

## *The Semantics of War*

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### I

On 30 March 1900, today exactly 99 years ago<sup>i</sup>, there were 207,000 British troops engaged in South Africa, two and a half times the entire population of the Orange Free State at the time. And reinforcements were arriving at the rate of 30,000 per month. The Boers had suffered a series of severe losses and the tide of war seemed to have turned against them. All expected a rapid end to the war, which might indeed have come about, had not emerged from the Boer ranks a leader who was to generate a Boer revival and to change the character of the war: Christiaan de Wet. On 31 March, in a brilliant battle plan, De Wet engaged a British force which lost 159 officers and men (against 3 on the Boer side), captured another 421 soldiers, 7 guns and 83 wagons with supplies, and turned off Bloemfontein's water supplies. Two days later, on 3 April, De Wet claimed another 470 prisoners. These brilliant successes had "an electrifying effect on Boer morale. It stiffened the resolve of those in arms, rallied the waverers, and inspired many burghers who had gone home to pick up their Mausers and resume the fight." (Farwell, p. 262) The war entered a new phase, and all hopes of a speedy end of the conflict were dashed, as the Boers reunited behind De Wet. If anything, the war acquired a still grimmer aspect. It had started very differently, however.

Half a year earlier, on 18 October 1899, a Boer patrol rode into Elandslaagte, a village of tin houses 14 miles north of Ladysmith on the Natal railway line between Durban and Johannesburg. The town was undefended, but the Boers caught an army supply train in the station and made prisoners of the few British soldiers they found there. The following morning General Johannes Kock, who had served as landdrost of Potchefstroom, arrived with a force of 1,200 men and two modern Krupp guns. The army rested the whole day. That evening, some of them organized a "smoking concert" at the local inn, to which the British prisoners were also invited. All sang songs lustily

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<sup>i</sup> The opening day of the PALA Conference in Potchefstroom, South Africa in 1999

in English and Afrikaans, including the “Volkslied” and “God Save the Queen”. As Byron Farwell, in his account of the Anglo-Boer war remarks: “The war was young and exciting and so far bloodless; they had not yet experienced its grimmer meaning. Within forty-eight hours some of the singers would be dead, some would be suffering untended wounds, and all would have a greater understanding of the nature of the enterprise upon which they had embarked“ (p. 68) Let me briefly sketch the engagement on which Farwell’s observation is based.

Two days later, Major General John French attacked the Boer’s position on a kopje rising 300 feet above the veld. After an initial artillery duel, in which a battery of the British old-fashioned muzzle loading 7-pounders was efficiently silenced by the Boers’ more advanced Krupp guns, French threw his infantry at them. The advance was slowed by the increasing intensity and accuracy of the Boers’ fire. By the time they were halfway to the top, half of the officers were dead or seriously wounded. The troops wavered for a critical moment, but were swept up by Colonel Ian Hamilton, who had the bugler sound “Charge”. Shouting and cheering, bayonets bared, the British infantry charged and cleared the crest, killing or capturing all of the Boers who had not fled. Hamilton then ordered “cease fire” when a small group of Boers held up a white flag. Suddenly, however, there was a furious burst of fire as some 50 Boers who had hidden just below the crest leaped to their feet and fired into the cheering soldiers. The commanding colonel “was one of the first to fall, ... a bullet in his leg and one in his chest. ‘My fellows are doing well,’ he was heard to gasp, and then a third bullet crashed into his skull. [...] Some men panicked. [...] Other officers rushed to stem the rout; the troops were steadied and [...] the crest was cleared for a second time, Kock falling mortally wounded and his remaining men fleeing in disorder” (p. 72)

