

THE LOSS OF INDIVIDUALITY IN WAR: EXISTENTIALIST APPROACH

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Abstract: The article explores the issue of loss of individuality in the war according to theoretical perceptions of existentialist philosophers. The problem is observed and discussed, focusing mainly on the cases of two world wars that emerged in the 20th century. These wars had a huge global impact not only on social and political life worldwide but also on the philosophical perceptions of human life valorization and existence.

Based on the comparative analysis of the philosophical views of different thinkers, the article reveals the loss of human individuality both in social conditions and on the ontological level.

It is concluded that if the philosophy of World War I observed death as a unifying factor, including an equalization that excludes the individual, then existentialism, as a condition of the reality of widespread death, considers it as a phenomenon that opens the spiritual eye of a person to the reality of death. As the development of technology and wars are closely related, world wars represent a direct threat by primitive nations that assimilate and use technology to absorb nations endowed with a peace-loving and creative spirit. This is a big threat to humanity in terms of its dehumanization and destruction.

Keywords: individuality, existentialism, war, dehumanization, social equalization, a spirit of abstraction, anthropocentrism.

In the reflection of intellectuals, World War I followed the logic of previous centuries' wars until the scale of the wars in the new era and the tragedy brought by the newest military equipment were not fully realized. For this reason, in the philosophy of World War I, "the concepts of state, nation, and national dignity were still fet-

terized (Fromm, 1973, p. 211). On the one hand, the war was perceived by many intellectuals as a condition for national consolidation, unity, and an awakening of the national spirit, and on the other hand, as a condition for showing heroism. In fact, World War I was still a pan-European war during which "the connection between tech-

nology and destructiveness was not yet fully expressed. For example, airplanes were bombed moderately, and tanks were still the continuation of traditional weapons. However, the Second World War brought about a decisive change: the airplane became a means of mass destruction (Fromm, 1973, pp. 403-404). In this respect, World War II showed that two important factors, the unprecedented geographical coverage of war and the use of weapons of mass destruction, demand not only a re-interpretation of the ideal of national unity and heroism but also of new phenomena “unknown” to philosophy, caused by wars, in general, and modern wars, in particular. Moreover, this is how the nature of collectivity and heroism change and how both deny the individual. At the beginning of World War I, the demand to subordinate the individual spirit to the national one during the war was common in the understanding of “public” philosophy. Characteristically, Erich von Ludendorff (1919), the author of the concept of total war, points out that “Every German has to act like a man and selflessly obey the national order as well as forget his individuality” (p. 620). The condition for the expression of national spirit is the suppression of individuality. However, how in times of total war or under conditions of militarized reality, the consolidation negates the individual, and how does the character of heroism, which seemingly enables the expression of the individual, change? To this extent, we have to turn to the polemic of 20th-century German and French existentialism and philosophical perception of war, which, as a conglomerate of somewhat intertwined philosophical and literary motifs, was nothing more than a philosophical reaction to the world war and what the world war brought to life and revealed (the World War II made more obvious all the accumulated problems and phenomena of the industry and technology development) new framework of phenomena and questions to be investigated. German and French philosophy of the World War II tried to comprehend the war in terms of ontology or phenomenological ontology, recognizing the shortcomings of the historical (Henri Bergson) and metaphysical (Max Scheler, Paul Natorp) methods used to explain the war during the World War I: a factual analysis, on the one hand, and metaphysical abstraction, on the other hand.

