoménologie et la question de l'homme." *Les cahiers de philosophie* (1990/1991).

Delbrück, Hans. *Geschichte der Kriegskunst im Rahmen der politischen Geschichte*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. [Nietzsche et la philosophie.] New York: Columbia University Press, 1983.

Demetz, Peter. *Prague in Black and Gold: Scenes from the Life of a European City*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1997.

Derrida, Jacques. *The Gift of Death*. [Donner la mort.] Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

Diogenes Laertius and Robert Drew Hicks. *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*. Loeb Classical Library. Vol. 184–185. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972.

Dodd, James. "A Question of Inwardness: Zarathustra's Speech 'On the Pale Criminal'." *New Nietzsche Studies* 6/7; 1/2 (2006/2007): 53–79.

Fanon, Frantz, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Constance Farrington. *The Wretched of the Earth*. [Damnés de la terre.] New York: Grove Press, 1968.

Flynn, Thomas. *Sartre and Marxist Existentialism: The Test Case of Collective Responsibility*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.

Fried, Charles Gregory. *Heidegger's Polemos. From Being to Politics*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000.

Garlan, Yvon. *War in the Ancient World: A Social History*. London: Chatto & Windus: 1975.

Gaukroger, Stephen. *Descartes: An Intellectual Biography*. Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1995.

Grossman, Vasily Semenovich, Antony Beevor, and Luba Vinogradova. *A Writer at War: Vasily Grossman with the Red Army, 1941–1945*. London: Harvill Press, 2005.

Handel, Michael. *Clausewitz and Modern Strategy*. London; Totowa: F. Cass, 1986.

Hanna, Martha. *The Mobilization of Intellect: French Scholars and Writers during the Great War*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996.

Hanson, Victor Davis. *Carnage and Culture: Landmark Battles in the Rise of Western Power*. New York: Doubleday, 2001.

———. *Hoplites: The Classical Greek Battle Experience*. London; New York: Routledge, 1991.

———. *The Other Greeks: The Family Farm and the Agrarian Roots of Western Civilization*. New York: Free Press, 1995.

———. *Ripples of Battle: How Wars of the Past Still Determine How We Fight, How We Live, and How We Think*. New York; London: Doubleday, 2003.

———. *The Western Way of War: Infantry Battle in Classical Greece*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.

Hedges, Chris. *War is a Force that Gives Us Meaning*. New York: Public Affairs, 2002.

Hegel, G.W.F., Eva Moldenhauer, and Karl Michel. *Werke*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1969.

Heidegger, Martin. and Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann. *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*. Gesamtausgabe. Vol. 65. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1989.

———. *Gesamtausgabe*. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1975-.

———. *Holzwege*. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1963.

———. *Nietzsche*. Pfüllingen: Neske, 1961.

———, and David Farrell Krell. *Nietzsche* [Nietzsche.] San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979.

———, William Kluback, and Jean Wilde. *The Question of Being* [Zur Seinsfrage.]. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1958.

———, and William Lovitt. *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays*. [Die Frage nach der Technik.] New York: Harper & Row, 1977b.

———, and Thomas Rentsch. *Sein und Zeit*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2001.

———. *Zur Seinsfrage*. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1956.

———. *Vorträge und Aufsätze*. Pfüllingen: Neske, 1967.

———. *Wegmarken*. Gesamtausgabe. Vol. 9. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1976.

Hobbes, Thomas, and C. B. Macpherson. *Leviathan*. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968.

———, and William Molesworth. *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury*. London: J. Bohn, 1839.

———, and Ferdinand Tönnies. *Behemoth; Or, the Long Parliament*. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1969.

Hoffman, Piotr. *Violence in Modern Philosophy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989.

———. *Doubt, Time, Violence*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.

Horne, Alistair. *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria, 1954–1962*. New York: New York Review Books, 2006.

