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1

Power and *Polemos*

One of the most significant statements concerning the nature of war is to be found in Heraclitus. Fragment 53 reads as follows: 'War [*polemos*] is father of all, and king of all. He renders some gods, others men; he makes some slaves, others free' (Heraclitus, 1987: 37).¹ On face value this fragment proposes that war is the determining principle in the flux of the cosmos; that life is in essence a conflictual struggle. But while history certainly testifies to the centrality of conflict in human affairs, and this chapter assumes that conflict is a central aspect of our being-in-the-world, this fragment will be used to argue against the simple equation that life is a violent struggle between competing forces. For Heraclitus, *polemos* is father and king; it is generative (father) and governing or ruling (king); it is productive and it is preserving; it brings things into being and maintains them in their being. Taking such a reading, *polemos* is not simply a violent struggle of becoming between already existing beings, it is the very possibility of one being standing against, alongside and even *with* another. It is the very exposition of beings. It is world-creation, and it is in this sense that this fragment will be important for us.

In a lecture course entitled *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, Martin Heidegger interprets the fragment in the following way:

The *polemos* named here is a conflict that prevailed prior to everything divine and human, not a war in the human sense. This conflict, as Heraclitus thought it, first caused the realm of being to separate into opposites; it first gave rise to position and order and rank. In such separation cleavages, intervals, distances, and joints opened. In the conflict a world comes into being. (Conflict does not split, much less destroy unity, it is a binding-together, *logos*. *Polemos* and *logos* are the same). (1959: 62)

In a fascinating study of the importance of polemos in Heidegger's philosophy, Gregory Fried (2000) shows how this reading describes two fundamental aspects of our involvement with the world. First, it reveals the manner in which beings become present, how they come to be and how they pass away, and secondly, and most important for our concerns here, polemos also describes the way in which beings are constantly an issue for us, and nowhere is this more in evidence than in the questions we have concerning our *own* being. Heidegger opens the lecture course by stating that the question of why there are beings rather than nothing is the first of all philosophical questions. Each one of us is touched by this question at some point, he contends, especially at times of despair when 'all meaning becomes obscured' (1959: 1). Our capacity to be touched by the question means that the question can best be answered by interrogating the nature of our own being-in-the-world. Thus in *Being and Time* Heidegger argues that 'to work out the question of being adequately, we must make an entity transparent in its own Being. [...] This entity which each of us is himself and which includes inquiring as one of the possibilities of its Being, we shall denote by the term "*Dasein*"' (1962: 27). The enquiry into why Being rather than nothing starts with an enquiry into Dasein, that is, our being-there.

The essence of Dasein lies in its existence, its characteristics are not properties but are 'possible ways for it to be' (67). And it is in this important understanding of human being as the creation of possible worlds that the concept of polemos will be important for understanding the nature of war. What is central for human being is that as Dasein it cannot be indifferent to its being, rather its being is an issue for it. It is always *mine* to be in one way or another, that is, Dasein always makes decisions about its own possibility, 'it *can*, in its very Being, "choose" itself and win itself' (68). In this sense Dasein's existence can be said to be hermeneutic; it is a matter of each Dasein interpreting and (possibly) creating the world anew. Human being as Dasein is 'thrown' into a world, into a history and a language, into a world that is never simply given but always given *as* something. Once thrown into the world Dasein projects its own possibilities and potentialities through an interpretation of itself and the other beings with which it is involved. This involvement is an *interpretive confrontation* through which a world becomes meaningful. As Fried notes: 'For Heidegger, the task of this polemos is never merely an academic controversy, the topic of entertainment, or even victory in war, but rather that which is given to us in our historicity as *what matters to us* [...]. This Being-at-issue of the polemos

is ultimately what underlies Heidegger's ontological politics' (2000: 31–2). To understand Heidegger's treatment of polemos, and to develop a conception of interpretive confrontation relevant to our context, it is important to work through Heidegger's engagement with Nietzsche. This will provide a means for understanding the persistence of war as well as a possible critique.²

Power

Nietzsche's philosophy can only be understood as a response to what he saw as the nihilism pervading Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century. Consequently, in *The Gay Science* he states:

I welcome all signs that a more virile, warlike age is about to begin, which will restore honor to courage above all. For this age shall prepare the way for the one yet higher, and it shall gather the strength that this higher age will require some day – the age that will carry heroism into the search for knowledge and that will *wage wars* for the sake of ideas and their consequences. To this end we now need many preparatory courageous human beings who cannot very well leap out of nothing, any more than out of the sand and slime of present-day civilization and metropolitanism – human beings who know how to be silent, lonely, resolute, and content and constant in invisible activities; human beings who are bent on seeking in all things for what in them must be *overcome* [...]. For believe me: the secret for harvesting from existence the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment is – to *live dangerously!* Build your cities on the slopes of Vesuvius! Send your ships into uncharted seas! Live at war with your peers and yourselves! (1974: 228)

For Nietzsche, the person that epitomizes the virile future and higher age to come is Napoleon, representing neither the 'blooming universal exchange of hearts' (318) promised by the French revolution, nor the pettiness of national movements that were leading Europe into chaos. With Napoleon 'we have entered *the classical age of war* [which] the coming centuries will look back on with envy and awe for its perfection' (318).

