

Abstract:

Beyond the *ius in bello*

On the discursive prerequisites of the dissociative mentality of total war

War is a strategic-aggressive state of relations among at least two military complexes, which is systematically based on destruction, injuring and manslaughter. During the cultural history of war, fear, suffering, pain, cruelty and terror have by no means been the exception. Especially against this background, those limitations have to be understood as civilized attempts to rein in the very outbreak of war and/or military violence. These limitations are expressed through the right to wage war (*ius ad bellum*) and the law during wartimes (*ius in bello*). In the course of the twentieth century, those moral and legal attempts to put constraints on war have led to its almost complete normative condemnation through international law. Yet, at about the very same time, the crude facticity of previously unheard levels of violence marks a stark contrast to this development. Total war does not know of any distinction between combatants and non-combatants. This kind of war is directed against entire populations and their means of livelihood and thus takes on the characteristics of a brutal campaign of destruction. However, against the backdrop of the aforementioned normative and legal reining in of war, such atrocities seem to gain the status of "something exceptional during a state of exception," therefore, the need for further explanation arises. How did this great contrast between norm and reality develop?

My lecture attempts to approach the above question from a discursive-sociological position. It is going to ask what the discursive preconditions are of that peculiar "dissociative mentality" (Bernd Hüppauf), which "severed the ties to the universal ideas of *any* politico-aesthetic traditions" and thus has to be understood as playing an integral part in what caused the Wehrmacht's war of total destruction. Scrutinizing the public discourse held in Germany between the two wars will help make clearly visible one of those discursive requirements that are needed so as to lead to a complete dissolution of the boundaries of violence during war: After WW I there is a broad and influential critique of political Romanticism taking place, which successfully aims at disrupting the links of that peculiar socio-political theory with (contemporary) civil society. This critique ultimately leads to an apology of a kind of violence, which, according to Heinrich Popitz, would have to be called "total violence": Violence is glorified, since it would be able to show "German Man" the path that ultimately leads to the core of his very being (Ernst Jünger). The psychic state of utter indifference towards the victim's suffering is systematically prepared at that time, since the Romantic notions of reconciliation and empathy are rejected as "irresponsible subjectivism" (Carl Schmitt). The enemy is made a "total enemy," whose existential rivalry justifies and calls for "the reckless application of *any* destructive measures". Furthermore, this discursive paradigm glorifies "proving one's worth" during the completely technologized battle (Jünger), all this leading to the apotheosis of an entire technology of destruction.

This lecture might be rather unusual insofar, as most of the time Romanticism is seen as modern bellicism's direct precursor. Yet, instead of constructing a (straightforward) general "German pathological history," it would make much more sense to focus on the breaches and ruptures within that discourse, so as to be able to understand that peculiar "dissociative mentality" and thus the cruelty of total war, which it systematically made possible.

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