From the beginning to the end of the World War I, in the first series of reports presented to the French Academy in 1914, Henri Bergson, examining the historical and political reasons of the war origins, tried to explain the militarization of Germany under the influence of Prussian militarism and the demonic image of Bismarck. This report of Bergson, as it is showcased in Caterina Zanfi’s “Bergson and German Philosophy: 1907-1932”, has found a great response among German intellectuals. Many philosophers and sociologists such as Gerhart Hauptmann, Thomas Mann, Fritz Mauthner, Georg Simmel, Max Scheler, and others reacted to it. Mann, for example, in his article “Thoughts during the War” accused French intellectuals of interpreting the war as a struggle of civilization against “barbarism” (Bergson used this very word), and in another article, “Apolitical Reflections” (1918), contrasted the moral and ethical aspects of German civilization to the humanist spirit of French democratic politics, mocking the French view of any success of the Entente during the war as a triumph of spirit over matter. M. Scheler’s position about Bergson was moderate. According to Scheler, Bergson unwittingly paid tribute to the anti-German “military psychosis”. The reaction of Simmel, representative of the “philosophy of life”, was also relatively moderate. In Bergson’s personality, he saw with regret the Frenchman’s “hopeless inability to understand the German spirit” (Zanfi, 2020, p. 237), and only another great representative of the “philosophy of life,” Keyserling, welcomed the great French philosopher’s stance and his will to keep “the intellectual honesty” (Zanfi, 2020, p. 238).

It is interesting that during World War I and World War II, the “philosophy of life” and existentialism were influenced by the former (in some sense, existentialism can be considered as “philosophical impressionism” (Rickert, 1920, pp. 3-4) were reconciled in the context of German and French philosophical confrontation on the issue of war, a circumstance that substantiates the truth of these two methods of philosophical approaches of understanding war.

In this context, S. Luft points out that Bergson’s approach was historical, while even the most thorough examination of the historical sources and causes of war cannot claim to make

¹ See more in detail in the following work: Zanfi, 2020.

sense of the phenomenon of war. That's why Scheler and Natorp were right that historians, social scientists, and sociologists cannot explain war apart from examining the causes of specific wars, which by its nature is a "metaphysical event" and can only have a metaphysical justification (Luft, 2007, p. 4).

Scheler, who considered the war as just and necessary event, in the treatise "The Metaphysics of War," emphasized it from the viewpoint of national spirit rise. According to him, "During the war, the reality of the nation becomes actually visible and tangible to the spiritual eye, and in terms of peace, it is the individual's turn to justify his reality as a condition emerged to justify his own existence". In this regard, Scheler highlights that everyone feels that the existence of the nation becomes more essential and obvious than the existence of his own person. And everyone feels that he/she has to practically justify and win his existence in front of the nation as a merit and not like it was before when the nation had to justify itself in front of the individual. The significance of war's metaphysical cognition lies precisely in this context (Scheler, 1917, pp. 120-121).

After Germany's defeat in World War I, however, Scheler's worldview underwent a significant change. According to him, although the war unites the representatives of the same nation around the national spirit, this unification is destined to be short-lived.

In general, the transformations in the worldview of the great theorist of the World War I German philosophy express the tendency of extinguishing the common enthusiasm of the philosophy, art and literature of the beginning of the World War I (let's remember the futurist symbols praising war, in which it was even considered the health care of the world. "Long live war, only it can cleanse the world, glory to arms, love for the motherland, the destructive power of anarchism, the highest Ideal of destroying everything," wrote Marinetti (1986, p. 160) in the first of futurism manifesto // expressing the militant spirit of the time) and the rooting and widespread of the existentialist worldview. Scheler himself, in his later work "Philosophical Worldview," even refuses the idea of considering the nation as the basis of true identification. If in the "Metaphysics of War," the ideal is the nation, the rise of national spirit, and the collective person (geis-

tige Gesamtperson), then in the "Philosophical worldview" the "realm of the absolute" and what replaces God, including the nation, should be considered as an idol. "A human being can fill that sphere of absolute essence and perfect goodness without noticing the finite things and goods with which he deals in his life, as if they were absolute; so one can do with money, or with a nation, or with every person. And that is fetishism and idolatry. If a human being has to get out of that mental state, then he must learn two things: first, thanks to self-analysis, he must realize his own idol that has occupied the place of the absolute being and the perfect good. Then, he has to smash and destroy it, that is, return the extremely adored object to its relative place in a finite world. At that time, the realm of the absolute appears again. And only in this case the human being is able to independently philosophize about the absolute" (Scheler, 1968, p. 5).