Note, however, that Nietzsche does not celebrate war for the sake of war. When war breaks out, he writes, people will rapturously 'throw themselves into the new danger of *death* because the sacrifice for the fatherland seems to them to offer the long desired permission – to *dodge*

their goal; war offers a detour to suicide, but a detour with a good conscience' (270). In other words, military heroics is often a way of avoiding the need to be heroic in life, it can too often serve the preservation of the status quo when in fact this is what we should be at war with. The war Nietzsche advocates is not for the homeland, but a war that renders one homeless. He loves neither universalism nor does he support the chauvinisms that counter this universal brotherhood. Those who live dangerously and love adventure 'do not love humanity; but on the other hand we are not nearly "German" enough, in the sense in which the word "German" is constantly used nowadays, to advocate nationalism and race hatred [or] the national scabies of the heart and blood poisoning that now leads the nations of Europe to delimit and barricade themselves against each other as if it were a matter of quarantine. For that we are too openminded [...] too "travelled"' (339). With regard to his homelessness Karl Löwith argues that Nietzsche understood his life in terms of a fateful decision taking place between the old and the new; he was 'a human being at the limit' (1995: 204).

This warlike philosophy, which does not advocate dying for the fatherland or hating one's neighbours, can only be understood in relation to Nietzsche's philosophy of value. The important sentence in the passage quoted from *The Gay Science* regarding the coming virile and warlike age is his call for human beings to seek in everything that which must be overcome. Life, if it is to be meaningful, must be understood as a struggle to practice what is most essential to human beings, namely to give value. In pursuit of this overcoming, Nietzsche does advocate a hardness that many readers and commentators quite rightly find difficult to accept. For example, again in *The Gay Science*, he challenges his readers to seek strength and greatness but to understand they can only do so if they are prepared to inflict great suffering. 'Being able to suffer is the least thing', he argues, 'not to perish of internal distress and uncertainty when one inflicts great suffering and hears the cry of this suffering – that is great, that belongs to greatness (1974: 255). Such statements regarding suffering are often cited as evidence that Nietzsche was immoral, not just amoral in the sense that he may have transcended good and evil, but immoral in the sense that he purposefully turned a deaf ear to the suffering of others in favour of his own will. He does indeed implore us to turn away from suffering in order to affirm joy, and to not get caught up in the pitying discourses of the virtuous and the moralists, that is, to live 'in seclusion so that you can live for yourself' (271), but this is also an argument against becoming involved in the noise of war. Throughout Nietzsche's work there is an

ambiguity to war. Warfare is too imbued with the 'religion of pity', or conversely too caught up in the identity of a fatherland, and more often than not it is the work of tyrants, not masters with an understanding of their fateful decision, but men who simply want to breed passivity and extend their domination. If we are to understand the relevance of Nietzsche for an analysis of war, it is necessary to move away from the direct issue of militarized war itself and focus instead on the use of war as an analogy for the struggle to affirm values, or the will to power that is the motor of Nietzsche's overcoming.

In understanding the struggle that was Nietzsche's life and that was so central to his philosophy, the language of conflict is never far away. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the book published in 1883, a year after *The Gay Science*, and the book in which for the first time he explicitly set out his philosophy of the will to power, he calls on us not to work but to do battle, and to love peace as a means to new wars. 'You should be such men', he announces, 'as are always looking for an enemy – for *your* enemy' (1969: 74). A little later Nietzsche argues that friendship is too often used as a means to hide weakness, as a means to compensate for a lack. We find in others those qualities in which we are most deficient, or we seek in a friend something that confirms our current identity, beliefs and values. Friendship, conventionally understood, is anathema to risk and more closely allied to comfort. For Nietzsche, however, in your friend you should possess your best enemy. Your friend ought to be the locus of the confrontation that will lead each seeker of knowledge onto their *own* path. 'Your heart should feel closest to him when you oppose him' and you should be to him 'an arrow and a longing for the Superman', for 'O my friend, man is something that must be overcome' (83). The enemy like the good warrior is the person that breaks with uniformity and satisfaction, and commends us to this highest of ideas. As Peter Berkowitz has noted, 'Zarathustra believes that loving the friend is identical to loving what is farthest away, because the friend's purpose is precisely to symbolize unachieved freedom and mastery' (1995: 173). To commit oneself to the struggle to overcome and to the conflicts that ensue, this is good, and in a polemical overturning of the logic of the just war Nietzsche mocks those who say it is the good cause that hallows war, when in fact 'it is the good war that hallows every cause!' (1969: 74).

The relationship of struggle is most powerfully expressed in Nietzsche's Foreword to *Ecce Homo*. Here he declares his business to be the overthrow of idols. Nietzsche's philosophy is an undoing of the 'beyond', for him it is the immanent that matters. Thus there is no excuse in the

present; there is no *other world* of truth. Man must wrestle for the truth here and now. In the Foreword he states: 'How much truth can a spirit *bare*, how much truth can a spirit *dare*? That became for me more and more the real measure of value. Error [...] is not blindness, error is *cowardice* (1979: 34). Nietzsche's struggle, then, is epitomized by his capacity to suffer and his will to risk all, with the key qualities for an understanding of man and his world shown to be strength and courage. Most notable, however, is Nietzsche's claim that error is not blindness, meaning it is not a question of faulty observation or measurement, it is cowardice. With this one gesture towards the will Nietzsche sums up his entire critique of science as the mode of thought in which truth is to be most fundamentally expressed. For Nietzsche, scientific thinking or what he also refers to as the will to truth is presupposed by an even more fundamental, and one must say primitive, drive to knowledge. Behind every claim to truth is a prior valuing of that truth. A very good example of this is given in Heidegger's essay, 'Nietzsche's word: "God is Dead".' In the essay Heidegger notes how for Nietzsche 'the thought of value is more fundamental than the fundamental thought of certainty in Descartes' metaphysics, since certainty can only count as right if it also counts as the highest value' (2002: 183). Descartes's epistemological reduction failed to recognize the antecedent value given to this search for a secure ground.

