

PREFACE

IN 2009 WE PUBLISHED a book called *Social Theory*, which attempts to provide a comprehensive overview of developments in sociological theory and adjacent fields in the German-, English-, and French-speaking worlds since the Second World War. Our latest joint effort is another book of theory and history of thought. This book goes much further back in history but has a narrower thematic focus. We are concerned here with the history of social theorizing on war and peace. The period in question extends from the early modern revolution in thinking about political issues in the work of Thomas Hobbes to the immediate present. There was of course an extensive philosophical, theological, and historiographical discourse on war and peace before Hobbes. By beginning with Hobbes, however, we are following a well-founded convention common within philosophy and the social sciences, one evident in the work of authors from Leo Strauss to Talcott Parsons. Our account revolves around the development of sociological theory, though supplemented by consideration of those thinkers whose writings—whatever their specific disciplinary affiliation—have exercised and continue to exercise a great influence on the development of sociology and the social sciences. We have not been concerned to achieve encyclopedic completeness, but we have tried to write a coherent narrative presenting a history of theory rather than the history of a discipline.

The key justification for our project is that, particularly when it comes to the topic of war and peace, we can fully comprehend and evaluate arguments only in their historical contexts. A historical account enables us to observe current assumptions and conclusions, as it were, *in statu nascenti*. We are not advocating a historical reductionism here, as if every contemporary idea were merely a lingering echo of classical thinking. But the practice of analyzing arguments in context helps us take a step back and gain perspective when thinking about the present.

We decided to organize the mass of relevant material on an essentially chronological basis. One alternative would have been to structure our account around paradigms, whether still emerging or with a lengthy

tradition often extending over vast stretches of time (such as “power-political realism”). We decided against this because it would have forced us to indulge in numerous schematizations and repetitions; it is seldom possible to confine the most interesting thinkers within the clear-cut boundaries of “paradigms.”

Like our previous joint effort, this book too is based partly on academic courses;¹ in this case, political motifs play a greater role. But we should mention that the origins of this book project also lie in a plan partially pursued but eventually abandoned. Years ago we made the decision to write a better and more comprehensive version of Günther Wachtler’s (1983) commendable but diminutive volume with its brief excerpts from important social scientific analyses of the armed forces. The introduction to this planned volume grew exponentially, far beyond our original intentions; we now present it, in expanded form, as a publication in its own right. Both authors have already published various texts on parts of this history. We have taken the liberty of drawing on our earlier work for some of the passages in this new book. This applies especially to passages from Hans Joas’s book *War and Modernity* (2003), though there the history of theory was just one motif among others and the focus was on the relationship between the experiences that constitute values and experiences of violence; it applies also to the introduction by Wolfgang Knöbl and Gunnar Schmidt to their jointly edited volume *Die Gegenwart des Krieges* (2000, *The Presence of War*) and the essay by Wolfgang Knöbl on the paradoxes of markets in violence: “Krieg als Geschäft” (2006b, *War as Business*).

We have sought to highlight one *leitmotiv* of our history of the relationship between social thought and war by using a term not used before as far as we know, namely the “suppression of war.” This choice of term is rooted in the observation that throughout the period examined here—from Hobbes to Habermas as it were—wars are often constitutive of theory construction, as the informative background to ideas, yet they do not appear in theories themselves at all or only to a small extent. This at least raises the suspicion that there is a mechanism at work here of the kind described by Sigmund Freud. According to him, frightening and threatening experiences perceived as negative are the very ones the conscious mind is likely to shut out—without robbing them of their potency. As our account shows, wars and periods of escalating tensions are often times of intensive interpretive production, featuring a highly positive mythologization of “us” in contrast to an equally negative mythologization of “them.” Once hostilities have abated, these interpretations are often

discarded or denied with much shame. This may apply to the relevant thinkers and scholars themselves or to their successors and admirers. In any case, wars represent a special affective challenge to our thinking, to which people often react with strategies of avoidance or mythologization or with historical self-consolation, as when a particular war is interpreted as the last that will be waged before the rise of a peaceful world.

But it would be a misunderstanding of our choice of terminology to imagine that we wish to psychoanalyze theory production. We are neither qualified nor motivated to do so. We will not be tracing the consequences of the suppression of war in the work of those authors in which it is most strikingly evident. Our focus is on the thematization of war, whatever marginal or distorted forms this may take. In-depth exploration of how social theory has approached the topic of war over the centuries can and should contribute to overcoming the “suppression of war” and to making the contemporary social sciences more realistic in this regard.

This book, originally published in German in 2008, has been slightly revised and expanded for the English-language edition. The Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies (FRIAS, School of History), at which both authors are presently fellows, has offered excellent working conditions that have made it easy for us to complete that work.

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