With this observation, Scheler already comes closer to the spirit of Christian existentialism, even if both his metaphysical interpretation of war and this observation about the "realm of the absolute" ignore the individual spirit, which is extremely valuable in Christian existentialism and particularly, for Gabriel Marcel - a prominent philosopher close to Catholic personalism. Like Jean-Paul Sartre, Marcel tried to personify, as individual destinies, what cannot be expressed through philosophy. The humanism of existentialism lies in this anthropocentrism and valorization of the individual (it is not in vain that Sartre tries to prove this in his essay "Existentialism is a Humanism")². German and French existentialism differ significantly from each other, and this difference lies in the permanent difference between German and French philosophy in general, which Germaine de Staël has analyzed. According to him, the worldview of moral and social orientation is rooted in French philosophy, according to which the person and society are the core of the universe. The scope of interests of French philosophy is related to the problems of practical reason, while German philosophy is characterized by a theoretical approach to the world and the coordination of ideas aimed at the cosmic totality and the understanding of the hidden beginning of existence. French philosophic thought is social, nay more personalistic, it ema-

² See more in detail in the following work: Sartre, 1996.

nates from human and is addressed to human (Staël de, 1856). “In Germany they study books, in France they study human” (Staël de, 1856, p. 81). The same applies to the German and French branches of existentialism. German existentialism tries to create a system or make theoretical generalizations; French existentialism tries to observe a person from the inside and is characterized by the tendency of individual reliving of war and empirical meaning. The two great religious and atheistic existentialists, Gabriel Marcel and Jean-Paul Sartre, were deeply humanistic thinkers. Karl Jaspers’s philosophy is also humanistic, while Martin Heidegger’s entire philosophy, as Emmanuel Faye tried to substantiate it in his detailed and comprehensive work “Heidegger: The Introduction of Nazism into Philosophy”³, is adapted to the Nazi ideology.

Referring to Heidegger’s main work “Being and Time” (Heidegger is widely regarded as the greatest philosopher of the twentieth century who has collaborated with the Nazis), Emmanuel Faye (2021) draws attention first to his tendency to abandon “any philosophy of individual existence” and observes that it is not difficult to understand why Descartes’ philosophy became the main target of that country (p. 71). The main category of existentialism that is noted as “existence” is quite vague in Heidegger’s who rejects any certainty that can be based on the acceptance of foreign cultures or a universal understanding of existence.

Heidegger rejects any philosophy of self and human individuality, contrasting the self reduced to the level of “formal specification” with the concept of identity (Selbst), which contains nothing individual and which is given to man as destiny (Schicksal), which in its turn, can only be imaginable “in the temporality and historicity of existence”. That destiny itself is the “happening” (Geschehen), a “state” (Geschick), which “in no way consists of individual destinies, just as being-with-others cannot be understood as the co-presence of several subjects”. According to him, in true existence there is no individual existence. It is a “general state” (Geschick) included in “the coexistence and the realization of the nation” (das Geschehen der Gemeinschaft, des Volkes) (Faye, 2021, pp. 70-72). Faye insists that the hidden and real project of Heidegger’s major

work was the elimination of individual thinking to make room for a “radical individuation” (radikalste individuation), realized not in the individual but in the organic inseparability of the nation’s coexistence (Faye, 2021, p. 73).

It is clear that the group spirit liberated from the individual is controllable. And this was achieved by fascism through its ideology, which was also supported by philosophy, including Heidegger. Quoting Heraclitus in one of his lectures propagating Nazism, he directly declares the imperative to win the lost war in a spiritual struggle. “We are obliged to “win this war with spirit, that is, the *struggle* is the *most precious law* of our existence”. The struggle is “the greatest test of existence”. Faye showcases that Heidegger’s philosophy constantly uses the plural for the head of state and that the concepts of struggle (Kampf) and war (Krieg) are identical in his understanding (Faye, 2021, pp. 198-199). Accordingly, the ultimate goal of that existential struggle is not the unification of the German higher national spirit or the national spirit forging in the struggle, as for Scheler (whose influence on Heidegger is undeniable), but decided once and for all the outcome of the dilemma of becoming a ruler or a slave.