The British cavalry then set in the pursuit, sabres drawn and lances lowered, riding through the straggling Boers, sticking them even when they fell. “The Boers were horrified; one Boer prisoner said, “Men on horses carrying sticks with spikes on top, came galloping at us as we were running to our horses. They pushed us up on the spikes like bundles of hay. They came through us once, then again, altogether five times. And you English call yourselves civilised people!’ [...] One young Boer, still

alive, was found to have sixteen lance wounds. [...] the Boers never forgave them. [...] Some vowed they would kill any lancer who fell into their hands. There was also a feeling shared by many Boers, [...] that it was un-Christian to attack a fleeing foe. But waging war in such a fashion was beyond the understanding of the British .... Night fell on a battlefield littered with the remains of bleeding, broken men lying on the cold, stony ground in the rain. Some were still alive” (p. 72-3) “General Kock’s wife, meanwhile, was searching for news of her husband among the defeated and dispirited burghers returning from the battle. Deneys Reitz saw her the next morning when she was trying to find a way to reach the British lines, ‘the memory of her tear-stained face giving me my first hint of what women suffer in time of war’” (p. 74)

## II

The horror of the incident could be multiplied and the ferocity of the engagement still increased by the description of later battles in the Anglo-Boer war. But the present account suffices for our purposes. Here we already observe some of the ingredients that war is infested with.

- One is the enthusiasm with which people set out on a course toward war. In his recent review of the English translation of Robert Musil’s *Diaries*, Professor Coetzee of the University of Cape Town reminded us of Musil’s experience of the wave of patriotic passion that accompanied the outbreak of war, a passion that, to his surprise, he found himself sharing. (Coetzee, p. 52)
- Another is the painful awakening of the reality of war soon after, accompanied by the impossibility to stop it once violence has run its course. Indeed, it is one of the remarkable characteristics of war that it takes on a dynamic of its own that seems to escape all further attempts to direct its course in a particular direction. Typical are the profound miscalculations with which nations enter warfare. Even the greatest strategists of military history have succumbed to them, as Napoleon’s and Hitler’s Russian campaigns illustrate. Similar miscalculations characterized the Boer war. The Boers were full of confidence -- “slechts vertrouwen, dat is al” [simply trusting, that is all]: “their morale was

high, their cause was just, and surely God would help them, provide miracles, and give the ultimate victory.” (p. 51) On the other side, hardly anybody “believed that the war would seriously strain Britain’s resources or that it would last more than six months.” (p. 53) Two and a half years later, after the introduction of barbed wire and the first concentration camps in the history of mankind (in which about 20,000 boys and girls under 16 died within a period of 12 months), <sup>1</sup> and after some 22,000 casualties on the British side and an approximate 15,000 on the Boer side, the figures (though they look low compared to what we, after two World Wars, have become used to) were extraordinary for what had looked like a regional dispute in the beginning.

- Yet another aspect is the infractions of the rules of warfare as laid down in international agreements. Kock’s attack after the white flag had been waved is one of them; the British hitting the Boers’ field hospital with their artillery is another one; both sides used dum dum bullets, in spite of international agreement, that these were weapons too cruel to be employed. These infractions went together with a radicalization of deep distrust once the hostilities had been initiated, seen in the Boers’ shudder at the cruelty inflicted on them by the lancers.
  
- Still another aspect is the enormity of war, making it impossible to give exact numbers of casualties. To get a rough idea: “During the course of the war the British purchased 520,000 horses and 150,000 mules; of these, two-thirds of the horses and a third of the mules perished. The British, a horse-loving people, were horrified by these losses, and there were anguished cries in Parliament and in the press” (240-1). Disease “also followed. It had not yet been learned that an unsanitary camp could be more dangerous than the most determined foe, more fatal to strategy than a major defeat on a field of battle.” (241) An estimated 13,250 British died from enteric, 31,000 men had to be invalided home because of it. (241)
  
- We should also not be blind to some of the emotional aspects that provide

warfare with an unmistakable attractive character. In spite of all its gruesome atrocity, war often also brings out the best in human beings: heroic and totally altruistic behaviour in the face of horrifying wounds and imminent death; cp. Stephan (1997), Ehrenreich (1997). In the case of the Boer war, one has to concede that outside the engagements, both sides showed a remarkable degree of humanity and magnanimity toward each other, both during the war and the peace negotiations, as well as after the war.