Husserl, Edmund, Thomas Nenon, and Hans Rainer Sepp. *Aufsätze Und Vorträge, 1911–1921*. Husserliana. Vol. 25. Dordrecht: Nijhoff, 1987.

Jünger, Ernst. *Sämtliche Werke*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1978.

———. *Über die Linie*. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1950.

Kant, Immanuel, and James W. Ellington. *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* [Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten.] Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993.

Kapust, Antje. *Der Krieg und der Ausfall der Sprache*. München: Fink, 2004.

Kondylis, Panajotis. *Theorie des Krieges. Clausewitz—Marx—Engels—Lenin*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1988.

Leghissa, Giovanni, and Michael Staudigl. *Lebenswelt und Politik. Perspektiven der Phänomenologie nach Husserl*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007.

Leśniewski, Norbert, and Ewa Nowak-Juchacz. *Die Zeit Heideggers*. Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2002.

Luft, Sebastian. "Germany's Metaphysical War. Reflections on War by Two Representatives of German Philosophy: Max Scheler and Paul Natorp." Themenportal Erster Weltkrieg 2007 [http://www.erster-weltkrieg.clio-online.de/2007/Article=2008].

Lynn, John. *Battle: A History of Combat and Culture*. Boulder: Westview Press, 2003.

McCormick, John P. "Fear, Technology, and the State: Carl Schmitt, Leo Strauss, and the Revival of Hobbes in Weimar and National Socialist Germany." *Political Theory* 22/4 (November 1994): 619–652.

Meier, Heinrich. *Carl Schmitt, Leo Strauss und der Begriff des Politischen: Zu einem Dialog unter Abwesenden.* Stuttgart: Metzler, 1988.

Menand, Louis. *The Metaphysical Club.* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001.

Michalski, Krzysztof. *Płomień Wieczności. Eseje o Myslach Fryderyka Nietzschego.* Krakau: Znak, 2007.

Müller-Lauter, Wolfgang. *Nietzsche: His Philosophy of Contradictions and the Contradictions of His Philosophy.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999.

Münkler, Herfried. *Über den Krieg: Stationen der Kriegsgeschichte im Spiegel ihrer theoretischen Reflexion.* Weilerswist: Velbrück Wissenschaft, 2002.

Natorp, Paul. *Der Tag des Deutschen, Vier Kriegsaufsätze.* Hagen i. W.: O. Rippel, 1915.

Neiman, Susan. *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002.

Nietzsche, Friedrich and Walter Kaufmann. *On the Genealogy of Morals.* [Zur Genealogie der Moral.] New York: Random House, 1969.

———,Giorgio Colli, and Mazzino Montinari. *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden.* München; New York: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag; de Gruyter, 1980.

———, Walter Kaufmann, R. J. Hollingdale. *The Will to Power.* [Der Wille zur Macht.] New York: Vintage Books, 1968.

Papenfuss, Dietrich and Otto Pöggeler. *Zur philosophischen Aktualität Heideggers.* Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1990.

Paret, Peter. *Clausewitz and the State: The Man, His Theories, and His Times.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.

Pascal, Blaise, and A. J. Krailsheimer. *Pensées.* [Pensées.] London; New York: Penguin Books, 1995.

Patočka, Jan, Erazim Kohák, and James Dodd. *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History.* [Kacířské eseje o filozofii dějin.] Chicago; La Salle: Open Court, 1996.

———, and Petr Lom. *Plato and Europe.* [Platón a Evropa.] Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002.

———, and Erazim Kohák. *Jan Patočka: Philosophy and Selected Writings.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989.

———, Ludger Hagedorn, Hans Rainer Sepp, Jiří Němec, and David Souček. *Texte, Dokumente, Bibliographie.* Freiburg; Prague: Alber; Oikoumenē, 1999.

Plessner, Helmuth. *Macht und Menschliche Natur. Ein Versuch zur Anthropologie der geschichtlichen Weltansicht.* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1981.