For Scheler, the war performed an existentially important function in addition to uniting the nation, and from this perspective, Scheler’s philosophical anthropology is closer to human being and personality than Heidegger’s existentialism. Scheler (1917) points out that “After overcoming the first horror of sharpening bullets, the genius of war brings our spiritual eye closer to death. It reconciles the innate thirst for life that hides death from us with the terrible reality of death” (pp. 124-125). Indeed, as Fritz Mauthner (1914) observed in his essay “War and Philosophy”, “the philosophy of war teaches us to discover the meaning of death”(p. 10). Death is a key issue in the philosophy of existentialism. In this regard, Emmanuel Mounier (1948) states that death cannot be forgotten, taking into account that it is the sad concern of existentialism (p. 38). In the ontological sense, “war does not change anything in the loneliness of a person against death” (Hermans, 2018, p. 128), but in the conditions of the ubiquity of war and death, the meaning of death is revealed. Death is even perceived as a gift of war and the whole range of existentialist motifs revolves around the relationship with death, the

³ See more in detail in the following work: Faye, 2021.

axis of death (often abstracted from the historical context). In a certain sense, death itself, as a rebellion against the ultimate truth of human life, can also become the hidden impetus for the manifestation of human personality and heroism during war, whether we consider it from the perspective of religious or atheistic existentialism. For religious existentialism, it is a spiritual triumph; a condition of immortality, and for atheistic existentialism, which accepts the absurdity of existence, heroism is an adventure. If existence is meaningless and absurd, then what difference does it make when, from what, how and where a person will die? For Andre Malraux's adventurous heroes and for Malraux (1928, 1930, 1937) himself, who voluntarily participated in the resistance movement with his own airplane, the life was a bet, and it didn't matter where that bet would take place: going to the front voluntarily, robbing the Khmer temple or participating in the Canton People's Revolution⁴. The complete lack of belief in the afterlife in the conditions of the ubiquity of death and the worthlessness of life can make the struggle and its heroic outcome truly hopeless.

Existentialism tries to understand the person facing death, in a "borderline situation" and motivated by self-knowledge. The war is a large-scale "borderline situation". For person, the war creates such situations, in which he can no longer avoid self-knowledge as in peacetime. And in this sense, in contrast to the existentialism of metaphysics, which emphasizes the factor of consolidation around the national spirit, war is perceived as a gift, that is, not a nation, but a person, which needs to be observed from the inside. Meanwhile, the metaphysical interpretation of war is abstracted from human being and his personality. Unlike the approaches of German metaphysics, French existentialism starts from the ideal of human inimitability, individuality and uniqueness. Jerzy Kosak, a Polish researcher of the philosophy and literature of existentialism, presents Gabriel Marcel's existentialism with these general lines. He rightly states that according to Marcel, the human as a person is one of many. Partly, he is an element to be observed and measured from the outside. He is a part of society, but as an individual, he is unique, a

unique spiritual existence that is absolute to any objective and social reality, as well as compared to any other human personality. As an individual, person is always unique and it is impossible to observe him only from the outside, considering him as an element of the general or whole: family, class, state, nation or humanity (Kosak, 1980, pp. 132-133). Marcel opposes the very metaphysical abstraction and encroachment on individuality in war. In his article "The Spirit of Abstraction as a Factor in War" directly opposing Scheler and describing some of the manifestations of the spirit of abstraction in wartime, he writes: "Once the emotional basis of the spirit of abstraction is recognized, it becomes clear that it must be placed at the basis of the horrors of any war and the understandings associated with them. The most important of them is the following: when I am required (by a state, a party, a faction, or a religious sect) to take part in military operations against the people that I have to demolish, I immediately lose the consciousness of the individual reality regarding the creature I am compelled to kill (Marcel, 2018, pp. 120-121).