### III

What are we, in literary studies, in stylistics, or in the Humanities in general, to make of this? War is pretty familiar to us through its literary representation. Let us not forget that the oldest and most famous literary work in the West, the *Iliad*, is about war (between the Greeks and the Trojans). One is also reminded of the endless variations and adaptations of this work during the Middle Ages, of Grimmelshausen's gruesome descriptions of the Thirty-Years' War, of Shakespeare's *Henry V* or Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, or -- if one prefers, of *Saving Private Ryan* and *The Thin Red Line*. Art seems to entertain an intimate affinity with war. The question I would like to raise here is whether these cultural treatments of war can tell us anything about the nature of such conflicts. Or stronger even, whether they can inform us of possibilities to avoid (or contain) wars. Is there, in other words, anything we can do with this knowledge in order to prevent the killings and mutilations that wars bring us? To many, such a question sounds far-fetched if not ludicrous. Many scholars in the Humanities indeed hold the position that art, history, literature, philosophy are all fine and beautiful, and perhaps also interesting, but without the ability to tell us how to act in daily life. I personally find such an attitude not only an act of premature intellectual surrender (to remain in the military way), but also a sign that one does not really take these works seriously.

Recently, however, an attempt has been made to confront the question I just outlined. Faced with increasing unemployment among their graduates, departments in the United States (the country where the future already exists) have experimented with ways to

bring the study of the Humanities in closer contact with social reality. The effort has grown to such an extent that we are now all familiar with the experiment; it goes under the name of “cultural studies”. If the aim of Cultural Studies was to bring our students more jobs, then I think at the end of the day, the balance is going to be negative. I have no time here to go into an extensive analysis of why cultural studies failed, but one element seems to me to have played a considerable role, namely its ideological content and impact. Its ideology requires you to balk both at the current prevailing structures of Western societies in general, and at science in particular. It is easy to see that such ideology is not really conducive to problem-solving, a skill in high demand on the job market. Instead, it fosters a culture of complaining and of an easy form of social criticism, easy because it comes without responsibilities. (We also see a good deal of this easy criticism, by the way, in so-called ‘critical discourse analysis’ and ‘critical stylistics’.) It is a form of self-deception to expect that your students are going to get well-paid jobs in industry or organizations if you first teach them to balk at all forms of rational analysis and at the idea of a free market. It would therefore be wise, I believe, if in Europe (perhaps also in South Africa) we think twice before copying the mistakes made elsewhere, and suppress the drive to mimic new fashions coming from the United States.

If cultural studies failed, must we therefore return to the scepticism with which many scholars in the Humanities greeted the question about the social value of history or literature? The answer, I believe, is no, and the position I am going to defend in the rest of my paper is that we are well placed in the Humanities to help solve social problems, including those connected with war, if we do not foreswear rational analysis, but instead attempt to link up with empirical strands of research in the social sciences. In the case of war, we should study the way in which the previous remarks hold together in a systematic way. This, I propose, should inspire and form the basis of our teaching and our research.

#### IV

By way of an example, let me briefly refer to a course I just finished teaching at my own Institute, to students preparing for their M.A. The course was titled “On War and

Peace” (“Vom Kriege und vom Frieden”), with an allusion, of course, to Von Clausewitz’ famous treatise, *Vom Kriege [On War]*, and to Tolstoy’s famous novel. The course took as its presupposition that the Western tradition in reflecting on issues of war and peace is still relevant to our current concerns, as first proclaimed already by Thucydides, when he wants his history to be “judged useful by those who want to understand clearly the events which happened in the past and which (human nature being what it is) will at some time or other and in much the same ways, be repeated in the future” (I;22). The works written in this tradition contain a wide and rich spectrum of information about violent conflicts. They could be called a “semantics of war”, and that is how I am going to consider them in the rest of this essay.