In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche imagines the many 'strange, wicked, questionable questions' (1990: 33) the will to truth has set before us. Is it any wonder, then, that we should turn impatiently away and ask: What is the value of this will? Consequently, he does not 'believe a "drive to knowledge" to be the father of philosophy, but that another drive [...] has only employed knowledge (and false knowledge!) as a tool' (37). To understand this drive the philosopher needs to examine human instincts, to embark upon a psychology that supposes the moral prejudices and timidities of what has passed as psychology before. Even here the language is of conflict and struggle for each of the human drives practices philosophy, and 'each one of them would be only too glad to present *itself* as the ultimate goal of existence and as the legitimate *master* of all the other drives. For every drive is tyrannical: and it is as such that it tries to philosophize' (37). The tyranny of the will to truth is best seen, Nietzsche argues, when philosophers rapturously claim to have derived their law from nature when in fact these self-deceivers want only to prescribe their morality and their ideal *to* nature. As soon as a philosophy begins to believe in itself, he argues, it 'always creates the world in its own image, it cannot do otherwise;

philosophy is this tyrannical drive itself, the most spiritual will to power, to “creation of the World”, to *causa prima*’ (1990: 39). This is a hazardous truth, but a truth that only Nietzsche is brave enough to think. Truth is not the objective correspondence between thought and world, but rather the subjective *creation* of a world. Truth is nothing other than an interpreting, evaluating will to power.

The will to power incorporates a constellation of Nietzschean concepts including valuation, revaluation, master and slave, becoming, overcoming and the superman. It is often interpreted as a will to domination, and, as has just been shown, such a reading is not entirely incorrect. The will to power is tyrannical and does seek to create in its own image. It is also an expression of strength, indifferent to suffering and is best conceptualized through analogies of battle, conflict and war. All this lends itself quite easily to a very belligerent reading of Nietzsche’s philosophy, and yet to see it purely in terms of power understood as strength or might does greatly reduce its complexity. In this regard I tend to favour Walter Kaufman’s (1992) reading of Nietzsche which seeks to draw out the less violent or aggressive aspects of this thinking that are too often forgotten. Kaufman gives the example of a note on Goethe written at the time of *The Gay Science*. It runs as follows: ‘The Germans think that *strength* must reveal itself in hardness and cruelty [...] That there is *strength* in mildness and stillness, they do not believe easily. They miss strength in Goethe...!’ (in Kaufman, 1992: 92–3). On this reading strength is not domination but creativity. It is having the imagination to invent and the courage to risk all, to see in everything that which must be overcome.

The context or horizon against which Nietzsche’s philosophy of the will to power emerges is set out in the parable of the madman in *The Gay Science* who runs into the marketplace shouting incessantly that he seeks God. He then asks the gathering crowd where God has gone, and realizing they do not know he tells them: God is dead and we have killed him! The importance of this statement is contained in its two phrases. The first, God is dead, comments upon the condition of the times whereby, as Heidegger argues in his interpretation, ‘the supersensory world has no effective power. It does not bestow life’ (2002: 162). The ideal has died. There has been a devaluation of the hitherto highest values and nihilism, to be precise incomplete nihilism stands at the door. The second phrase, stipulating that it is we who have killed him, is the means to complete nihilism, to the realization that it is human beings who create and that we are at the dawn of a new dispensation of values. Complete nihilism is the grasping of this normative phase, an

affirmative 'yes' to the new, the seeking out 'of what is most alive' (Heidegger, 2002: 169), whereas incomplete nihilism seeks its escape without any revaluation, seeking refuge in that which is petrified and decomposing. The man speaking of the death of God is mad, of course, because he is ahead of his time.³

That valuing is most essential to human beings, or that human beings are no closer to acting according to their essence than when they set values, is the main subject of Zarathustra's discourses. 'A table of values hangs over every people', he declares. 'Behold, it is the table of its overcomings' (1969: 84). Every community has its table of values and every community rewrites it anew. 'Whatever I create', he notes while contemplating self-overcoming, 'and however much I love it – soon I have to oppose it and my love: thus will my will have it' (138). This is not simply a statement about Nietzsche's own propensity to overcome, it is rather a feature of every human culture. Life (and history) tells him, 'I am that which must overcome itself again and again', because 'man is a bridge and not a goal' (215), his evenings are always a way to new dawns.⁴ The most pertinent fact for Nietzsche is that no people can live without evaluating. 'Man first implanted values into things to maintain himself – he created the meaning of things, a human meaning! Therefore he calls himself: "Man", that is: the evaluator' (85). What is more, without the creative act of evaluation, 'the nut of existence would be hollow' (85). Nowhere is this made more clear than in the qualification to the observation noted above: 'No people could live without evaluating; *but if it wishes to maintain itself it must not evaluate as its neighbour evaluates*' (84, my italics). Evaluation produces and dispenses both identity and difference. It is world making, world preserving and world changing.

Here is the first reference to valuing as the confrontation between individuals or communities seeking to win their worlds. Too often, however, Nietzsche's references to persons or a people seeking to maintain itself has seen the will to power reduced to a philosophy of self-preservation akin to Darwinism. While the will to power should be understood only as a psychological drive and a condition of the spirit to create and preserve its own world, it is often understood to be a biological drive. This is certainly not helped by Nietzsche's own ambiguous use of language. In *Beyond Good and Evil* for example, he describes evaluations as 'physiological demands for preservation of a certain species of life', and that falseness is not an objection to evaluations, the only question is whether they are 'life-advancing, life-preserving, species-preserving' (1990: 35). However, for evidence that the will to power and the drive

to evaluate are not biological we should instead take notice of those moments where Nietzsche states explicitly that self-preservation is only a consequence of the will to power, and that we should 'beware of *superfluous* teleological principles' (1990: 44). In *The Gay Science* he writes:

The wish to preserve oneself is the symptom of a condition of distress, of a limitation of the really fundamental instinct of life which aims at *the expansion of power* and, wishing for that, frequently risks and even sacrifices self-preservation. It should be considered symptomatic when some philosophers – for example, Spinoza who was consumptive – considered the instinct of self-preservation decisive and *had* to see it that way; for they were individuals in conditions of distress. [...] The whole of English Darwinism breathes something like the musty air of English overpopulation, like the smell of the distress and overcrowding of small people. (1974: 291–2)⁵