The spirit of abstraction radically changes the perception of heroism. In heroism, combining the strength of body and spirit, Scheler (1917) saw not paganism aimed at earthly glory, but a combination of Christian suffering and chivalry, united by self-sacrifice and rapprochement with God (p. 125). Marcel, answering the question "is heroism itself a value?" writes: "What do they want to say when they attribute value to heroism itself?" It seems obvious to me that value and significance are associated with a certain excitement which is a completely subjective feeling that can be extracted by the one who seeks it. The hierarchy would be justified here only if understandings of a different order were taken as a basis, which had nothing to do with either heroism or passion; for example, the understanding of public benefit. While, according to Marcel, the public benefit belongs to the class of inferior idols and the heroism is heroification only when it is the heroism of a martyr. Under the concept of martyr he understands "witness" (Marcel, 2007, p. 278).

But in this sense, both Scheler and Marcel still follow the logic of previous centuries' wars nature. Heroism, whatever perception is put under this concept, could be understood as a way of showing individuality during war, but total war

⁴ See more in detail in Malraux's following books: Malraux, 1928, 1930, 1937.

changes the nature of heroism, and therefore its reliving, which is, in fact, the result of technical wars.

How the “spirit of abstraction” manifests itself in the age of weapons of mass destruction is well illustrated in an example cited by Karl Jaspers, in the following words of an interview given at the awarding of a young American lieutenant for heroism after the World War II: “I feel like a cogwheel in a huge infernal machine,” admitted the lieutenant, whose name Jaspers probably deliberately does not mention. The more I think about it, the more I imagine that since the day I was born I have always been a cogwheel in one mechanism or another. Every time I tried to do what I wanted, something incomparably bigger than me appeared in front of me which took me to another place predetermined for me” (Jaspers, 2017, p. 109). This means that in the conditions of war, the possibility of the manifestation of human personality comes to the fore, intensifying the reliving of powerlessness to manifest that personality. A person realizes that “heroism” is only a matter of instruction and mechanized execution, in which the most important component of the feat of self-sacrifice is missing, that is, there is no personal sacrifice in heroism. And we will not be mistaken if we say that the sacrifice of the personal is the way to gain the individual. A person realizes the deep inconsistency between the state awards and public opinion that glorify him and his reliving of “heroism”. And that is the reason why Claude Robert Eatherly, who dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima in 1945, could not consider himself a hero despite the attempts to glorify himself and, even realizing the real consequences of his action, considered himself a criminal, demanding to be sentenced to prison instead of being made a hero. Both the case of the lieutenant mentioned by Jaspers and Eatherly’s case vividly showcase that the de-heroization of “heroism” in modern wars is the equivalent to subjective reliving of objective realities.

Indeed, there can be no feat and heroism in such an act, and awarding the title of hero for such an act not only testifies to the terrible nature of the “spirit of abstraction” in wars, but also to the transformation of public perceptions. In this regard, Marcel writes “Whatever attempts have been made to justify war or to see even a certain spiritual value in it, it is necessary to state that

war in its current form is a sin. And at the same time we have to admit that modern warfare is the work of technicians; on the one hand it is characterized by the possibility of exterminating an entire population of people without discrimination of age and sex, on the other hand by the fact that it is carried out by a small circle of people with formidable weapons and directing operations from the bunkers or their laboratories. One way or another, the destinies of war and technology are now inextricably linked, so it can be argued that in the current era, what contributes to the build-up of technical capabilities is aimed at making war even more destructive, at the same time forcing it to become a means of suicide for mankind (Marcel, 2018, p. 74).

Erich Fromm rightly gives a psychological description of this phenomenon in his book “The Sane Society”. “In modern war, one individual can cause the destruction of hundreds of thousands of men, women and children. He could do so by pushing a button; he may not feel the emotional impact of what he is doing, since he does not see, does not know the people whom he kills; it is almost as if his act of pushing the button and their death had no real connection. The same man would probably be incapable of even slapping, not to speak of killing, a helpless person. In the latter case, the concrete situation arouses in him a conscience reaction common to all normal men; in the former, there is no such reaction, because the act and his object are alienated from the doer, his act is not his anymore, but has, so to speak, a life and a responsibility of its own” (Fromm, 2001, p. 116).

