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**The Force of War.  
Max Scheler and Jan Patočka on the First World War<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract**

*The First World War was both an historical and a philosophical event. Philosophers engaged in what Kurt Flasch aptly called "the spiritual mobilization" of philosophy. Max Scheler was particularly important among these "war philosophers", given that he was the one who penned some of the most influential philosophical writings of the First World War, among them Der Genius des Krieges und der Deutsche Krieg. As I aim to show, Max Scheler's war writings were crucial for Jan Patočka's interpretation of the First World War in the sixth of his Heretical Essays. However, the importance of Scheler's war writings goes far beyond the First World War for Patočka, since they offer Patočka a far-reaching interpretation of the 'excessive' character of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As I will show through the example of Max Scheler, the German war philosophers succumbed to a dangerously romantic conception of "force" – and it is this ominous force, which Patočka takes to lie at the root of the increasingly excessive character of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.*

**Keywords:** Scheler, Patočka, war, force, sacrifice

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**1. The Force of the War, the Forces of War**

"I came to see World War I (...) as the great seminal catastrophe of this century – the event which (...) lay at the heart of the failure and decline of this Western civilization" (Kennan 1979, 3) – this is American Historian George F. Kennan's famous assessment of the importance of the First World War as a world-historical event. This statement might seem outdated at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, after two terrifying World Wars, the unimaginable genocide of the Holocaust, a Cold War that pushed the entire world to the brink of nuclear self-annihilation, and countless irreconcilable regional conflicts of ever-increasing intensity. However, the intention behind the statement was to show that the historical event of the First World War had profoundly changed the way in which Europe – and subsequently the world –

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perceived itself and, further, that it was precisely the First World War that brought about a world-historical change by setting the course for the excessive nature of this century.

The First World War can be seen as a starting point of the catastrophes to come. The violent deaths of previously unimaginable numbers of people in the battlefields, the first use of bio-chemical weapons like mustard gas, the first machines like tanks and airplanes as new agents of war, the sheer endless stalemate of trench-warfare, the novel experience of attrition warfare, psychopathological phenomena such as "shell-shock", the thousands of mutilated soldiers returning from the front, the slow collapse of the difference between the battlefield and the homeland, the total mobilization of material and psychological resources – all of these features called for individual and collective responses for which there was no roadmap. Hence, intellectuals of all disciplines responded to this genuinely new event in their own ways.

Philosophers too reflected upon the importance and consequence of this world-historical event. The events of the war were accompanied by a surprising, and previously unprecedented, philosophical engagement. In particular, German philosophers like Rudolf Eucken, Max Scheler, Ernst Troeltsch, and many others wrote books, essays, articles, countless pamphlets, and held public speeches and talks to defend the national cause and the war effort in general (Lübbe 1974, Flasch 2000, Bruendel 2003, Sieg 2013, Hoeres 2014). These philosophers soon realized that this war was being fought on two very different battlegrounds where very different weapons were being used. They conceived of this war not so much as an historical-political event of fighting forces in the battlefield, but instead as a philosophical war, i.e. a genuinely spiritual event upon which hung the fate of all humankind. This spiritual event followed very different rules than the war that took place on the "real" battlegrounds. For the first time in history, philosophers became soldiers equipped with pen and paper as weapons (*Kriegsdienst mit der Feder*<sup>2</sup>), fighting in a war of ideas, of culture, of values – a "spiritual mobilization" (Flasch 2000), as the German historian Kurt Flasch has aptly described it.

This spiritual warfare mobilized not only philosophers, but also their philosophical concepts as such, which underwent crucial reinterpretations and left a decisive imprint on 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy.<sup>3</sup> Basic philosophical ideas, such as life & death, community, sacrifice, spirit, value, culture, and many others became irrevocably tainted or even thoroughly corrupted by the experience of this first total war. From among these many concepts, I will focus on one peculiar concept, which remains ominous but at the same time ubiquitous; namely, the

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<sup>2</sup> This expression stems from the philologist Theodor Birt (quoted from Bruendel 2003, 11).

<sup>3</sup> Domenico Losurdo has shown this remarkably well in the case of Heidegger and the First World War (see Losurdo 2001).

concept of "force". As mentioned above, one can find a strangely romantic fascination with the idea of force in the work of German war philosophers. It is the Czech philosopher Jan Patočka who, in the 1970s, returned to this concept in his *Heretical Essays* and interpreted the 20<sup>th</sup> century *itself* as war, and did so by means of the concept of force or, as he writes, the "transvaluation of all values under the sign of [force]." (Patočka 1996, 124)<sup>4</sup>

The First World War unleashed forces of a hitherto unparalleled and unknown scale. It mobilized every single aspect of European life that was possible to mobilize: Weapons, ammunition, equipment, food, medicine, troops, infrastructure, to name only the most important among them. More importantly, it mobilized people – materially and psychologically. People – soldiers in particular – became forces, fused into the unity of a single force, and became a part of a mobilization of massive proportions. In his famous *Die totale Mobilmachung* (Jünger 1993) from 1930, war veteran Ernst Jünger tried to retrospectively express and describe the uniqueness of this mobilization of forces in the First World War. For him, only a "power of cultic origin" (ibid., 124) could have achieved what he calls a "total mobilization" (ibid., 125), i.e. a mobilization that leaves no potential force untapped and that fuels the energy of war like an erupting volcano (ibid., 123).

