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Readers' Comments: The End of Disarmament? Making Sense of the German Debates (Rejoinder to A. Sørensen)

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I benefitted from reading Asger Sørensen's contribution on the special issue of the journal *Emancipations* on the war in Ukraine (Vol. 1, Iss. 4 [2022], Art. 7), which I found insightful and clearly argued.¹ The reference to Kant definitely makes sense and is convincing. The question of ideology is something, though, that I see somewhat differently. This is probably due to the different discourse situation in Germany.

Here, an ideological discourse dominates in the mass media. Its core content is propaganda for neo-militarism, based on adulation of the state and the nation. Many authors and discourse participants seem to be caught in 'poor immediacy' (to quote Hegel: *schlechte Unmittelbarkeit*). The closeness of the conflict and, what is more, the permanent emotional reporting and comments in the sense of an ethics of conviction (to quote Weber: *Gesinnungsethik*) in the German leading media seems to seduce many discourse participants to urging for arms deliveries in any quantity and quality. They are apparently unwilling or unable to distinguish between the question of support for a country that has been attacked and a general ideological justification of nations and of states. The ideological legitimization of nation and of state perpetuates the justification of warfare.

The problem of *Unmittelbarkeit* in these discourses in Germany I see in the following: Apparently, the mode of *Unmittelbarkeit* satisfies the need to finally be able to identify with NATO in good conscience. Therefore, the bellicism of the Green Party and their foreign minister has strong features of *Gesinnungsethik*. Jürgen Habermas recently criticized this, in a moderate tone, in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.

The following is not intended as a criticism or a refutation of Asger Sørensen's contribution. My intention is to show what is at stake concerning the ideological front lines in Germany.

Here I see, in principle, five formations within the (broadly speaking) left-wing discourse in Germany. The first one calls for unrestricted military support for Ukraine. This formation is by far the largest. It advocates an unconditional and unqualified

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espousal of the liberating power of the transatlantic military alliance (e.g., authors of the weekly *Jungle World*). Those who do not do so appear as being caught in Russian propaganda, being anti-American or nationalist (or all of the above). The second formation is by far the smallest (e.g. authors of the weekly *Junge Welt*). It denies that the Russian invasion of Ukraine is a war of aggression. They hold that Putin's use of the military is justified because a threat to Russia emanates from the West. The third formation does not deny that there is a Russian war of aggression (e.g. Wolfgang Streeck in the magazine *Das Argument* or Alice Schwarzer and Sara Wagenknecht). But they emphasize that "the West" provoked it by escalation policy. Therefore, it calls for de-escalation and advocacy of a ceasefire and immediate negotiations. The fourth formation (e.g. Jürgen Habermas in the daily *Süddeutsche Zeitung*) in principle advocates military support for Ukraine. But, like Habermas, they critically point out that the military supporters do not name a clear war goal. They criticize that instead of such a goal, the magic formula "Ukraine must not lose this war" is constantly repeated. However, this formula only conceals the fact that either one does not want to say out loud that one's own war goal is the complete defeat of Russia – or that one does not admit it to oneself. The fifth formation (e.g. authors of the monthly magazine *Konkret*) argues that large sections of the left are taking the opportunity to convert. The left-liberal-ecological mainstream would welcome the fact that the governing parties SPD and Die Grünen have turned their back on the goals of the peace movement. The assistance for Ukraine would become an ideological justification for a general neo-militaristic foreign and domestic policy now and in the future.

Stefan Lessenich, director of the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, rightly calls it a "double standard" when "war is outlawed in Europe, but wars are allowed to happen in the rest of the world"; when "reference is made to Russian propaganda of lies, but silence is kept about the Iraq war built on lies"; when "homage is paid to a European canon of values, but it is ignored on the Mediterranean". Lessenich suspects that this kind of political ideology production is ultimately "not about the weal and woe of Ukrainians, but about German economic, security and room temperature interests." "What needs to be defended is the production and consumption way of working and living" of Western capitalist societies. Lessenich insists, against the policies of the SPD and the Greens, which

do not question the principle of competition and private ownership of the means of production: "What is needed is a radical change in our economic order, which is not only deadly here and now." (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*)

This corresponds in principle to my own view (as I argued last year in the daily *ND*). The turn to militarism of the SPD and Die Grünen was not surprising. In 1999, when the SPD and Die Grünen were in government in the Federal Republic, they participated in NATO's war of aggression against Serbia-Montenegro without a UN mandate. This intervention did not bring any humanitarian benefits. Things are different today. After 30 years of deregulated world market chaos, the configuration of antagonistic world domination into new power blocs is picking up speed. The U.S. needs large capacities in the South Pacific region in its fight against rival China if it is to remain a hegemonic power. NATO's Europe must position itself powerfully against China's future appendage, Russia. Germany is reorganizing itself. It wants to get serious again about national and alliance defense. Energy dependence on the USA seems now to be in the national interest. The aggressive U.S. policy against its economic rival China, with growing provocations around Taiwan, is fully supported by the Green foreign minister. It would be in line with this if Germany were to set itself the goal of becoming the European nuclear power alongside France and Great Britain. The ideological justification of all this is the defense of Western values against threats from Russia and China.

