

Science, Technology, Society: Prologue

Arno Bammé

All people everywhere would like to live in peace. Yet wars are constantly being fought. War, it seems, is an aspect of human and social development that is never lacking, anywhere. It belongs to the elementary phenomena of human coexistence and is rooted in the essence of what it means to be human, irrespective of place and time (Mohrs 1995). To answer the question of why no amount of cultural conditioning such as parenting and schooling has been able to prevent humans from prosecuting wars and committing murder on a grand scale, despite the fact that everyone claims to be for peace and against war, we must turn to evolutionary theory (Mohr 1992) and the assertion that since the Pleistocene, humans have been genetically hard-wired to survive in small, manageable groups. According to this argument, humanity's evolutionary heritage and especially its 'capacity for collective aggression'—the drive 'to hate and destroy', as Freud described it—imposed quasi-permanent limits on its conduct that could not be overstepped. Curiously, sociology, unlike evolutionary theory, has never taken much interest in this death drive. On the contrary, the 'repression' and 'forgetting of war' (Joas and Knöbl 2008) might even be described as a distinctive characteristic of contemporary social theory.

For Welzer (2008), this abstinence has to do with how the social sciences are structured as academic disciplines. For most sociologists, the phase of peace and prosperity that in the countries of the West has endured for two generations has become both their principal object of study and their own milieu, so that stability is now regarded as the norm and instability as the exception. For Joas and Knöbl, too, the inner contradiction of modernity that manifested itself in two world wars and state-instituted mass murder has not had an impact commensurable with its magnitude on any of the contemporary social theories expounded by sociologists such as Habermas and Luhmann, Bourdieu and Foucault. On the contrary, wars are perceived as extreme exceptions, as temporary disruptions of the essentially non-violent process of civilization. Borrowing Freud's concept of 'repress-

sion', Joas and Knöbl attribute this to the liberalism on which all these theories are premised. Rooted in the European Enlightenment, liberalism knows only social progress. A third interpretation is that to be found in Mühlmann (1996), for whom the tendency not to talk about war is a distinguishing characteristic of a mindset shaped by the humanities that prefers not to sully itself with the 'banalities of everyday life'. That the West's prototypical philosophy cannot so much as talk about the aggressive, oppressive, colonizing side of its own culture is surely significant. This inability to talk about war could be used as a new definition of philosophy. 'Accordingly, philosophy would be a precisely defined area of communications within a warring culture, whose symbolism has been so manipulated that it cannot refer to war.' This could be taken a step further by charting "epidemiological" maps of Europe showing how strong the culture of autonomous philosophy is in each state and the extent to which each nation has attracted notice in connection with war, war crimes, and genocide'.

But there is one exception that has gone largely unnoticed or has perhaps been long since forgotten. The reference here is to the *Soziologie des Krieges* of 1929 by Rudolf Steinmetz (1862–1940), the founder of sociology in the Netherlands (the 'Amsterdam School') and of sociography. For him, war is 'one of the most appalling phenomena of human history' and at the same time 'a great cultural power.' Dispassionately and objectively, he analyses 'war in its causes, its development, and its consequences' in an effort to lay bare its 'underlying rules'. The First World War, he argues, was 'the most important experiment ever conducted to test all theories and interpretations of war'. In his analyses, Steinmetz sets himself apart from both the 'naïve illusions' of well-meaning apostles of peace, whom he accuses of having a 'blinkered view of the facts,' and from the belligerents, whom he describes as 'panegyrists of war', and accuses of trivializing and glorifying violence.

Steinmetz's utterances, like those of many of his coevals, do not always conform to today's standards of political correctness. What makes his study especially interesting, however, is the fact that it was written in the aftermath of the First World War but before the outbreak of the Second. The labor pains of sociology as a still nascent science of crisis are thus very much in evidence. For sociology, as a discipline born into a crisis,

allowed certain themes to be discussed with an unprecedented degree of impartiality, which the experience of the 'Third Reich' would shortly render impossible for many years to come—at least in the German-speaking world (see Singer 1991). Steinmetz had no doubt at all that there would be further wars in future—in fact that there would be wars for as long as a mentality that perhaps had its roots in the Pleistocene proved impervious to change. War, to him, is 'nothing other than the expression or result of human nature, which to this day has remained more or less the same in all races and in all periods of development. No religions, no culture, no morality, no revolutions, no inventions have changed it in the slightest'. To his mind, therefore, there can be no doubt that the Treaty of Versailles prepared the ground for an even worse war than the one it ended. This 'future war', writes Steinmetz, 'will be conducted more efficiently, with more sophisticated technology, and more intensively' than the earlier one. Steinmetz could not have foreseen the fundamentally irrational Nazi war machine, of course, but he had no doubt at all that it originated in large part in a peace treaty and in the incompetence of the victorious powers' politicians, who basically wanted a 'perpetuation of war in peace'.

The First World War was not a relapse into barbarism in Steinmetz's view; it was rather an expression of the very same civilization that prosecuted it 'like a modern industrial plant: scientifically, rationally'. It shared 'all the same traits of this civilization,' he argued. 'The spirit that animated it and informed its character was the same as the one that dominates today's society and, in principle, today's economy.' The intensity that set it apart from other wars was 'a consequence of its commercial character. For business and technology know no more of romanticism, compassion, and war-weariness than do machines.' The conclusions that Steinmetz draws from his analyses are clear: 'The spirit of our capitalist society is rational, calculating, technical, and commercial. The World War was its unsparing, collective revelation. Like us, so him. Businessman, industrialist, and banker all leave their mark on our whole lives. The World War was a battle to the death between two giant trusts'.

Alongside the traditional 'great wars', however, we are likely to see more 'small wars' in future (see Creveld 1998; Waldmann 2003). These

will be fought more like civil wars; in other words through terrorism, the deployment of hired mercenaries, or 'small armies' backed up by plenty of high tech (see Kaldor 2000; Münkler 2002). No longer will it be 'numbers against numbers', but rather 'intellect against intellect'. And just as crucial to victory or defeat, in Steinmetz's eyes, will be the 'resistance threshold' of the populaces involved in the war, which will have a major impact on its duration. This is the painful lesson that the USA would learn four decades later in Vietnam.

The objective of modern warfare is not to annihilate the enemy, but to 'bring him to the point where he can be made to submit to the other's will. The war stops as soon as that has been achieved'. That is why it has to be conducted intelligently and to an ever greater extent against the civilian population and the big cities as 'centers of popular power'. The objective of successful warfare must be to break their 'resistance threshold', to kill 'whatever percentage of the population' is necessary to that end, to destroy 'part of the enemy's material wealth,' to undermine courage, and to paralyze the will to power. The 'resistance threshold' must be overcome as swiftly as possible, meaning with the 'greatest possible, most widespread terror.' Following this logic, the 'extraordinary terror of the whole war with all its attendant misery and pain' could be 'ended immediately' if, for example, 'at the beginning of the campaign' a 'hidden mine were used to blow up 100,000 people.' This scenario reads like a prophetic vision of the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Lasting peace, Steinmetz argues, is tied to two conditions: one is the triumph of a world state endowed with full sovereignty and the other a complete change of mentality on the part of humanity. That these two conditions will be realized in the foreseeable future he regards as unlikely. His resignation on this point was shared by Sigmund Freud, who in a letter to Albert Einstein written in 1932 asked: 'Why are we so outraged by war, you and I and so many others? Why do we not just accept it like any other of life's adversities? It seems so natural, so biologically founded, so practically unavoidable.'

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