Materially *and* psychologically – the latter category is one of the defining elements of the transformation in warfare that emerged. The First World War was an event that mobilized the masses, the force of the masses, and the forces within the masses. Rudolf Eucken, the German philosopher and Nobel Prize laureate, emphasized in his speech *Die sittlichen Kräfte des Krieges* that this war, although destined for bloodshed and destruction, could awaken the slumbering forces that would not have arisen in times of peace (Eucken 1914). Furthermore, he tried to draw attention to how the war unites forces that otherwise lie disconnected from one another. In his view, war binds all of these particular forces together, creating one single force, which by its accumulation exceeds the mere sum of its parts. This force is not only a material force, but an "inner strengthening"<sup>5</sup> (*innere Kräftigung*) (Eucken 1914a, 166) that

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<sup>4</sup> The English translation by Erazim Kohák often greatly differs from the Czech original. In this particular passage, Patočka uses the word *síla* (force) and not *moc* (power). This is important to mention since there is a terminological difference between 'force' and 'power' in Patočka. Furthermore, the words for 'force' (*síla*) and 'violence' (*násilí*) stem from the same root. It is therefore important to listen to the relation that force and violence uphold in the Czech, since this brings force and power into an interesting relationship with Scheler's thought, where power has to control violence. Patočka uses a very similar train of thought in *Plato and Europe*. I am thankful to Daniel Leufer for pointing this out to me.

<sup>5</sup> The English language does not convey the proximity of *strengthening* and *force* like the German language does. In German, these two words share the same root: *Kraft* and *Kräftigung*. Hence, the force of war leads to an inner strengthening, but it is also this inner strengthening that makes the fighting forces more forceful.

arises with the war, so that this inner strengthening justifies this particular (German) war (cf. Hoeres 2004, 447-449).

The Germans were not alone in their fascination with the conception of a force that accumulates, renews and even transcends itself. On the French side, Henri Bergson characterized the warfare in terms of the force that either wastes or renews itself (*la force qui s'use et celle qui ne s'use pas*). In distinguishing between material and moral forces, Bergson sought to show why the enemy, Germany, would inevitably run out of force, since it only "worships brute force" (Bergson 1915, 46), i.e. material force. The force that renews itself, however, is the moral force which is kept alive by ideals – ideals which, in Bergson's opinion, Germany did not possess, or at least did not foster: "The energy of our soldiers is drawn from something which does not waste, from an ideal of justice and freedom." (ibid., 46) Taking up Bergson's idea of the nature of the war, one would have to conclude by mathematical principle that France will win the war against Germany. When all material forces are depleted, it is France's moral force that would rule over the lack of moral force in Germany. A simple or even oversimplified equation perhaps, but an equation which is nevertheless based upon the guiding principle of force which seems to define the essence of the conflict in Bergson's opinion.

One of the most interesting and crucial aspects of these conceptions of force is that this ominous force is simultaneously both bound and not bound, to human restraint. It is perhaps another defining aspect of the First World War that this relationship between human might and the might of force itself shifted dramatically out of alignment. Viewed from the perspective of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the First World War seems to be the first event involving a dramatic loss in control that, over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, would repeat and amplify itself, reaching its apex in nuclear brinkmanship. This force, which is idolized and worshipped in the writings of these philosophers during the First World War, became something that leaves the 21<sup>st</sup> century trembling in fear. The engagement with the force of war in this sense resembles a child playing with fire – unleashed by a deep fascination for yet unknown might, and followed by a frantic search for control and containment. Taking up Eric Hobsbawm's narrative of "the age of the extremes" (Hobsbawm 1995), this fire might have never stopped and kept on burning throughout the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

## 2. Max Scheler I: The Excess of Force

Max Scheler's war writings are among the most important and most influential writings of the First World War. In fact, Scheler's case is unique in the history of philosophy since he was the first philosopher ever appointed by the ministry of foreign affairs (*Auswärtiges Amt*) for war propaganda (Flasch 2000, 106). During the first years of the war, he wrote sev-

eral important essays, including the especially influential: *Der Genius des Krieges und der Deutsche Krieg* (Scheler 1986). In this essay, Scheler attempts to give a philosophical justification of war in general and for the German war cause in particular. However, not all of his war writings are affirmative of the war. As Zachary Davis has shown in his article *The Values of War and Peace* (Davis 2012), Scheler undergoes a dramatic shift in perspective and deeply regrets his previous "mobilization" for the German war cause (Flasch 2000, 103-146). In his later writings, he explicitly turns against his belligerent writings and he reevaluates and defends the philosophical concept of peace and pacifism, which he had previously discarded so enthusiastically.