Note: the term ‘war’ is itself in need of further specification. A semantic field can be located, where next to ‘war’ one will find terms such as ‘skirmish’, ‘raid’ or ‘battle’, all terms related to, yet not synonymous with ‘war’. That war has to do with violence and thus forms the opposite of ‘peace’ (which could be described as the absence of violence) will be clear. But not all violence is war: street fights, duels or a boxing match clearly differ from war. So what *is* war, after all? Some difficult issues present itself here: were the crusades a form of war? Is colonialism a warlike state? Can one have wars when there are not nations or states involved (as for instance in tribal societies)? It is impossible for me to solve these complex issues here; I would only like to point them out, and encourage care about the usage of terms in our further reflections on the issues at stake. There is a tendency to overreach the meanings of such terms and it will not be to the benefit of our research if we conflate all such terms with one another. Or, to point out another potential danger of confusion: the term ‘war’ can be used metaphorically, as in ‘economic warfare’ or ‘the battle of the sexes’. It is important, I believe, to realize the metaphoric (and hence non-literal) meaning of such terms. If one asserts that ‘globalization wages war on workers’, it is imperative to realize that this is still something quite different from the bloody war scenes with which I began this address. The ‘semantics of war’, as I have outlined it (from ancient Greece to the present) can also be seen as a gradual increase in semantic precision in dealing with inter-group violence.

Michael Doyle's recent and excellent book has been a great help in framing the course. Doyle considers three groups of authors, who bring different models to the study of war and peace: Realist, Liberal, Socialist theories. The realist model (the dominant one, according to Doyle) "portrays a worldview or an explanation of interstate politics as a state of war" (p. 45). "The core of Realism (to simplify) portrayed world politics as follows: a state of war among all states and societies, which is a condition in which war was regarded as a continuous possibility, a threatening prospect, in which each state had to regard every other state as presenting the possibility of this threat." (p. 209) As authors who have contributed to the realist model, Doyle considers:

- Thucydides (complex R.)
- Machiavelli (fundamentalist R.)
- Hobbes (structuralist R.)
- Rousseau (constitutionalist R.)

A liberal view, by contrast, proposes that economics and domestic structure of a society is at the heart of the matter. "Liberal societies compete to become rich, glorious, healthy, cultured, all without expecting to have to resolve their competition through war. Formal and informal institutions such as international organization and law then take on a greater role in competition with the warriors and diplomats who dominate the Realist stage" (p. 210). Authors to be considered here are:

- Locke (liberal individualism)
- Kant (internationalist L.)
- Smith
- Shumpeter

As a third and final group, Doyle considers socialist models. "It portrays a state of war and peace determined by the conflicts and solidarities among distinct units that are not states or constitutional orders or individual statespersons, but instead are classes [...]. Their politics of war and peace, moreover, takes place transnationally; across borders, not merely between or within them" (p. 321).

Its major authors are Marx/Engels and Lenin.

The first imperative of the course was to make oneself acquainted with a range of works considered 'classics' of this area. Students were therefore to read the following:

- Thucydides: *The Pelopponesian War* (431-404 BCE)
- Niccolo Machiavelli: *The Prince* (1520)
- Thomas Hobbes: *Leviathan* (1651)
- Jean-Jacques Rousseau: *Social Contract* (1762)
- John Locke: *Second Treatise of Government* (1690)
- Immanuel Kant: *Perpetual Peace* (1795)
- Adam Smith: *The Wealth of Nations* (1776)
- Joseph Shumpeter: *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (1950)
- Marx/Engels: Selections
- Lenin: *Imperialism* (1917)
- Carl von Clausewitz: *On War* (1832-34).