In his essay on Nietzsche, Heidegger offers a valuable interpretation of preservation and maintenance as they appear in Nietzsche's philosophy. He refers to aphorism 715 in *The Will to Power*, which reads: 'The standpoint of "value" is the standpoint of conditions of preservation and enhancement for complex forms of relative life-duration within the flux of becoming' (Nietzsche, 1968: 380). In keeping with the quote from *The Gay Science* above, Heidegger argues that for Nietzsche preservation and enhancement mark the fundamental traits of life and that they belong together. 'The desire to grow, increase, is part of the essence of life. To preserve life is to serve the increase of life. Any life that is restricted to mere preservation is already in decline. [...] Increase, however, is only possible where a durable resource has already been preserved' (Heidegger, 2002: 171). For Heidegger, Nietzsche demonstrates that the essence of beings, the being of beings, is the increase of life as will to power and their becoming is characterized by a new dispensation of value which serves as the enduring-preserving realm of future increase. 'Inside of becoming, life, i.e., the living, takes shape as centres of the will to power that are active at particular times. These centres are therefore structures of ruling power. It is as such that Nietzsche understands art, the state, religion, science, society' (172). In this manner, Heidegger continues, so long as Nietzsche understands value as the condition of the preservation and increase of life, and sees life as grounded in becoming, the will to power is revealed as the setting of the necessary conditions for expansion. In other words the growth of life exceeds a biological or physical reduction

because the will to power as the esteeming of values 'constitutes the condition of increase and fixes the condition of preservation' (177). The increase in life of animals is set by necessity. An animal's capacity for growth is determined by environmental conditions that it can do little to control. Humans, however, in their freedom have the capacity to determine their conditions for growth and the means for establishing that growth is the will to power, which as Heidegger puts it, is a commanding 'that has at its disposal the possibilities of effective action' (175). This is very much in evidence in Heidegger's critique of technology, but for now we can take from it the notion that the ruling structures of technological power are premised upon the setting of values with regard to nature as mere 'standing-reserve', as a resource open to exploitation, and that such a valuation sets the conditions for our current formation of preservation-increase. This model can also be seen in some of the new writings on empire. Alain Joxe, for example, has argued that the US does not want to conquer the world to ensure order and peace, it would rather 'regulate disorder through norms of behaviour implanted in their allies' (2002: 80). These norms of behaviour express the reading of the will to power given here as the drive to set conditions for the maintenance/expansion of that power. As Nietzsche noted in *The Will to Power*, values and any alteration to them are related to the growth in power of the one who sets values. Preserving this position of command is all important; again, it is the confrontation to win a world.

In this regard Nietzsche remains relevant to our context. If the essence of power is the overpowering of itself, that is the will to an ever-new dispensation of values (increase), together with the will to secure the means to that end (preservation), then Nietzsche's philosophy of the will to power remains a crucial tool in understanding contemporary power struggles and the wars that issue from them. However, Nietzschean philosophy has never simply been a means for making sense of human conflictual becoming, it has often been used to justify and even precipitate such conflict. Domenico Losurdo (2001), in his very interesting study of the ideology of war prevalent in Germany at the turn of the twentieth century, highlights the contribution made by Nietzsche's thought to the *Glaubenskrieg* that was the First World War. Despite Nietzsche's strident criticism of 'national movements' he was successively appropriated by supporters for Germany's war of honour in 1914 and then later by the Third Reich propagandists. We have already noted how much the notion of a fateful decision played in Nietzsche's thinking, and this is especially manifest in his writings on Napoleon, but most

significant was the philosophy of an affirmative, overcoming spirit that fought every minute against nihilism. What distinguished the 'ideas of 1914' from the 'ideas of 1789', or what Nietzsche contemptuously called 'modern ideas', was the assertion of a regenerative, creative power against the dulling, levelling down of liberalism and the insipid happiness of 'the last man', all of which were seen to threaten a catastrophic decay. Here Nietzsche is clearly challenging the Hegelian end of history thesis – something we shall discuss in Chapter 3 – as well as the utilitarianism that defined British philosophy in the nineteenth century. The satisfaction of 'universal brotherhood' could only ever produce 'garrulous, weak-willed' people 'who need a *master*' (1990: 173). And this will not be the master that exemplifies the affirmation of life, but quite the contrary, the tyrant that enforces standardization, uniformity and comfort. The lives of the last men are satisfied and trivial. 'They still quarrel, but they soon make up – otherwise indigestion would result' (1969: 47). They are a herd in which everyone is the same, where those who think differently take themselves off to the madhouse.

We may, then, see the persistence of war as the playing out of competing wills to power, a conflict between worlds and the drive to set values. The war against terror epitomizes this struggle between two modes of esteeming that are vying for expansion. Nietzsche's work lends itself to a study of war because he presents us with a globe traversed by competing wills, each trying to complete itself by preserving/expanding its realm. This, however, is only part of the way in which Nietzsche helps us consider the persistence of war. The other way, especially useful when considering the war against terror, which is also a war of fundamentalisms, is the path Nietzsche opens for critique, and for this we need to briefly return to the question of force. If force is present in Nietzsche's work then it surfaces as movement or becoming, because 'man is the animal *whose nature has not yet been fixed*' (1990: 88). Man is thus the site of struggle between reactive, conservative forces, and active, life-affirming forces. It is the struggle between sameness and difference that ought not result in a state of equilibrium. In perhaps the most famous study of Nietzsche's philosophy of force, Gilles Deleuze writes, 'if becoming had an end or final state, it would have already been attained [...] past time being infinite becoming would have attained its final state if it had one' (1983: 47). Indeed, in aphorism 1062 of *The Will to Power* Nietzsche doubts that the universe is capable of 'being' at all, or has one single point of fixity. And this leads to perhaps Nietzsche's greatest insight, an insight that is presented in his very first work, *The Birth of Tragedy*. Given that becoming is the law of