Scheler's *Der Genius des Krieges und der Deutsche Krieg* is one example of how the idea of force permeates war writing. This is manifest in his use of many expressions ranging from "force" and "forces" to several interesting and more sophisticated composite notions, like "force of will" (*Willenskraft*) and "force of sacrifice" (*Opferkraft*), etc. In his view, war becomes the means to bind and release the forces accumulated throughout the course of history – Scheler here speaks of a "uniting force of war" (cf. Scheler 1982, 76) a notion to which I shall return later. Although this understanding of war as an agent within history tenses in a rather mythical direction, Scheler shows that war is something that can only occur in and is hence bound to human realms. Furthermore, he explicitly turns against the idea that war itself is nothing other than an expression of the conflicts of rivalry, already evident in the animal kingdom. In his opinion, human conflicts are entirely different since these human conflicts are always spiritual in their essence, even though they show themselves to be brutally material at times:

That any similar forces are at work here and there, that of course is certain. But only when these forces enter into an interaction with the conscious and reasonable spirit, through whose possession the erect vertebrate becomes the 'human being' within history, only then can they generate these phenomena.<sup>6</sup> (ibid., 14)

Against the fashionable deterministic philosophical positions of his time (Darwinism particularly), Scheler argues that "Human things like war and labor can never be fully understood by biological laws; because the new factor of spirit is added."<sup>7</sup> (ibid., 34). Here, it is important to note that Scheler emphasizes this "new factor of spirit". At first glance, this seems to be an

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<sup>6</sup> "Daß irgendwelche gleichartigen Kräfte hier und dort wirken, das freilich ist gewiß. Aber erst indem diese Kräfte mit dem bewußten, vernünftigen Geiste zu einem einzigartigen Zusammenspiel treten, durch dessen Besitz das aufrechtgehende Wirbeltier erst zum 'Menschen' der Geschichte wird, erzeugen sie jene Erscheinungen." (All quotes from Scheler are translated by the author, C.S.)

<sup>7</sup> "Menschliche Dinge wie der Krieg und die Arbeit können niemals vollständig aus biologischen Gesetzen begriffen werden; denn der neue Faktor 'Geist' kommt bei ihnen hinzu."

innocuous statement that only serves the purpose of a terminological differentiation. If one takes the consequences of this into account, then this means that by definition, every war – not just the First World War – is a spiritual war in its essence. If one connects this to the very specificity of the so-called "spiritual mobilization", and its respective war philosophies (especially *The Ideas of 1914*), it becomes clear that there cannot be any other war than a spiritual one, at least in Scheler's view. Therefore, it is also not surprising that Scheler attributes a creative principle to war, i.e. that war is a principle in history which fosters the spiritual development of humankind, insofar as war is something both spiritual and also deeply human. In his opinion, it is only through conflict that humankind can drive itself further and higher in its spiritual development.

Scheler's fierce rejection of peace, and of Kant's concept of "eternal peace" especially, is partly based on this logic. Scheler proceeds under the assumption that war is something primordial which, as a force, runs through the course of history. As such, it shapes history and fosters its developments. Peace, in turn, is regarded as the universal halting of this movement. In Scheler's view, the concept of eternal peace is even something "reactionary" since it entails that humanity accepts the current state as a universal state and closes itself off from history's future development. As such, it is the most backward idea in the philosophy of history. The strong rejection of eternal peace, and also Kant *per se* as Domenico Losurdo (Losurdo 2014) convincingly shows, is a common feature of German war philosophy and is particularly evident in the *Ideas of 1914*. Werner Sombart, in his book *Händler und Helden* (Sombart 1915), provides the most provocative case, since he even pities old Kant for his "sad writing" on eternal peace, which does not show the great philosopher Kant, but only the "small-minded Kant from Königsberg; grief-stricken, creased and disgruntled over the death of Lampe."<sup>8</sup> (ibid., 93)

In Scheler's opinion, peace is only the temporary bracketing of a more fundamental state of war that runs throughout history.<sup>9</sup> As such, it transforms the force of conflict into various more implicit forms of social conflict in times of peace, something which is not recognized as being a part of this one fundamental force. Scheler's critique of capitalism (Scheler 1982, 36) goes so far as to state that capitalism is only another form of warfare in which individuals are permanently set against each other. The error, therefore, would be to call this state of affairs peace, since it is just a more wisely concealed form of permanent conflict that, fur-

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<sup>8</sup> "Die traurige Schrift des alten Kant über den 'Ewigen Frieden', in der nicht der große Philosoph, sondern nur der über den Tod Lampes vergräunte, gnittrige und verärgerte Partikulier Kant aus Königsberg zu Worte kommt, bildet die einzige unrühmliche Ausnahme."

<sup>9</sup> This of course is reminiscent of Heraclitus' conception of war as "the father of all things" (Diels/Kranz, 22 B 62).

thermore, inhibits the possibility of real conflicts and the subsequent historical, political, and spiritual changes that would arise therefrom.