Since not everything in these works deals with issues of war and peace, students were told to develop speed reading and search strategies, and to concentrate on those passages that dealt with violent conflicts in a theoretical way; hence not all descriptions of battles in Thucidydes were to be read -- not all of Adam Smith's economic theory was to be digested. Discussing this material took up the bulk of our time in the seminar. These discussions - as could be expected - regularly led to not only discussing the texts read, but also to debate whether the author had been correct or not. Such discussions sometimes took the form of 'for/against' discussions, at which point I always made clear the need for research rather than debate to settle such matters. On such occasions, I provided complementary information from the study of political science (I will give some examples instantly).

In order to strengthen the links with these social sciences, students acquainted themselves with current journals in the area of international relations and conflict resolution. They then chose a present-day conflict and read at least one article from

such journals (I provided them with a list of some 120 in total) on the specific conflict they had selected. (Issues selected were, among others, the conflict over Kashmir between India and Pakistan, the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea, the civil war in Sierra Leona, Congo, Liberia and Rwanda, the conflict in Kosovo, and so forth.) Students were exhilarated: at once (perhaps for the first time in their study) they felt their subject had to do something with the real world, and they were now convinced that knowledge of this subject could contribute to a better understanding, perhaps also to some solutions, of international conflict.

On the basis of these materials and the preparatory work done in the seminar, students had to write a 20-page paper, in which the conflict under consideration was analysed in such a way that - as far as possible - concrete models for a solution of the conflict were to be proposed. Most students are still writing at their reports (the deadline is April 30th), but I have meanwhile received and read five (very good) papers: one on the situation in Cyprus, one the Western Sahara, one on Afghanistan, one on the crisis in Indonesia, and one on water resources in the Jordan basin as a potential conflict source. I think the course has certainly widened the scope of my students' abilities, it has shown them the relevance of their own discipline and the need to link up with empirical research in the social sciences. I suspect that as a result my students will have greater potential now on the job market. I expect -- as I have seen before with similar courses -- that on the basis of the research they carried out for this paper, they may come in for jobs related to international studies, peace keeping and conflict resolution.

## V

I now wish to concentrate on one particular issue in this area. I have before sketched some of the grim aspects of the Anglo-Boer war. The philosopher Karl Popper remarked that "The Boer War led to a revulsion of feeling in Great Britain, amounting to a moral conversion in favour of peace" (Popper 1963:371). And he connects this conversion with the advent of full democratic government: "That since the time of the Boer War, none of the democratic governments of the free world has been in a position to wage a war of aggression. No democratic government would be united upon the issue, because they would not have the nation united behind them. Aggressive

war has become almost a moral impossibility” (p. 371).

What are we to make of this? Popper certainly is not alone in advancing the claim, and it is one intimately tied to the liberal group of theories, especially the ones by Locke, Smith and Kant. In other words, we face the question, whether what Popper says here is true. You may perhaps find this a strange sort of question. The world of the Humanities nowadays seems to be carved up between, on the one hand, a very small minority of people who find the writings of Popper a great and important source of inspiration, and, on the other hand, the bulk of scholars who demonize these writings as positivist (a peculiarly strange claim). Some clever people have also said that Popper’s ‘demarcation’ criterion of *falsification* (to distinguish science from non-science) cannot itself be subjected to a falsification procedure and therefore is not scientific. It is also implied that Popperians are therefore involved in just another piece of ideology. This is nonsense, of course. Contrary to many positions in the humanities, followers of Popper find nothing wrong with criticizing Popper. This is fundamentally different from Heideggerians, Derrideans, or Foucauldeans, who would not even dream of criticizing their master discourses. How different this is with Popper becomes clear when one realizes that it is precisely in the spirit of his philosophy to critically examine Popper’s claim. As a matter of fact, Popper’s philosophy presupposes that it is itself flawed, and therefore in need of continuous critical analysis and debate. If one attempts to falsify the principle of falsification, however, a funny thing happens: it turns out that in order to do so, you need the principle of falsification! And thus this principle does seem to grasp some foundation of rational investigation that is difficult to ignore, let alone abolish.