the universe, and that becoming necessitates difference, mutability and uncertainty, tragedy registers this condition of indeterminate existence. It registers that existence is to be taken up and fought for over and over again. Unfounded, yet to be affirmed, incomplete existence is the condition of human being. As Deleuze remarks: 'Multiple and pluralist affirmation – this is the essence of the tragic' (1983: 17). Nietzsche's problem, one that Heidegger remained caught up in but later also completely dismantled, was that in the tragic absence of a ground all that remained was the wilful, subjective transvaluation of value; a condition that pitted would-be master against would-be master. It is Nietzsche's failure, then, to overcome the last vestige of metaphysics that permits his work to be appropriated by the belligerent and the violent. Turning to Heidegger it is possible to see how this overcoming of the philosophy of the subject opens up a radical critique of war, and the war against terror in particular.

Polemos

Heidegger's translation of polemos is an example of the change of register from his early existential work epitomized by *Being and Time* to his later work on the history of Being, and yet it is also a sign of the continuity in Heidegger's examination of truth understood as unconcealment (*alētheia*). The polemos involved when bringing beings out from their hiddenness was initially translated as *kampf*, signalling Dasein's struggle whereby truth is 'wrested from entities' (1962: 265). Later it is understood in ontological terms when polemos is translated as *Auseinandersetzung*. In German this word has many meanings including to separate, to set out, to explain, to talk and to argue. Heidegger uses it to invoke the positing, placing, exposing, founding or establishing (*setzen*) of differentiated beings (*auseinander*). Polemos is thus the conflictual relation of one with another that is the conflictual separation of the realm of Being itself. For many commentators this shift in Heidegger's questioning of Being represents his break with Nietzsche and the last residues of the metaphysics of the subject. For others, this shift, especially as it is played out around Heidegger's revised translation of polemos in the Heraclitus fragment, represents a political move. In 1933 Heidegger had joined the National Socialist Party and had taken up the position of rector at the University of Freiburg, by 1934 he had resigned. The following years saw an engagement with his affiliation to National Socialism with many people interpreting the disappearance of the word *Kampf* from Heidegger's vocabulary as an attempt to distance

himself from its use by the Nazi propagandists with whom he was finding himself increasingly in disagreement. Either way, in philosophical or political terms Heidegger's deployment of polemos is central to the evolution of his thought.⁶

Heidegger was a revolutionary thinker both in the radical way in which he approached philosophy and because the subject of that philosophy invariably involved questions of renewal, overturning and epochal beginnings. In many respects his philosophy could be understood as the systematic destruction of the tradition; a destruction distinct from, yet not wholly alien to Nietzschean transvaluation. In this sense the practice of philosophy itself was exemplary of the radical questioning that faces every authentic Dasein. Along with this distaste for security and comfort Heidegger's philosophy continually warns of the decline in spiritual life through immersion in the talk, habits and involvements of *Das Man*, translated as 'the *anyone*' or 'the *they*'. This is the language of *Being and Time* where Heidegger speaks of Dasein dissolving into the being of others who also become indistinguishable in turn. The neutral anonymity of the *they* is a dictatorship. 'We take pleasure and enjoy ourselves as *they* take pleasure; we read, see, and judge about literature and art as *they* see and judge; [...] we find "shocking" what *they* find shocking' (1962: 164). This 'averageness [...]' prescribes what can and may be ventured, it keeps watch over everything exceptional that thrusts itself to the fore' (165). It is 'the "levelling down" of all possibilities of Being' (165). In this sense the *they* disperses the authentic self that has been *taken hold of* in its own way, and unburdens it of its struggle. This language also extends from the immersion in public everydayness to a critique of publicity understood as the creeping bureaucratization and democratization of life during the period of the Weimar Republic. Heidegger, much like Nietzsche, had little time for these universalizing modern ideas. Against the everyday, then, philosophy must do battle in order to keep possibilities, potentialities and the future open. As John Caputo puts it: 'Philosophy is a battle because life is a battle. A being whose being is itself a battle thus demands a philosophizing that knows how to do battle' (1993: 50).⁷

While Heidegger is critical of the everyday, the criteria he uses for an investigation of it in *Being and Time* are not to be taken as expressing a 'negative valuation' (1962: 220), for it remains the realm from which Dasein projects its future, authentically or not. Heidegger calls this projection of a meaning for Dasein resoluteness, and this existential conception of authenticity as standing true is evident in Heidegger's first public treatment of the Heraclitus fragment.⁸ In the 1934–5 lecture

series on Hölderlin, Heidegger still translated *polemos* as struggle, declaring that ‘Struggle is indeed progenitor, but also ruler. And where struggle as the power of preservation and standing true ceases, there begins standstill, compromise, mediocrity – and harmlessness, atrophy and decline. [...] Through proving true to a test, a being in one way or another first becomes in each case what it is and how it is’ (in Fried, 2000: 30). However, as Fried notes, rather than simply plotting a future and holding oneself to a final decision, which could still be little more than a glorified flight from oneself, being resolute means ‘constantly holding open the meaning of the future and its possibilities on the basis of an ongoing interpretive reflection on what has been given in the past’ (98). This is one early way in which Heidegger differentiated himself from Nietzsche who also understood the weight of history. For Nietzsche, to teach the transvaluation of all values was to teach people to create the future and thereby redeem the past. Zarathustra announces: ‘You shall be fugitives from all fatherlands [...] You shall love *your children’s land*: let this love be your new nobility – the undiscovered land in the furthest sea!’ (Nietzsche 1969: 221). But possibility is never a pure projection of the will. What Nietzsche calls esteeming, and therefore any new dispensation of value, is always based upon Dasein’s thrownness, that is the history of its communal, interpretive practices. To resist the virile, even romantic, autonomy of Nietzsche, Heidegger reminds us that ‘*authentic* existence is not something which floats above falling everydayness; existentially, it is only a modified way in which such everydayness is seized upon’ (1962: 224). Dasein, therefore, projects possibilities from within factual life and always as historical being. As Fried notes, Dasein must confront the world, but this confrontation is the ‘reinterpretive encounter of Dasein with the world as it has been given, by a history that Dasein can never leap out of and control’ (2000: 85).