As indicated above, Scheler holds that war is something specifically and properly human, "eigentümlich Menschliches" (ibid., 14). This idea, however, shifts to various degrees and it is not entirely clear whether man has power over war or war has power over man in the end. This is especially the case when he argues that war is the dynamic or guiding principle of history. War, then, becomes itself a force within history that puts man under its spell. As Scheler says, "War is the dynamic principle of history as such"<sup>10</sup> (ibid., 19). The limitation of human power could not be expressed more clearly as in the following statement where war figures as the return to a creative source, one that shapes humanity's activity and fate:

"Every war is the return to the creative source out of which a state even emerged; diving into the mighty source of life from where the great borderlines are drawn wherein human fate and activity will range furthermore."<sup>11</sup> (ibid., 19-20)

In Scheler's opinion – and in the opinion of many other phenomenologists who reflected on the First World War, as Hans Rainer Sepp has shown in his article *Die Grenze der Solidarität* (Sepp 2014) – war contains the force necessary to give rise to meaning as such and meaningful structures of the life-world in particular; it gives meaning first and foremost to social entities, such as states, communities, shared values, etc. With special regards to Europe, Scheler argues that the war shapes an idea of community that could not arise otherwise. For him, it is a general rule that war is the "strongest force in history to build states, peoples and nations" (*stärkste staaten-, völker- und nationenbildene Kraft der Geschichte*) (ibid., 39). With special reference to the First World War, he argues that the task of "welding together the Western European nations to a kind of unity and solidarity, for which we yet lack a name, might be reserved for this outrageous war"<sup>12</sup> (ibid., 39-40). Hence, in his opinion, the war has an unparalleled "uniting force" (ibid., 76) and figures as a "builder of community" (*Gemeinschaftsbildner*) (ibid., 280) that can generate a new form of unity and solidarity, something which could not arise in any other way.

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<sup>10</sup> "[D]er Krieg [ist] das dynamische Prinzip [...] der Geschichte".

<sup>11</sup> "Jeder Krieg ist Rückkehr auf den schöpferischen Ursprung, aus dem der Staat überhaupt hervorging; Untertauchen in die mächtige Lebensquelle, aus der heraus die großen Grenzlinien bestimmt werden, in der sich menschliches Geschick und Betätigung fernerhin bewegen kann."

<sup>12</sup> "[S]o ist es also diesem unerhörten Kriege vielleicht vorbehalten, die westeuropäischen Nationen zu einer Art der Einheit und Solidarität zusammenschweißen, für die uns noch der Name fehlt." Although the concept of solidarity does not gain any more theoretical substance in Scheler, one could draw connections to Patočka's concept of the "solidarity of the shaken" in the 6<sup>th</sup> Heretical Essay: "the solidarity of those who are capable of understanding what life and death are all about, and so what history is about." (Patočka 1996, 134)

This holds especially true for the people sacrificing their lives for the well-being of the German nation. His notion of the "force of sacrifice" (ibid., 99) captures the thought that the act and ideal of sacrifice radiates a force that is essential to the communal existence of the German people. The centrality of the idea of sacrifice is, of course, not something limited to Max Scheler's thought as almost all war philosophers reflect on it. This can be easily seen in the simple fact that almost every war book is dedicated to the soldiers, friends, sons & daughters, et al. who participated in the war in any way.<sup>13</sup> What is specific to Scheler's view of sacrifice is that he divorces it from the idea of exchange. On the contrary, Scheler tries to think about a form of sacrifice that is given, and which does not receive anything in return. The soldier who dies at the front for his fatherland cannot get anything in return. The massive death of soldiers at the front for the German Fatherland also greatly exceeds any logic of exchange. On the contrary, Scheler thinks that the sacrifice has a meaning in itself and that it bridges the gap between the contingent act of sacrifice and the eternal sphere of values.<sup>14</sup> Scheler holds that the soldier's sacrifice is an act that gives birth to new values, values that integrate themselves in the development of the pantheon of values. Since values have an eternal form, this means that soldiers, in their contingent act, touch the life of the eternal, even feel the "breath of eternity" (*Anhauch des Ewigen*) (ibid., 85). The significance is that the act itself, as an act, points towards the eternal sphere of values; moreover, the act of sacrifice becomes a symbol of these values. In this sense, it can be easily seen how this conception of the sacrifice contains a force, or even becomes a force itself, which goes against traditional forms and theories of sacrifice.

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<sup>13</sup> Sombart's *Händler und Helden* commences with the dedication: "To you, the young heroes out there facing the enemy." (Sombart 1915, III). Rudolf Eucken dedicates his *Die Träger des Deutschen Idealismus* to his sons: "To my dear sons Arnold and Walter who both stand in battle." (Eucken 1916, 7) In a later print of his book, he would adapt his dedication to his sons "who stood in battle." (Eucken 1916/1919, 7). Scheler dedicates his book "To my friends in the battlefield." (Scheler 1917, 8). Ernst Haeckel dedicates his book not only to the soldiers, but also to the bereaved, and declares: "The income of this writing is determined by the support of the bereaved of the German soldiers who sacrificed their lives and domestic happiness to the salvation of the fatherland and the preservation of the international law." (Haeckel 1915, 4) Hence, the cultural importance of the idea of sacrifice cannot be overstated.