But what about Popper’s claim that liberal democracies after the Boer War never went to war? Was the Anglo-Boer war not in itself a transgression of the kind Popper thought impossible? The Boers certainly had a passion for politics and debate, and would thus have to be considered as true democrats. However, they practised a form of near-slavery with respect to the indigenous population, a practice hardly an ingredient of democracy. England was not democratic in the modern sense and deeply involved in colonialism, but certainly the most democratic country in the world at the

time. What the example shows, is that a lot is going to depend on -- again -- semantics here. How does one define ‘democracy’? Was Nazi Germany a democratic country? Sure, the Nazis were elected by the people, but were these elections also democratically fair (in view of the massive state propaganda, widespread street violence and terror exerted by para-military groups?)

Perhaps the liberal view by Popper implies (rather than stating explicitly) something else; perhaps it means democracies of the sort we know in the Western, industrialized world. If that be the case, then research has indeed shown a tendency for industrialized nations to be less warlike: Cohen (1986) used a (albeit very limited) sample of four pre-industrial and five industrial societies, highlighting the difference suggestively.

**Table 1**  
**Frequency of wars per decade in selected state societies**

<b>Pre-industrial</b>				
<b>Country</b>	<b>Sokoto</b>	<b>Borneo</b>	<b>India 1707-71</b>	<b>France 14<sup>th</sup> century</b>
Wars per decade	13.6	7.5	12.7	8.5
Mean wars per decade	10.6			

<b>Industrial</b>					
<b>Country</b>	<b>France</b>	<b>UK</b>	<b>USSR</b>	<b>US</b>	<b>Germany</b>
Wars per decade	3.5	5.6	2.8	.86	.74
Mean wars per decade	2.7				

As can be seen in the Table above, industrialized societies are five times less prone to get to war than comparable pre-industrialized ones. The argument can be found already in Adam Smith’s work, where he outlines “as a possible pacifier an evolutionary sociology of aggression” (Doyle 236) showing that it is rational for some societies (i.e. pastoral and agricultural) to engage in war, but irrational for other (i.e. hunting and industrial), a view seemingly corroborated by modern anthropology; see

Crawford (1994), Dennis (1995), and Foster and Rubinstein (1986).

Nonetheless, the general proposition that liberal states are less war-prone cannot be upheld: Chan (1984) investigated a sample of some 120 wars (taken from Small and Singer 1982) fought between 1816 and 1980, and found that Liberal states initiated 24 out of 56 interstate wars, while non-Liberals were the initiators in 91 out of 187 times, hardly a difference worth noting. The relation between Liberal states themselves, however, is different. Here we observe a 'zone of peace' that is characterized by the near-absence of wars for almost two hundred years. Again, we have to be precise, however, as to what we mean by 'liberal'. Probably the most adequate specification has been provided by Kant in his political essay *Perpetual Peace* (*Zum ewigen Frieden*), proposing the joint functioning of four institutions as constitutive of liberal democracy:

- 1) a market and private property economy;
- 2) a polity that is externally sovereign;
- 3) equal juridical rights of citizens;
- 4) representative government (including the legislative branch to have an effective role in public policy).

So defined we can draw up a list of liberal democracies; Doyle (261-) presents the following one (see Appendix 1).

These countries have indeed not engaged each other in aggressive wars. Research by Henry Farber and Joanne Gowa (1995) presents a refined statistical testing of the 'liberal peace' proposition. Drawing on Small and Singer 's (1982) database of wars from 1816 to 1980, the results confirm that democracies are as likely as any other regime to get into war, but that they are significantly less likely to go to war with one another. The importance of this relation was well expressed by Levy (1988): "the absence of war between democracies comes as close as anything to an empirical law in international relations." Bruce Russett (1995) has recently calculated the probability of the claim that Liberal states will not go to war with one another as long as they are Liberal, by multiplying the probabilities in each given year to find the joint probability

over almost two hundred years. His calculation yielded the following result: “the probability that the Liberal peace is a statistical accident becomes remarkably small (2 preceded by a decimal point and twenty zeros)” (Doyle 298). And since the number of liberal states is growing, there is a shimmer of hope here for a peaceful future of Humanity.

