

Re-reading the Notion of Ontological Change in War: The Problem of Knowledge

Written by Giulia Tempo

This PDF is auto-generated for reference only. As such, it may contain some conversion errors and/or missing information. For all formal use please refer to the official version on the website, as linked below.

Re-reading the Notion of Ontological Change in War: The Problem of Knowledge

<https://www.e-ir.info/2021/01/31/re-reading-the-notion-of-ontological-change-in-war-the-problem-of-knowledge/>

GIULIA TEMPO, JAN 31 2021

Over the centuries, war has revolutionarily changed and evolved. Yet, is this a revolution in the “ontology” of war – i.e. the nature of its being – or rather in its “gnoseology”, meaning the way in which war is epistemologically conceptualised by a cognitive subject? Ontologies and epistemologies of war, in fact, are not necessarily motioned together – and through the seminal text *Empire of Chance* (2015) war can be investigated as a “problem of knowledge” (Engberg-Pedersen, 2015, p. 3). In this Essay I argue that, while war is subject to a continual, eventful, ontological change, the post-1800 revolution of the notion of contingency in war is gnoseological – the transition from ontology to gnoseology being premised upon the centrality of the cognitive subject. To expound how the underlying ontological change opens up to a revolution in cognition, the subject of gnosis must thus be awarded centrality. The change in war described by Engberg-Pedersen affects the subject’s knowledge of herself in the first place: she comes to conceptualise herself as material and contingent. Such shift is then mirrored in the subject’s cognition of war, thereby opening up to the revolution.

The initial goal is that of understanding Engberg-Pedersen’s ontology – exploring new historical and poetic potentialities and bringing him into conversation with metaphysics. I initially retrace his theoretical moves and the revolution he is describing – to requalify it as gnoseological. This assessment lays the foundation upon which to create the intellectual space for a conversation between Engberg-Pedersen and Lisle (2016). Through Lisle, in fact, the figure of the tourist can be harnessed to overcome the subject’s alienation from contingency – an alienation that hinders the conceptualisation of a gnoseological revolution proceeding from an ontological change. Were the process to stop at the ontological level, war would undergo a change in *ousia* – the Greek word for “substance”, sharing the same root with ontology – and, following from this, the subject would be passively affected. However, my goal is that of assessing the complexity and multifaceted connotation of that which signifies as a process of mutual impact: war changes, thus re-constituting the subject, and the subject punctually, revolutionarily re-constitutes her gnosis of war.

As concerns the organisation of the present work, Chapter 1 assesses Engberg-Pedersen’s account of contingency in war, to evaluate the epistemic implications of the shift, bring the work into conversation with philosophy and examine its limitations. Through a re-reading of *Empire of Chance*, I claim that the revolution of contingency that Engberg-Pedersen is describing should be connoted in gnoseological – rather than ontological – terms. I then examine the influence such a revolution has on history and poetics, and the impact exerted on metaphysics. Chapter 2 examines the cognitive subject, necessary to theorise a revolution in gnosis beyond Engberg-Pedersen. I first argue that the recognition of the centrality of the sentient subject is hindered by the latter’s extra-location *vis-à-vis* war. Subsequently, harnessing Lisle’s *Holidays in the Danger Zone* (2016), I respond to Engberg-Pedersen’s ontologies by re-materialising a globally-embedded subject. Finally, the last part of the second Chapter discloses, beyond the examined texts, the implications for empire of a subjectivity that has been globally re-materialised

(1) The Gnoseological Shift

This Chapter teases out the difference between the continual, eventful, ontological change to which war is subject and the post-1800 gnoseological revolution of contingency – with the goal of assessing the epistemic and metaphysical implications of this revolution. First, I present and respond to Engberg-Pedersen’s ontologising of the

Re-reading the Notion of Ontological Change in War: The Problem of Knowledge

Written by Giulia Tempo

geometry-to-contingency overthrow. Secondly, I examine the historical-poetic effects of that which I have re-signified as a gnoseological revolution. Eventually, in the third part of the Chapter, I look into the metaphysics of the revolution, bringing *Empire of Chance* into conversation with Hegel and Aristotle. The Chapter thus sheds light on Engberg-Pedersen's conceptualisation of warfare, laying the foundations to understand his *Empire of Chance* and subsequently critique it, in Chapter 2, by putting it into conversation with Lisle's framework.