<sup>14</sup> This is precisely the point at which his war writings become connected to his masterpiece *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik*, written around the same time as his war writings (Scheler 1966). Another short, but insightful, piece that adds to the puzzle is his essay *Vorbilder und Führer*, which explains the very ways in which idols and leaders are carriers of values who contribute to the objective hierarchy of values (Scheler 1957). In this example, the soldier would fall into the category of the "hero" and hence would foster "vital values". Furthermore, German Historian Ulrich Sieg shows in the second chapter of his book *Geist und Gewalt* how the philosophy of values had a high peak in philosophical and public discourse after the two assassination-attempts on Kaiser Wilhelm I. by Max Hödel and Karl Nobiling in 1878. (Geist 2013, 19-57)



### 3. Max Scheler II: The Adjustment of Force

Before the war had even ended, Scheler became very critical of his own war writings (like many other German philosophers in the so-called *Ideenwende 1916/1917*). In a lecture from 1927 entitled *Der Mensch im Weltalter des Ausgleichs (Man in the Era of Adjustment)* (Scheler 1976a/Scheler 1958), Scheler introduces the idea of "adjustment". Apart from the speech's theoretical ambition, this text constantly returns to the First World War and situates the concept of adjustment against the background of the war. Scheler argues that Europe now finds itself in a severe crisis, following the tragedy of the First World War. This first global war was not only an historical event but is, for him, the most decisive moment in the history of humankind (Scheler 1958, 103). In his view, this war is the watershed between an old age and a new one. The old age was an age of the steady rise of partial-particular forces (ibid.) in conflict: The Peasant wars, the English and the French revolutions, the small German and the Great Russian revolution. The First World War, however, ushers in a new age, given that it is the "first truly common experience" (*erstes wirkliches Gesamterlebnis*) (ibid.). Scheler even argues that this first total experience is the beginning of the history of humankind (ibid.) – it is the beginning of humankind, since it is the first event that bundles all of the partial-particular forces into one common total-experience of force (ibid., 104). All of the particular peoples, in their particular yet different life worlds, are fused into one gigantic total experience in which humankind experiences itself as one for the first time. Since this is a remarkable passage in his speech (in which he even refers to Rudolf Eucken), I will quote it in full:

The last epoch was essentially one of growing tensions which kept becoming more particularized, the epoch of the 'growth of forces,' as Rudolph Eucken called it. This trend was relatively seldom interrupted by violent revolutionary processes which released tension, such as the Peasant Wars, the English and French revolutions, the little German and the great Russian revolution. However, the most general formula applicable to the incipient era; the era of a *universal release of tensions* in human relations, is, it seems to me, that of the *adjustment of forces*. It is, at the same time, an era in which man once again relies on his living spirit and heart and tries to become the *master* of demonic powers which had become *centers of attention* after being unleashed by the last epoch. His purpose is to make these powers serve the salvation of humanity and the meaningful realization of spiritual values. (ibid., 103-104)

In Scheler's writings on the war, one can see that he interprets the First World War as an event of force. It is not only the accumulation but also the release of force that are so unprecedented in this war. However, Scheler became so fascinated with the force of war that he became its dupe, something expressed remarkably well by the quote provided at the begin-

ning of this article. In his late text on *Man in the Era of Adjustment*, he comes to terms with this former demonic spell of force and argues that the coming age will be an age of the global adjustment of the particular forces that, only a few years prior, drove humankind into the yet unparalleled catastrophe that was the First World War. His late speech, therefore, can be seen as a sober realization of his previous intoxication with the idea of force during the First World War. As such, Scheler might be one of the few cases of a former war philosopher who underwent a philosophical demobilization, which Davis showed in detail (see Davis 2012).

However, one has to mention that Scheler's prophecy for the coming age did not come true; the First World War was followed by an even more catastrophic Second World War which then passed into a Cold War in which, for the first time, humankind as a whole came close to self-extinction.<sup>15</sup> Given this, it seems reasonable to ask why this anticipated age of adjustment did not take place.

Somebody who thought about the nature of this coming age was Jan Patočka. Scheler's influence on Patočka is significant and directly observable in a couple of texts that refer to Scheler explicitly. These references are a testament to the fact that Patočka read Scheler's writings extensively throughout his life. These works by Patočka include *Plato and Europe* (Patočka 2002), the *Séminaire sur l'ère technique* (Patočka 1990), but also a lesser known text with the title *Max Scheler. Versuch einer Gesamtdarstellung* (Patočka 1999), which was written on the occasion of the Czech translation of *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos* (Scheler 1976b). This relatively unknown piece is interesting because in it Patočka sets out to achieve the rather ambitious task of introducing the Czech reader to Scheler's thinking in its entirety. In the passages where Patočka addresses Scheler's philosophical engagement in the First World War, it is somewhat surprising to find a rather warm appraisal of Scheler's infamous war writings:

Although belligerent and erroneous without doubt, these reflections do not lack depth and are full of observations which even under different circumstances retain their validity – among them especially the book *Die Ursachen des Deutschenhasses* which has not lost its interest, even today.<sup>16</sup> (Patočka 1999, 342-343)

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<sup>15</sup> The two philosophers who were most preoccupied with this coming age under the permanent threat of nuclear self-annihilation were Karl Jaspers in *Die Atombombe und die Zukunft des Menschen* (Jaspers 1957) and Günther Anders in *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen* (Anders 1956), *Endzeit und Zeitenende* (Anders 1972), and *Hiroshima ist überall* (Anders 1982).