In “The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness”, this phenomenon is described in more detail and explained using the category of alienation common to Marxism and existentialism: “The pilots who dropped the bombs hardly thought that thousands of people were killed in a matter of minutes... They hardly realized that they were dealing with the enemy, that they were killing living people. Their task was to precisely maintain the complex machine according to the flight plan. At the intellectual level, of course, it was clear to them that as a result of their action, thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands of people perished in the fire or ruins, but at the emotional level, they hardly understood it and, as paradoxical as it may seem, they did not even care. And that’s why many of them did not feel

responsible for their actions, which were actually the greatest cruelty in history towards humanity. Modern air warfare follows the logic of modern mechanized production, in which both engineers and workers are completely alienated from the results of their work. According to the general plan of production and management, they carry out a technical assignment without seeing the final product, and even if they see it, it does not concern them directly, they do not feel responsible for it, it is beyond their scope of responsibility” (Fromm, 1973, p. 404).

This is how the “spirit of abstraction” observed by Marcel, works in modern wars. The victims only become a number. Dead from the bombing, each of them was a bearer of an individual existence, and they are added up and turned into a *digital abstraction* that shows the true value of human life and individuality in a modern world where self-determination, equality, state sovereignty and other concepts are still in circulation. “One can find such principles,” writes Jaspers, “which as such are comprehensible to human (such as Kant’s principle of Perpetual Peace). The concepts of self-determination, equality, and state sovereignty become relative by losing their absolute meaning. It is possible to prove that the total state and total war contradict natural law because in them the means and prerequisites of human existence become an ultimate goal, or because the absolutization of the means leads to the destruction of the meaning of the whole and to the destruction of human rights (Jaspers, 2017, p. 186). Of course, these phenomena are more profound and not caused only by the war. Wars are simply an occasion for the manifestation of symptoms of human, public, national and civilizational diseases. In this sense, the mechanization of human, his anonymity, dehumanization, deprivation of rights, suppression of human dignity and individuality, described objectively and in detail in Sartre’s “War Diaries: Notebooks from a Phony War”⁵ are not a consequence of war, but phenomena revealed during war. And world wars revealed these universal problems. Humanity is becoming more and more subject to one common fate. In addition to the ontological dimension, the equalization and the rejection of the individual brought by the war is

also expressed in the symbolism of social life, whether it is a military uniform or a monument to an unknown soldier that became popular after the First World War. Referring to B. Alexander, Lunkov rightly noticed that death unites and equalizes people. War makes the equality of humans even more evident in the face of death and in a large sense; it eliminates the individual difference in their destinies (Lunkov, 2019, p. 36). According to Sartre (2002) the war is collectivization (p. 18). In a certain sense, he enters into polemics with Heidegger. If for the latter, the meaning of war is the national consolidation, then for Sartre, collectivization has a negative meaning. In case of ethnic war, it may be fair to claim that the “masses” turn into a nation in a positive sense, but in a total war, and as Jaspers observes, since the World War II humanity has entered the globalization stage of history when both the national and the individual factors decrease (Jaspers, 2017, p. 122).

In any case, war is a struggle for the imposition of one’s culture to others or a preservation of national identity. The deriving of the naturalness of war from the law of nature is not a new problem in philosophy. Total war is an existential struggle and it becomes an occasion for the more aggressive species to gain the privilege of challenging the right to exist of the creative and peace-loving species. In this regard, it has to be emphasized that Heidegger’s identification of struggle and war is dangerous not in itself but as propaganda. Jaspers makes an important warning: primitive nations easily adopt and use technology and “present a formidable threat to nations with a creative spirit” (Jaspers, 2017, p. 195).

Total war can also be compared to faceless evil, a major natural disaster, or an epidemic Sartre in his “War Diaries” talks about reliving war as plague and Albert Camus in “The Plague”⁶ defines the epidemic as a metaphor for total war against which human is already powerless, although he brought the technique to life himself (Jaspers observes that inventors are “simply functionaries in the chain of an anonymous creative process (Jaspers, 2017, p. 96)) with the power of his spirit that has replaced the nature or become “second nature”. It has gone out of control,

⁵ See more in detail in Sartre’s following work: Sartre, 2002.