I see a break in the left discourse (in the broad sense) in Germany that consists in the following. Some say that "our Western values" are being defended in Ukraine. Therefore, the EU and NATO would be obliged to help the Ukrainian armed forces with military equipment. This is in line with Michael Walzer's position, when he claimed in his seminal *Just and Unjust Wars* (1977): The legitimacy of wars should not be established on the basis of power interests and political goals, but on the basis of the opponents' concepts of justice. Walzer asserted that wars are "sometimes necessary" and just, if they are morally justified.

The opponents of this view hold that an ethical justification of wars based on values, norms and duties is outdated. In February 2022, a new era has begun. The time of "value-based" and "norm-driven" politics of the last 30 years is over. Interests and power would again be enforced with the instrument of military force. However, I

think it is a transfiguration from hindsight to present the matter as if, after the collapse of the bipolar world order 30 years ago, politics had been based on ethical values and oriented toward norms. After the collapse of Eastern bloc socialism, the interests of the political and economic rulers could be enforced without open warfare in the centers of the northern hemisphere. Wars took place in peripheral locations. The NATO attack on Serbia-Montenegro was already pretty close to home. And now there is war in NATO's European backyard. This is experienced as disruptive.

The concept of *bellum justum* was and is intended to legitimize warfare ethically. Initially, however, it was intended as a concept that legalized warfare. If warfare is no longer seen as a fact of nature, its goals must be rationally determinable. The means for the ends of war are evaluated legally and morally. That war is justified as a defensive measure was already taught by Cicero. And isn't attack the best defense? Today, ministries of war are called "ministries of defense" and people talk about "defensive weapons." In addition, there are justifications that place human rights above international law or legitimize a "War on Terror." So even if war is considered legitimate only in the case of defense, there can be a very broad concept of when exactly this occurs.

In bourgeois and post-bourgeois societies, law is the form that domination and violence give themselves. Law is the condition for the validity of their values and norms. The content of law is thus domination and violence. If they are recognized, peace can prevail within and outside of legally constituted states. Since the 19th century, wars have been fought as national or world wars between sovereign states. Legal and statutory foundations had been created for this purpose. Murderous conflicts can take place on legally secured ground. This is not to be underestimated. A normative barrier, as it were, is now built into the use of force: a standard against which its use could be measured. From this normative barrier, Kant and other philosophers of the Enlightenment were able to work out the criterion by which it can be measured whether military force is appropriate. It is appropriate if and only if its purpose is its own abolition. If it serves its own perpetuation, it cannot be justified.

Beyond normative foundations, state-organized killing in the 20th century took on dimensions of immeasurable horror. But this is not due to moral oblivion. It is related to the aporia of the philosophy of bourgeois enlightenment. This consists in

the fact that monopolized violence, which as a function of domination is as always particular, gives itself the form of universal law in the bourgeois state. Particularistic domination is replaced by the domination of universally valid laws. Max Horkheimer has seen in this the real reason for "the limitedness of the bourgeois concept of man". Laws alone do not lead to the liberation of all people. For the equality of formal law, which constitutes the bourgeois state, codifies the material inequality of the owners. The sublime general law prohibits the poor and the rich alike from sleeping under bridges, Anatole France once commented on the bourgeoisie's understanding of the law.

Convinced that war could no longer be a legitimate means of state policy, the UN proclaimed after the Second World War that the "right to war" must be replaced by a "right against war". The "right against war" was to be endowed with sanctioning power. From this was deduced: Warfare is justified in certain cases. Thus, the *right against war* ultimately became a *right to war* again. This is absurd. But the absurdity is dispelled if one shares the assumption that only the community of states may possess the *ius ad bellum* and exercise it only *contra bellum*. Against this background (which affirms the ideological concept of the state) the twists and lies can be used to justify warmongering by a UN mandate (e.g., the alleged "Serbian horseshoe plan" against the Kosovo Albanians, the "Iraqi weapons of mass destruction").

Historically, it may seem that war can only be ended by war. But such an ending continues what should be ended. One cannot get out of this aporia by the ideological justification of participation in wars. "You can only negotiate or wage war," said Alexander Kluge in the weekly *Die Zeit*. "No one can win. Whoever wins crashes. [...] You can only end war by finding the small possible space where peace would be possible."

When Michael Walzer legitimized *just war*, he let the cat out of the bag at the end: "regime changes" are legitimate if they help justice to win. That such considerations do not only determine the war aims of the USA was, of course, already known before the war of aggression against Ukraine. The prospect of self-extinction of the human species by nuclear weapons has made the assumption that wars can be rational and just ad absurdum. Today, more than ever, it is important to

define those interests which stand in the way of the rational interest in a humanity based on solidarity. It is absurd to call for the German Bundeswehr to be upgraded as quickly as possible. After all, the military upgrading in "the West" has not prevented the invasion of Ukraine. "The West" has been canceling disarmament treaties since the 1990s – most recently the INF agreement of 1987, which was intended to limit the danger of nuclear first strikes. **A new justification for the arms race is not in the rational interest of a self-determining community of all the people.** It cements the conditions that are antithetical to its realization. In this I see the ideological superstructure in the German discourse that hangs like a fog over reasonable considerations of how to help Ukraine against its being invaded by the armed forces of a regional imperialist.

Würzburg, 10 March 2023.