<sup>16</sup> "Zwar kampfeslüstern und zweifellos in die Irre gehend, lassen sie aber doch die Tiefe nicht vermissen und sind voll von Beobachtungen, die auch unter veränderten Vorzeichen Gültigkeit behalten – dazu zählt vor allem das Buch über die Ursachen des Deutschenhasses, das bis heute nichts an Interessantheit verloren hat." (translated by the author, C.S.)

#### 4. Jan Patočka I: The Metaphysics of Force

In the 6<sup>th</sup> essay of his *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, Jan Patočka thinks about the First World War and its consequences for the historical and spiritual situation of present-day Europe – and consequently for the Western world in general. In his view, the First World War was the "decisive event in the history of the twentieth century." (Patočka 1996, 124) It bore witness to an unprecedented unleashing of forces that set the course for the excessive wars to come. In his opinion, the Second World War and, subsequently, the Cold War only repeated this (potential) excess of force, but with an ever-increasing intensity – for Patočka, the difference between these wars is only a quantitative and not a qualitative matter. Although his observations in the *Heretical Essays* only hint at the possible ramifications of the nuclear arms race of the Cold War, the *Séminaire sur l'ère technique* follows these questions in greater detail. There, it becomes evident that humankind has entered a new ontological era under the threat of total self-annihilation (cf. *ibid.*, 114).

His use of the seemingly innocent notion of "force" does not draw attention to itself in this context, and yet this idea of force unfolds into a surprising complexity of ideas that, in the end, results in a dark and even "mythological" (*ibid.*, 116) use of the word. In short, Patočka's remarks raise the question of whether this force is something that remains bound to the realm of man or whether this force is something that takes man into its own realms. Furthermore, Patočka characterizes humankind's struggle in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a struggle between the "forces of the day" and the "forces of the night" (*ibid.*, 6<sup>th</sup> essay). Yet, it is not entirely clear whether these forces are part of this one mythical force; also unclear here is whether these forces become part of the human sphere or not.

The more frequent and terminologically consistent use of force in Patočka begins in the 5<sup>th</sup> heretical essay where Patočka raises the question of whether technological civilization is decadent or, worse, destined to decay. After speaking about the constitutive role that religion – here Christianity specifically – plays, as being the most powerful upsurge against decadence, he combines his analyses on the orgiastic with later analyses of the First World War. In direct reference to Ernst Jünger's *Totale Mobilmachung*, he argues that it is precisely war that enables the "release of orgiastic potentials which could not afford such extremes of intoxication with destruction under any other circumstances." (*ibid.*, 114) Taking up his former analysis of religion, the orgiastic grows out of a lack of distance and a deep fascination with that which transcends the realm of everydayness. The orgiastic is enraptured with the exceptional, "where something more powerful than our free possibility, our responsibility, seems to break

into our life and bestow[s] on it meaning which it would not know otherwise."<sup>17</sup> (ibid., 99) This connection between technological civilization, religion, and the First World War is not obvious at first glance. However, in Patočka's opinion, both religion and the experience of the front in the First World War commit man to a form of transcendence that could not be achieved by any other means.

Patočka's understanding of force is deeply connected to the Heideggerian understanding of technology (Heidegger 1977). His answer to the question of whether technological civilization is decadent depends upon the idea that technology only offers "substitutes where the original is needed." (Patočka 1996, 117) Technology, and the civilization that obeys its laws, leads to man's profound alienation and converts reality into a means through which everything is calculable, mobilizable, and is to be used for any given purpose. Since everything is turned into a force, these partial forces contribute to a rule of a force which is unbound from human control and, hence, seems untamable: "It generates a conception of a force ruling over all and mobilizes all of reality to release the bound forces, a rule of Force actualized through global conflicts." (ibid., 117) At this point, Patočka's understanding of technology functions as an indirect key to understanding his ominous use of force: Technology, or as Heidegger himself would call it the "enframing" (*Ge-stell*) (Heidegger 1977, 19ff.), turned reality into partial forces that for any given purpose are calculable, mobilizable or are transformed into, in Heideggerian terminology, the "standing reserve" (*Bestand*) (ibid., 17). This turns man into the grand accumulator of force, but also integrates him into this force, a station through which force passes:

It seems as if humans have become a grand energy accumulator in a world of sheer forces, on the one hand making use of those forces to exist and multiply, yet on the other hand themselves integrated into the same process, accumulated, calculated, utilized, and manipulated like any other state of energy. (Patočka 1996, 116)

Hence, we can now answer one of the questions we posed above: man is the master of force, but at the same time is also a slave to force. In a very dense paragraph, Patočka states that man has lost his relation to being and instead becomes a force himself in the age of technology, in his social being first and foremost. Being itself has been broken down into partial forces and, as such, being has been converted into a force; however, man has also become "a gigantic transformer, releasing cosmic forces accumulated and bound over the eons." (ibid., 116)

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<sup>17</sup> For an investigation of Patočka's interpretation of religion between the sacred and the profane, between responsibility, irresponsibility and the orgiastic, see also Sternad 2015; concerning the question of religion and Europe, see Sternad 2016.