⁶ See more in detail in following books: Sartre, 2002; Camus, 1947.

and the collective consciousness of humanity has not yet come to the awareness of the danger of this unstoppable. “There is a danger,” Jaspers writes, “that humans will suffocate in his *second nature* (emphasis is ours) that he creates with technology. However, in his relation with invincible nature, he constantly tries to maintain his existence through hard work and introduces himself as incomparably free” (Jaspers, 2017, p. 97). Indeed, the development of technology, ruling over nature, does not lead to the liberation of humans from the power of nature but to the destruction of nature and of the human himself.

Quoting some of Jacob Burckhardt’s observations on the prediction of the loss of individuality, Jaspers cites a letter from him written in 1872 which states that in the future, “the ideal of life will become the military order” (Jaspers, 2017, p. 137). And how the individuality is suppressed in a military order is best described by Sartre in “War Diaries: Notebooks from a Phony War”, when he reveals in detail all the phenomena associated with collectivization in militarized reality, the meaning of joint performance of various actions and outlines how soldiers take care of their needs in a group by generalizing, “We are in a constant state of nakedness towards each other, and it is not the nakedness of an athlete, but of a snail: a nudity-weakness, slimy and unattractive” (Sartre, 2002, p. 24). Sartre shows how a person is deprived of opportunities in a militarized reality. Opportunities turn into a “reflection of opportunities” for a soldier who has “lost his individual human temperament”, for example, a captain who has only an anonymous function to instruct, transport and command. In these conditions, the individual is totally lost (Sartre, 2002, p. 28). He compares the soldier to a patient who has been deprived of his own opportunities and is dependent on the will of others. Sartre (2002) describes in detail this *objectification* and *dehumanization* of a person accompanied by inner silence (pp. 26-27). According to him, the person turns into an object, he is treated as a material (when loading and moving like sheets of tin or barrels (Sartre, 2002, p. 23). At best, he is “treated as a machine” that works like a laborer, but that work is completely unproductive” (Sartre, 2002, pp. 22-23). It is empty and does not bring any joy to the person because its deepest meaning is “in nothingness and death. The soldier is not exploited, but more than a

worker, he is kept as a machine that must be provided with the most necessary things: clothes, food, and a place to sleep. All these things are not provided to him to be pleased but exclusively to maintain his existence and ensure his operation. Thus, the person becomes his own anonymous function.

Consequently, it can be argued that the war itself is not the cause of individuality deprivation, turning a person into a faceless mass, or his *social equalization*, but the forms of collectivization, be it fascism, world war, or socialism. “War is socialism,” writes Sartre (2002), “it equalizes individual human property to zero and replaces it with collective property” (p. 17). War is a concentration camp (any “ism” or ideology implies the subordination of the individual spirit to the group spirit). Essentially, the emergence and collision of these two collectivizations (fascism and socialism), these two poles, the most massive in human history (turned into brilliant metaphors in Eugene Ionesco’s “Rhinoceros” and George Orwell’s “Animal Farm”)⁷ is not accidental. In the book “The Origins and Goal of History”, Jaspers also describes the process of transformation of humanity into a mass, the process of deprivation and the illusion of the acquisition of individual will. “The mass is becoming more and more homogeneous,” he writes and adds. “The mass is becoming a determining factor.” The individual is now more defenseless than ever, but as an individual member of the crowd, he seems to gain a will. Meanwhile, the will cannot be manifested in a faceless mass. It is awakened and guided by propaganda. The masses need ideas and slogans” (Jaspers, 2017, p. 123). In this respect, Mauthner (1914) asks in his essay “War and Philosophy” that how is it possible to philosophize about death when slogans and manifestos falsify reality? (p. 10). As for Jaspers (2017), he asks in the same spirit: how is it possible to philosophize about individuality when “reality forces man to be a mass” (p. 124). The problem becomes more complicated in the case of rejection of societal resistance and intellectual revolt. And if, at the beginning of the World War I, a German philosopher, HellmuthFalkenfeld, in a letter sent from the front, could write that Kant’s third antinomy is more important than the entire world war and

⁷ See more in detail in following books: Ionesco, 1976; Orwell, 2004.