## VI

This, then, seems to me to provide a strong confirmation that we are allowed to take the “semantics of war” seriously. At least this aspect of the liberal tradition in analysing the conditions of international conflict seems to be based on correct premises. Kant and Smith did not have the methodological means to independently test their claims against the evidence. With empirical methods currently available in the social sciences we can carry out such tests, in Popper’s words, falsification procedures, and we should - if we care about war and peace - take such tests seriously. Similar procedures will have to be applied to the two other groups of theories analysed by Doyle, the Realist and Socialist ones, about which I have not spoken any further.

But perhaps you are not convinced that we need such analysis and such testing. Maybe you believe that war will vanish if we all share the view now prevalent in academic and intellectual circles, where it is fashionable to be ‘against’ war -- any war. But let us not forget two things:

- 1 This anti-war attitude is a relatively recent phenomenon in the history of mankind, so that we cannot even be sure how long it is going to last, even in our circles. The figure of Socrates may serve as an example here. For all the scourging criticism he heaped on his fellow citizens, on his home town and its government, he never questioned the wars they were involved in, and served as a hoplite in several campaigns. No pacifism there, and not for a long time to come with any of our academic forefathers.
- 2 The anti-war attitude does not solve the problem of war. Pacifism certainly is a noble cause, but so was the search for a ‘perpetuum mobile’. Our feelings accompanying such noble causes may easily prevent us from seeing the real

causes at hand. Many intellectuals seem to be enamoured of a rather rosy picture of mankind: if we all respect and love each other, war will be gone. Sure: IF. But that, precisely, is the snag. Let us not forget that aggression is to a large extent an in-born drive (see Eibl-Eibesfeld 1997), that the world, for all our rosy pictures, is still not a safe place, that there are enough belligerent states and greedy dictators around to ensure that our nice anti-war attitudes are not going to change much in this respect, an aspect on which Macchiavelli, another 'classic', has some interesting things to say.

I am not saying that our aversion to war and our positive feelings for universal peace are meaningless. In all probability they are important, for without them we presumably would not be able to educate our children in a spirit of peace, and instil in them a fundamental respect for all people, regardless of nationality, language, ethnicity, religion, skin colour, and so forth. What I am saying is that such feelings are not in themselves going to solve the problem of war; perhaps they form a necessary condition for such a solution, but certainly not a sufficient one. In order to become better at avoiding and/or containing wars, we will have to overcome our ignorance and to sidetrack our ideological and emotional indulgence. The most promising avenue to that end is through unflinching rational analysis and through independent robust empirical testing of our assumptions. Without such a method, we will remain the victims of our wishes and emotions. If we instead prefer to engage the problem of war rationally and empirically, we may entertain the hope that one day Humanity may be rid of a scourge that has racked it relentlessly since its earliest origins.

As Norbert Elias once said: "Menschen sind nicht in der Lage, den Tod abzuschaffen. Aber sie sind gewiß in der Lage, das gegenseitige Töten abzuschaffen." [ Human beings are not in a position to abolish death. But human beings are very much in a position to abolish death through reciprocal killings.]

#### *Notes*

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<sup>1</sup> I should like to remark that the notion of concentration camp has since acquired an altogether different association; after the Nazis' use of the concentration camps for purposes of mass annihilation, it seems difficult to

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regain the original meaning of the word. It should be emphasized that the concentration camps established by the British in South Africa had no such purposes. Rather, they were meant to provide shelter for the Boers and their families who had become homeless after the scorched-earth strategy launched by the British against the guerilla tactics of the Boers.

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