This discussion of projection also allows us to approach Heidegger’s very particular conception of truth as ‘Being-uncovering’ (1962: 262). He recognizes the radical nature of this rendering, breaking, as it does, with conventional conceptions of truth as agreement between thought and object, and mocks those who worry about ‘plunging the “good” old tradition into nullity’ (262). For the Greeks, argues Heidegger, if a discourse, as a demonstration or a showing, is to be true, its Being-true is Dasein ‘taking entities out of their hiddenness and letting them be seen in their unhiddenness (their uncoveredness)’ (262). The world, then, is not something external and permanent but is disclosed only in and through Dasein. There is no split between subject and object, there is

no splitting of the phenomenon between human being and a world, rather Dasein is the disclosedness of a world. To use another important Heideggerian term, Dasein is the 'clearing', in German *Lichtung*, that sheds light. Only for an entity that is disclosive can things be brought to light or hidden in the dark.⁹ In this way Dasein can be said to 'bring its "there" along with it' (171).

This Being-uncovering is a twofold struggle. As has already been noted unconcealment is a wresting of truth from entities. 'Entities get snatched out of their hiddenness. The factual uncoveredness of anything is always, as it were, a kind of *robbery*' (265).¹⁰ However, the struggle is never an unmediated struggle to find some bare truth, it is rather the struggle with the interpretation of entities that is Dasein's 'there'. This means that thrownness is revealed by the fact that in each case Dasein 'is already in a definite world'. Dasein's thrownness is also a 'falling' because 'for the most part Dasein is lost in its "world" [and] is dominated by the way things are publicly interpreted' (1962: 264). Projection is thus Dasein's realization that it can understand *itself* in terms of the world or in relation to its ownmost potentiality. 'The goddess of Truth who guides Parmenides', Heidegger writes, 'puts two pathways before him, one of uncovering, one of hiding [...]. The way of uncovering is achieved only in [...] distinguishing between these understandingly, and making one's decision for the one rather than the other' (265). The essential task, then, is for Dasein to 'explicitly appropriate what has already been uncovered, defend it *against* semblance and disguise, and assure itself of its uncoveredness again and again' (265). This is a hermeneutic task. Dasein is interpretive, and if it is to win its world, if it is to be authentic, it must address, question and challenge the interpretation of the world as it is publicly set out. The centrality of this interpretive task for Heidegger cannot be denied because it is this ontological questioning concerning what constitutes existence that distinguishes Dasein ontically. Dasein is ontically distinct from other entities in that its being and its world is a question for it (1962: 32).

As was mentioned in the opening of this chapter, the world is not simply given, but always disclosed *as* something. In wresting with entities, they are understood *as* this or *as* that, to be utilized in this manner or in that. That the world is disclosed in this way is the basis of Heidegger's hermeneutical analysis and is the key to understanding Dasein as polemos. As Fried notes: 'Dasein is polemos because Dasein's existence is hermeneutic, and all interpretation is polemical' (2000: 52). It is usual to think that interpretation is a process on the way to

understanding. For Heidegger it is the other way round; interpretation is the development of a more primordial understanding that characterizes Dasein's being-in-the-world. Only through being-in-the-world, that is, "standing" there, is the world 'disclosed as possible significance' (184) and the totality of our involvements with it revealed. Understanding for Heidegger is therefore an ontological rather than an epistemological problem. Interpretation, likewise, is 'the working-out of possibilities projected in understanding' (189). Through interpretation something is explicitly understood *as* something: 'when something in the world is encountered as such, the thing in question already has an involvement which is disclosed in our understanding of our world, and this involvement gets laid out by the interpretation' (190–1). Fried takes the example of a tree limb lying on a forest floor to show what is at stake in the polemos of interpretation. He explains that the scientist may see decomposing organic material or chemical compounds and processes, but these remove the bough from its involvements with the world where it might 'announce itself to us as [. . .] firewood, as a weapon, as a tool' (54), and to privilege the scientific view is to privilege a particular interpretation of Being. As Heidegger explains: 'Meaning is an *existentiale* of Dasein, not a property attaching to entities' (193). The radical nature of this conception means there is no final thing or substance, no ultimate reality to appeal to. Our world is therefore the privileging of certain interpretations, specific *as*-structures, over other possibilities that may be projected from within Dasein's understanding. Without an appeal to finality or some ultimate substance interpretation and the creation/projection of a world, the worlding of the world is always polemical. Indeed, it is in the name of these conflicting, competing, contending *as*-structures that worlds collide. In ontological terms, war is this interpretive confrontation where the worlding of the world is at stake. In ontical terms it is the violent means by which a particular world is preserved/expanded. However, that the ontological confrontation must result in an ontical conflict is by no means a necessity. To understand how the ontological confrontation might indeed undermine the inevitability of an ontical conflict Heidegger's analysis of polemos needs further discussion.