“war is related to philosophy in the same way that sensibility is related to reason” (Safranski, 2005, p. 92), then in the World War II, any thinker couldn’t allow himself such an expression of cynicism. “Do not even hope that in the reality of war you will be able to flee to noble and spiritual realms”, Sartre warns us and ironically remarks that “the world of the spirit is carefully prepared for you. This is a world, a sacred world of strict discipline and protocol, respect and obedience to orders to stand guard” (Sartre, 2002, p. 25).

In this book, we see the tragedy of an intellectual seeking the manifestation of his individuality in a militarized reality. First of all, the author is consoled by a friend’s observation that “during the 1914 war, most people were only concerned about how to present themselves as men” (Sartre, 2002, pp. 20-21). Apparently, realizing that “man” is a general concept and a gender classification. Therefore, masculinity is not a form of expression of individuality. Sartre (2002) writes that “at least this formulation replaces the collective slogans with an obligation to respect one’s individuality (p. 21). The war is considered for him a source of a certain experience and a reality of individual biography (Sartre, 2002, p. 21), which is truly individual for a philosopher or a writer.

Conclusion

During World War I, the philosophy of war mostly fetishized the ideas of the rise and awakening of a nation, national spirit, and unity. The philosophy preceding World War II valued the duty of an individual to justify himself before the nation, considering heroism as a way of demonstrating individuality (theism: Max Scheler) and in some cases, affirming the ideal of the collective person, even denying the individual spirit (atheism: Martin Heidegger).

Contrasted with the metaphysical meaning of war that ignores the individual in German philosophy, existentialism, particularly its French branch, strives for anthropocentrism and valorization of the individual. In this respect, according to the religious existentialist Gabriel Marcel, man as a social person is an element to be observed and measured from the outside, but as an individual he is a remarkable and unique spiritual

existence. And this spiritual existence is absolute in any material and social reality and compared to any other human personality.

Instead of the metaphysics of war that idealizes national unity, the existentialism of World War II observes war as a social phenomenon, as a collectivization that becomes a condition for suppression and loss of human individuality. From a homogeneous mass in a peaceful situation, in which he seemingly only showed will, in a militarized reality, a person turns into an entity that is subject to military order and is lacking opportunities, whose individual spirit is subordinated to the collective spirit. As a result of this collectivization, he experiences himself as a selfless substance or object, an anonymous function or a working machine, whose work is unproductive and aimed at destruction and annihilation. In order to destroy others, he needs labels: fascist, anti-fascist, communist, etc., which lead to the abstraction of others from the individual reality, which Marcel calls “the spirit of abstraction”.

A soldier who uses a weapon of mass destruction is alienated not only from the emotional experience of his action, but also from his victims, who are transformed and perceived as a digital abstraction. He is alienated from the final result of his activities or actions. This means that World War II simply brought up even more clearly the universal problems already observed in philosophy: the connection between the transformation of humans into a mass and the loss of individuality, the development of technology, and the alienation of a person. And since World War II marks a turning point for the globalization of history, and the development of technology and wars are closely related, world wars represent a direct threat by primitive nations that easily assimilate and use technology to absorb nations endowed with a peace-loving and creative spirit. This is also a big threat to humanity in terms of dehumanization and destruction.

By assuming the existentialists’ general assessment and their position on the discussed problem, it is argued that the wide spread of the existentialist worldview in 20th century, the attempt of an existential-humanistic understanding of war, and the warnings about the danger and consequences of a possible world war were not able to create a viable and functional value system which would be based on the anti-war ideal of individual (and national) identity. Even in the

1st quarter of 21st century this trend still persists because the conflicting nature and interests of the mankind prevail on universal humanistic values.

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