Since man is so immersed into this world of forces: "Force is the Highest Being which creates and destroys all, to which all and everyone serve." (ibid.116)

To return to the 5<sup>th</sup> heretical essay's initial question, technological civilization is decadent because in this framework, man has lost his relation to being. Instead,

force manifests itself as the highest concealment of Being which [...] is safest where it is exposed to view in the form of the totality of what-is; that is, of forces that organize and release one another, not excluding humans who, like all else, are stripped of all mystery. (ibid., 117)

Nevertheless, this relation to being does not seem to have been lost for good. Instead, Patočka emphasizes: "Hidden within Force there is being which has not ceased to be that light which lights up the world, though now only as a malevolent light." (ibid., 117) Here again, Patočka's thoughts fall in line with the Heideggerian idea that concealment is never just a concealment, but is deeply related to its unconcealment, i.e. the unconcealing concealment or, vice versa, the concealing unconcealment. Taking these thoughts and combining them with his interpretations of the First World War, the consequences are quite staggering: Although the First World War is situated in a technological world, and is as such a technological event, the forces released by the war transcend the realms of this technological framework. In other words, the release of forces through the war could bring being into light. This is precisely the moment when his interpretation of the writings of war veterans Ernst Jünger and Teilhard de Chardin come into play, since their front experiences seem to be the apt depiction, in Patočka's view, of a man who has overcome himself in the trenches.

### **5. Jan Patočka II: The Forces of the Day and the Forces of the Night**

This is the point at which Patočka's narrative of the "metaphysics of force" (ibid., 116) is divided into two governing principles: "the forces of the day" and "the forces of the night." (ibid., 6<sup>th</sup> essay) The forces of the day obey the law of technology. They are the principles by which the world is governed through reason, although this reason is understood as an instrumental form of reason. The logic of the day has turned reality into forces at man's disposal and, hence, is part of the mobilization, which in the war, according to Ernst Jünger, became *total mobilization*. In Patočka's view, the First World War is an event that clearly depicts the logic of the day:

It is the forces of the day which for four years sent millions of humans into hellfire, and the front line is the place which for four years hypnotized all the activity of the industrial age which a participant of the front, Ernst Jünger, called the age of [...] total mobilization. (ibid., 125)

The term "total mobilization" designates the process in which every force becomes a means to an end yet to come. Although Jünger used this description to show the uniqueness of the First World War, Patočka goes beyond Jünger to show that the First World War was only the inception of a whole new century that was to be characterized by this permanent total mobilization. As Patočka shows, total mobilization in itself has no end, since it transforms every force into a standing-reserve waiting for its application. Against Jünger, Patočka argues that: "War as the means of releasing Force cannot end." (ibid., 132) Instead, the substantial difference between war and peace vanished, since peace is also characterized by a total mobilization of forces that inhibit the potential outbreak of war. For Patočka, this war showed something different, i.e. that it is precisely the forces of the day, the instrumental logic of reason that did not end the war, but "mutated into something peculiar which looks neither quite like war nor quite like peace." (ibid., 119)<sup>18</sup>

Patočka's provocative claim, or perhaps indictment, at the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> essay is that we did not yet fully understand the significance and essence of the First World War. This war set something in motion that we tried to understand by means of old concepts from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, concepts which were defined by the reason and the logic of the day. To quote Patočka:

The First World War provoked a whole range of explanations among us, reflecting the effort of humans to comprehend this immense event, transcending any individual, carried out by humans and yet transcending humankind – a process in some sense cosmic. We sought to fit it into our categories, to come to terms with it as best we could – that is, basically, in terms of nineteenth-century ideas. [...] [But] all approached war from the perspective of peace, day, and life, excluding its dark nocturnal side. (ibid., 119-120)

However, and this is decisive for the trajectory of the 6<sup>th</sup> heretical essay, there is also what Patočka ominously calls "the forces of the night". The forces of the night are what slip through the firm grip of technology, mainly because of their non-instrumentality. The reason for getting into this extensive conversation with Teilhard de Chardin and Ernst Jünger is because there is a sacrifice at the front which does not belong to the day's rational calculation anymore. Patočka differentiates between two forms of sacrifice: on the one hand, the relative sacrifice is that which belongs to the realm of trade and calculation. It is instrumental in the

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<sup>18</sup> It is indeed surprising to read a remarkably similar depiction of this permanent mobilization in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. In the last chapter of the second part, Winston reads the ominous forbidden book by Emmanuel Goldstein, the supposed leader of the resistance. In this book, Goldstein explains the genesis of the hyper-totalitarian state and age in which Winston finds himself (Orwell 2008, Part Two, Chapter IX). It is very likely that Patočka knew Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

sense that one gains something for the offer. Absolute sacrifice on the other hand – which Patočka equates with the experience of the front – is something completely different:

The front-line experience [...] is an *absolute* one. Here, as Teilhard shows, the participants are assaulted by *an absolute freedom*, freedom from *all* the interests of peace, of life, of the day. That means: the sacrifice of the sacrificed loses its relative significance, it is no longer the cost we pay for a program of development, progress, intensification, and extension of life's possibilities, rather, it is significant *solely in itself*. (ibid., 129-130)

This *solely in itself* means that it leaves behind the logic of the day, the logic of mutual exchange and calculability. In absolute sacrifice, man gives himself for something, which is nothing, or to accentuate it differently: no-thing. It is precisely this setting itself free from relationality that achieves this absolute form of freedom. (cf. Sá Cavalcante Schuback 2011)

The idea that guides Patočka's thoughts here is that of an eschatology of sacrifice that breaks with the logic of the force. The only thing that overrules force is absolute sacrifice, since it escapes the logic of the day. The sacrifice of giving oneself for nothing, for no-thing, can no longer be converted into a force. Hence, it is only the logic of the day that prolongs the war without end. "War as the means of releasing Force cannot end." (Patočka 1996, 132) Instead, absolute sacrifice amounts to a suffocation, an implosion of force, since man rejects his role as the accumulator of force, denies to force the use of his being, and declines to be its conveyor. This act certainly points to this twofold relation that man maintains with force or, vice versa, that force maintains with man. Force can only manifest itself through man and man can only be empowered through force. To return to the metaphor used above, one can say that there is no need to play with fire, but the deep fascination of touching something that exceeds the ordinary force of man is so intriguing that it sets in motion this vicious spiral towards destruction and self-destruction.

## 6. Conclusion

The First World War was a unique event in the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century insofar as it introduced a new kind of warfare that radically broke with all means of war employed by that point in history. This new warfare introduced a potentially endless war that could only end through complete exhaustion and attrition. In the hellfire of the trenches, humankind was confronted with a new force that far exceeded the control of political diplomacy. Instead, political diplomacy was turned into a fragile balance of forces in which peace was no longer the lasting absence of war, but only the temporary suspension of war. The Cold War's nuclear arms race made it all too clear that the mere absence of gunfire cannot be considered to constitute true peace. To this day, this situation has only changed in degrees, not in principle.

Missiles are pointed at almost every country on earth. The frightening system of MAD (*Mutually assured destruction*) guarantees that nobody attacks first without facing the consequence of self-annihilation in almost the same instant.

Max Scheler and Jan Patočka were confronted by dark aspects of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and responded in their own ways. Although their situations were dramatically different, they both seemed to believe that man's complex relation to force was key to understanding the excessive nature of the previous century. Many philosophers, and other intellectuals of all kinds, were fascinated with this idea of force in the First World War; they fueled its fire by means of enthusiastic speeches and writings, and looked forward to the advent of a new beginning of history. As both Scheler and Patočka, showed, this truly was the beginning of a new age with which we still wrestle today.

Scheler had his moment of painful realization, even undergoing a conversion of sorts, upon realizing that this spiritual mobilization was without end. Interestingly, Scheler clearly saw his dangerous fascination with force and proposed a counter-concept meant to reorient humankind towards a global adjustment of conflicting forces. Although Scheler admits that this idea describes nothing peaceful *per se*, it still leads to the hope that humankind will realize itself in a higher form of being that he calls not the "Übermensch", but the "Allmensch" (Scheler 1958, 101-102). His death in 1928 prevented him from seeing the future events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and it also prevented him from the sad realization that this old age of increasing particular forces did not end with the First World War; it only continued in increasingly violent outbursts of force over the remainder of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Jan Patočka had the fortune, or bad luck, to have been born after Scheler and, hence, witnessed what Scheler could not have foreseen. In the middle of the Cold War, and under communist oppression, Patočka takes up these ideas again and reflects upon the century's excessive nature. For him, the First World War was also the decisive event in the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and introduced an incalculable force into history with which man had to struggle. Unlike Scheler, Patočka does not see an age of adjustment on the horizon. On the contrary, Patočka seeks a way to break through force precisely at the place of its clearest expression, i.e. trench warfare, as depicted in Ernst Jünger and Teilhard de Chardin. In these accounts, Patočka outlines an implosion of force that rejects force's domination over man. In other words: where Scheler saw hope in a global adjustment of force, Patočka sought an implosion of force in the *locus* of its greatest excess.

The example of the concept of "force" shows an unsurpassed mobilization of philosophy during the First World War. What it also shows is precisely how the First World War was not only a historical, but also a philosophical event that left a crucial imprint on the philosophy of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and maybe even the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The connection between Max Sche-



ler and Jan Patočka is so rich because they both responded to events that were almost impossible to respond to, both by using this ominous concept of force. What we can take from their analyses is not so much their interpretations of the events of their time, but rather the crucial insight that the 20<sup>th</sup> century gave birth to forces which far exceed humanity's capacity to control them. This is especially obvious in the mobilization of the masses, but also in the technology that goes into warfare today. Hence, what we can learn from these devastating examples is to be aware of the seeds and the growth of all kinds of mobilization and to avoid, by all means, fighting against force with force. To quote Patočka one last time: "Whither do such perspectives lead? War as the means of releasing Force cannot end." (Patočka 1996, 132)

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