The semester following the first lecture course on Hölderlin, the Heraclitus fragment is revisited, only now Heidegger alters his translation of polemos from *Kampf* to *Auseinandersetzung*. Also, when viewing the two passages together it is evident that much of the existential language which still played a significant role in the lectures on Hölderlin has been replaced by an analysis of the differentiation within the realm of

Being itself. In other words, we can see in this language a move in Heidegger's thinking away from an analysis of the *existentialia* of Dasein to the question pertaining to modes of presencing. This question is undoubtedly active in *Being and Time*, only now it receives significant attention. It is important at this point to remind ourselves that Heidegger was as concerned about nihilism as was Nietzsche and that in many respects his thinking is defined by this concern. In our brief address to Heidegger's thinking with regard to truth, it was noted that truth is *alētheia*, namely unconcealment. The important thing for Heidegger, however, is that no truth, understood as representation or correspondence, is adequate to the hiddenness, or withdrawal, of Being. Each age, or every epoch, has its own manner of disclosing Being, its own world, but in every disclosure Being also withdraws and conceals itself. Being is therefore never fully grasped. The history of metaphysics is the history of the attempt to think Being in terms of beings, assuming that some essential substance or principle lies at the heart of Being, be that Aristotle's *ousia*, the medieval Christian creator, or modernity's claims for reason. All of these principles fall by the wayside, however, before the continual nascency, presencing or bringing-forth of Being.¹¹

To return to the question of polemos, the *Auseinandersetzung*, as it is now translated, is the expositing of differentiated beings but also the difference (and conflict) between the two essential powers of Being, that is between withdrawal and unconcealment. In a lecture entitled 'The Origin of the Work of Art', which dates from the same time as the course on metaphysics, Heidegger understands the strife between unconcealment and withdrawal as the conflict between 'earth' and 'world'. 'World and earth are essentially different and yet never separated from one another. World is grounded on earth, and earth rises up through world' (Heidegger, 2002: 26). As Fried points out, world and earth are a 'vocabulary for thinking how structures of sense and meaning happen temporally *for* and *through* Dasein' (2000: 60). In Nietzschean terms, world is the given dispensation of value, for Heidegger it is the dominant as-structure that lays out our possible involvements with other entities. It is the horizon of intelligibility, an order of directives and assignments. It is the governing principle that holds sway, as in the age of technology where nature is treated as standing-reserve, or where the world is regulated according to the rational efficiency of the market, as is now the case under the common sense of neo-liberal economics. Earth, however, can never fully be laid bare because it is what always already informs the fore-structure of Dasein's understanding, and because 'it is what both grants and upends Dasein's historical understanding'

(Fried, 2000: 61). It is, then, on the one hand the deep historicity of Being from which Dasein cannot extricate itself, but it is also the undisclosable, the presencing of Being that is irreducible to what is present. When Heidegger therefore says that world is grounded in earth, it is important to remember that earth is an *Abgrund*, an abyssal, an-archic ground, and for this reason it continually interrupts and dislocates the established certainty of any particular world, it also exceeds the will of any subject. As Heidegger argues in 'The Origin of the Work of Art', earth is disconcerting for it cannot be mastered. 'Earth is not simply the closed but that which rises up as self-closing. World and earth are essentially in conflict, intrinsically belligerent. Only as such do they enter the strife of clearing and concealing' (2002: 31).

Returning to the interpretation offered in *Introduction to Metaphysics* it is this conflict 'that first projects and develops what had hitherto been unheard of, unsaid and unthought', a battle 'sustained by the creators, poets, thinkers and statesmen' (1959: 62). Most importantly, as we have seen, earth and world never fall into a state of empty opposition, they are always involved in a struggle in which 'each opponent carries the other beyond itself. [...] The earth cannot do without the openness of the world [and world] cannot float away from earth if [...] it is to ground itself on something decisive' (Heidegger, 2002: 27). In other words, if Dasein finds nothing to be at issue in its interpretation of Being, it is not living essentially, but inauthentically. This means that where the polemos ceases, where earth and world are no longer set against each other, 'the world turns away' (Heidegger, 1959: 62). There is no more worlding, it is finished, available to all, degenerating into a prototype to be copied, a schema, something exchangeable, interchangeable, reified and standardized. For Heidegger, the diagnosis is as follows: 'When the creators vanish from the nation [*Volk*], when they are barely tolerated as an irrelevant curiosity, an ornament, as eccentrics having nothing to do with real life; when authentic conflict ceases, converted into mere polemics, into the machinations and intrigues of man within the realm of the given, then the decline has set in. [...] the inherited level of dignity [...] can be maintained only if it is at all times creatively transcended' (63).

It is not hard to see how, with selective reading, it was possible for National Socialism to claim Nietzsche's philosophy as their own. The demand to act decisively, to strive for new beginnings, as well as the call for nobility and mastery were well suited to the virility of National Socialist thinking. However, as I have noted above, such an appropriation of Nietzsche would need to repress his own critique of nationalism and

especially racism. It would also need to divest the obedience demanded by the Reich as well as the mass rallies of their herd-like character. Likewise, when considering Heidegger's own affiliation with National Socialism we must remember that his understanding of Being as essentially conflictual did lend itself to supporting the struggle that was the National Socialist project. His belief, like Nietzsche before him, in the importance of thinking and acting decisively, his search for a new beginning, as well as his belief in the destiny of the *Volk* all contributed to his commitment. That he was mistaken, and that National Socialism turned out to be even more nihilistic than the materialism of American capitalism and Soviet Communism, must however, be taken into account. Whilst Heidegger made the most contemptible alliance, it is wrong to reduce his critique of mass movements, technology, biological racism and National Socialist science to the level of the internal squabbles that continually plagued the party, as Lasurdo does. We should note that Heidegger was staunchly anti-democratic, and yet there is little in his thinking that is fascist as we would understand it today in terms of a denial, repression and extermination of difference, in fact quite the contrary is the case. But it is not the purpose of this chapter to debate the warlike quality of Nietzschean overcoming, or Heideggerian authenticity, it is rather concerned with trying to assess what their philosophy can tell us today about the persistence and ontological structure of war. I have sought to show how Nietzsche understood human being in its essence as the dispensation of value and how Heidegger understood our being-in-the-world as the interpretive confrontation to project and win a world. We have also seen from Heidegger's reading of the will to power that power concerns the preservation and expansion of itself. In this regard it can be argued that the war against terror is the conflictual expression of the will to power. Raging against each other are two regimes seeking to preserve and expand their own dispensation of value and conception of worldhood.