Pfafferott, Gerhard. *Vom Umsturz der Werte in der modernen Gesellschaft.* Bonn: Bouvier, 1997.

Roberts, Neil. "Fanon, Sartre, Violence, and Freedom." *Sartre Studies International* 10 (2004).

Santoni, Ronald. *Sartre on Violence: Curiously Ambivalent.* University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003.

Sartre, Jean-Paul, and David Pellauer. *Notebooks for an Ethics.* [Cahiers pour une morale.] Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

———, and Hazel Barnes. *Being and Nothingness; An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology.* [Étre et le néant.] New York: Philosophical Library, 1956.

———, Alan Sheridan-Smith, and Jonathan Rée. *Critique of Dialectical Reason.* [Critique de la raison dialectique. Tome I.] Vol. One. London; New York: Verso/New Left Books, 2004.

Scarry, Elaine. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.

Scheler, Max. *Der Genius des Krieges und der deutsche Krieg*. Leipzig: Verlag der Weissen Bücher, 1917.

———, and Maria Scheler. *Gesammelte Werke*. Bern: Francke, 1954.

Scheuerman, Bill. "Is Parliamentarism in Crisis? A Response to Carl Schmitt." *Theory and Society* 24/1 (February 1995): 135–158.

Schmitt, Carl, and Ellen Kennedy. *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*. [Die geistesgeschichtliche Lage des heutigen Parlamentarismus.] Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988.

———, and George Schwab. *The Concept of the Political*. [Begriff des Politischen.] New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1976.

———, and Günter Maschke. *Der Leviathan in der Staatslehre des Thomas Hobbes: Sinn und Fehlschlag eines politischen Symbols*. Köln: Hohenheim Verlag, 1982.

———, and Guy Oakes. *Political Romanticism*. [Politische Romantik.] Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986.

———, and George Schwab. *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*. [Politische Theologie.]. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985.

———. *Theorie des Partisanen: Zwischenbemerkung zum Begriff des Politischen*. Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1963.

Sebald, Winfried Georg. *On the Natural History of Destruction*. [Luftkrieg und Literatur.] New York: Random House, 2003.

Sorel, Georges, T.E. Hulme, and J. Roth. *Reflections on Violence*. [Réflexions sur la violence.] New York: Collier Books, 1961.

Soulez, Philippe, and Etienne Balibar. *Les philosophes et la guerre de 14*. Saint-Denis: Presses universitaires de Vincennes, 1988.

Staudigl, Michael. "Toward a Phenomenological Theory of Violence. Reflections following Merleau-Ponty and Schutz." *Human Studies* 30/3 (2007): 233–253.

———. "Zerstörter Sinn, entzogene Welt, zerbrochenes Wir. Über Gewalt im Rahmen der 'a-subjektiven Phänomenologie' Jan Patočkas." *Phänomenologische Forschungen* 12 (2007): 145–162.

Stevenson, David. *Cataclysm: The First World War as Political Tragedy*. New York: Basic Books, 2004.

Teilhard de Chardin, Pierre. *Écrits du temps de la guerre: 1916–1919*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1976.

Vernant, Jean Pierre, and Pierre Vidal-Naquet. *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*. [Mythe et tragédie en Grèce ancienne.] New York; Cambridge: Zone Books; MIT Press, 1988.

Vidal-Naquet, Pierre. *Le chasseur noir: formes de pensées et formes de société dans le monde grec*. Paris: La Découverte; Maspero, 1983.

de Vries, Hent. *Philosophy and the Turn to Religion*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999.

Walzer, Michael. *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*. New York: Basic Books, 1977.

de Warren, Nicolas. "The Apocalypse of Hope: Political Violence in Sartre and Fanon." *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 27/1 (2006): 25–59.

Weil, Simone, Mary McCarthy, and Rachel Bespaloff. *War and the Iliad*. [Iliade, ou le poème de la force.] New York: New York Review Books, 2005.

Index