In keeping with this Nietzschean vision is Samuel Huntington's thesis of a clash of civilizations. First published in 1993, this argument that the wars of the future will be civilizational, that is, cultural, has become an integral part of the neo-conservative mindset in Washington. Since the attacks of 11 September 2001, it has legitimized the Bush administration's mantra that the war against terror is a war to defend the values of the West, which Huntington lists as individualism, liberalism, constitutionalism, human rights, equality, liberty, the rule of law, democracy, free markets and the separation of church and state (1993: 40). These values do not apparently resonate in the cultures of the other seven

civilizations he describes.¹² In Huntington's potted history we have moved from the medieval wars between princes, to the post-revolutionary wars between peoples, to the Cold War between the ideologies of capitalism and communism, to the current cultural wars between civilizations. The absurdity of this argument is twofold. First of all, the idea that, by implication, the other cultures are those of intolerant masses saved from the threat of anarchy only by the desire for hierarchy and domination is profoundly ideological, if not racist, and would seem to fit in well with the 'civilizing' discourse of colonialism. Also, one of the main global conflicts is the destruction of traditional and differentiated ways of being-in-the-world by the practices of neo-liberalism that reduce human being to the aggregated expression of free-market economics. This too is ideological, and it is crass to think otherwise given that capital has no cultural allegiance. Secondly, as Akbar S. Ahmed (2003) has argued, these divisions into civilizations and the expression of 'kin country' syndrome makes no sense in the current situation given that the US is reliant on Turkey, Indonesia, Afghanistan and Pakistan in its current attempts to police the war against terror.

However, the fact that an idea like the 'clash of civilizations' rings true at one level is because the war against terror *is* a war of competing wilful subjects seeking to impose their strength and secure the world as they have interpreted it. The task for us, of course, is to find our way out of this impasse. While Nietzsche's thought helps us strip the moral veil from the clash of civilizations thesis and understand it as one more raw expression of the will to power, it is important to understand how and why Heidegger's conception of polemos as interpretive confrontation challenges this philosophy of violent conflict between competing worldviews. We have already seen how Heidegger moves beyond Nietzsche's subjectivism by thinking Being as the polemos between earth and world. The source for the transvaluation is no longer the autonomous heroic will, but the hiddenness of Being that continually brings-forth new beginnings to which we must respond, a condition that modernity has vainly sought to master. In 'The Age of the World Picture' Heidegger unfolds the essence of modernity as the dual Cartesian moment whereby man becomes subject, the unshakable ground of certainty, and truth becomes the certainty of objective representation. The whole of modern metaphysics, including Nietzsche, he argues, maintains itself with this interpretation of being where '[m]an becomes the referential centre of beings as such' (2002: 67). This is not a shift from the worldview of the Middle Ages to that of modernity because what constitutes the emergence of the age of the world picture

is beings being brought before Man as the objective. In the Middle Ages, beings corresponded to the order of creation brought into being by a creator, God, and were never 'placed in the realm of man's information and disposal so that, in this way alone, [were they] in being' (68). The notion of a Greek worldview is even further removed. When the world becomes picture beings are that which Man intends and decides to bring before him. For the (pre-Socratic) Greeks Man is rather the one who is gathered and brought into presencing with *self-opening* beings.¹³ In this situation Man is maintained by the openness of beings, 'driven about by their conflict and marked by their dividedness' and to fulfil his essence man must preserve 'the self-opening in its openness; and he must remain exposed to all of its divisive confusion' (68). In stark contrast to this exposure to openness, the fundamental event of modernity is the conquering of the world as picture. This event also involves the interpretation of beings as representing values, value being the compensation for the loss of being that accompanies the shift to representation. This attributing of values, otherwise known as culture, becomes 'the general expression of the highest goals of creation devoted to the self-establishment of man' (77). Striving to promote that which is most valuable, 'man fights for the position in which he can be that being who gives to every being the measure and draws up the guidelines'. Because of this, Heidegger continues, 'the decisive unfolding of the modern relationship to beings becomes a confrontation of world views' (71).

One of the predominant components of enlightened modernity was the distance it took from the pre-modern warrior virtues. What is significant about modern warfare, aside from the scale of the devastation it can bring, is the fact that warfare does not carry its own legitimacy with it, that is, not being a good in itself, the case for war always has to be made. Integral to this is the structuring of identity and difference, self and other, whereby 'we' are always seen to be good, righteous and just, and 'they' are always seen to be bad, ungodly and cruel. Within Heidegger's articulation of the polemos between earth and world we are offered a philosophy that divests itself of the last vestiges of subjectivism and destabilizes the ground of such identities. We are offered instead, what Gianni Vattimo calls 'weak ontology', that is 'the taking leave of metaphysical being and its strong traits' (1988: 86). In Heidegger's opening up of the ground of Being identity becomes increasingly destabilized and unfounded, and such thinking can be used to directly challenge the rhetoric on both sides in the war against terror. Through reading both Nietzsche and Heidegger we can understand human being

as interpretive confrontation, and understand just how *uncertain* the world produced through such interpretation actually is. Let us have a war against terror by all means, but that would mean a war against the fundamental certainties that underpin it. The challenge, then, for thinking the polemos of Being is to face the groundlessness of our world while also developing a 'weak' normativity that can save us from the decisionism to which Heidegger succumbed.

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