Ontological change, gnoseological revolution

Engberg-Pedersen's work traces a deeply insightful portrait of the change undergone by war around 1800 – a change that he elevates to the status of ontological revolution. With the expansion of military operations, an increasing complexity of warfare becomes evident, prompting the author to speak about the birth of an unprecedented “*empire du hazard*” (Engberg-Pedersen, 2015, p. 4). Here, chance becomes an essentially productive principle – rather than being relegated to the obscure periphery of the metatheory of war. The most emblematic theorist of war who embraces the newly-found contingency of war is Clausewitz, who displays a marked “contempt for the continued application of geometry to modern warfare” (Engberg-Pedersen, 2015, p. 57). Geometricity is replaced with probabilism and friction, certainty with possibilistic pluralism, in a revolution that Engberg-Pedersen takes to be ontic. When he refers to the “transubstantiation” of the theory of war (Engberg-Pedersen, 2015, p. 57), in fact, there is a fundamental reference to *substance*. The ontological connotation of his metatheoretical reflection assumes even greater clarity if we consider the ancient Greek equivalent of the term “transubstantiation”: *metousiosis* (μετουσίωσις). The Greek word indicates, as the one of Latin origin, a change (*meta*) in the intrinsic, intimate essence of something – and interestingly the root of *ousiosis* is the same as that of ontology: the participle ὄν (pron. “on”) of the verb “to be”. On the whole, the revolution Engberg-Pedersen theorises is one in *being*.

In response to Engberg-Pedersen's ontologies, I argue that, when the increasing complexity of war reveals the ultimate limitations of geometry as an explanatory tool, there is indeed an ontological change (a shift in complexity), but the *revolution* is gnoseological. It is here pivotal to define the notion of “revolution” and the reasons for which it differs *vis-à-vis* “change”. I intend the revolution as a *sui generis* overthrow, distinct from a continual, eventful change. In the case of 1800 warfare, geometry performs as a superstructure that around 1800 is no longer capable of containing the ontological change of war. Geometry is thus revolutionised: chance takes over in the *knowledge* of warscapes, thus situating this revolution within the realm of cognition. In fact, even before 1800 there were *ontological* markers of contingency in war – albeit forcibly reconducted to geometricity. What develops after the turn of the century is “a different *understanding* [emphasis added] of war” (Engberg-Pedersen, 2015, p. 3). It is thus relevant to note that Engberg-Pedersen confuses the notion that pre-1800 war was *conceived* geometrically with the ontological geometricity of warfare. He ontologises that which is an epistemic frame – with war being deprived of agency until its assumed rescue at the hands of Napoleon. By depicting the revolution as ontological, Engberg-Pedersen traces the picture of a pre-1800 war essentially respondent to the commands of geometry – whereas arguably even before Napoleon the ontological explicative power of geometry was questionable. Engberg-Pedersen focuses on Euclid's parabolic geometry but, even extending the reasoning to hyperbolic geometry and to its 19th century developments, the battlefield transcends its axioms.

Geometry, in fact, does not admit limitations to knowledge – being premised upon a known plane and the lines and points contained within it – whereas the battlefield (both before and after 1800) is never *absolutely* knowable. Given the ontological limitations, even before 1800, of geometry *vis-à-vis* the battlefield, the revolution cannot but display a gnoseological character: the impossibility of *knowing* the entire warscape becomes revolutionarily manifest through the increasing complexity of warfare. The contingent limitations to absolute geometry, which the contained nature of pre-1800 warfare prevented to surge to a level where they could no longer be ignored, now surge to the level of cognition. War emerging “as a realm of radical contingency, a realm shot through with chance events” (Engberg-Pedersen, 2015, p. 4) and impeding the simplistic reconduction of the battlefield to the Euclidean plane, the pre-existing ontological limitations of geometry are made epistemically evident and geometricity itself is overthrown. War thus renders this scenario of gnoseological revolution available by severing the possibility for geometry to be deployed as explicative tool – ultimately opening up a space for the cognition of contingency that will prove indispensable for the framing of subsequent wars, as the 20th-century World Wars.

Re-reading the Notion of Ontological Change in War: The Problem of Knowledge

Written by Giulia Tempo

Historical-poetic effects of the gnoseological revolution

The loss of geometrical explicative power creates the space in which historical contingency can be acknowledged: the first implication exerted by the post-1800 gnoseological revolution is on history – which comes to encompass *probability*. As chance shifts from being an exception to serving as an “organizational principle” (Engberg-Pedersen, 2015, p. 27), the way history *is* comes to compete with how it *could* have unfolded. Contingency therefore undoes historical *nécessitarisme* through the tools provided by a war that is “a variegated epistemic field of chance” (Engberg-Pedersen, 2015, p. 7): the conscience that other histories might have been possible makes the spectator rethink the history she witnesses. Engberg-Pedersen thus builds upon Clausewitz’s notion that war has become an “empire of possible events” (Clausewitz, as quoted in Engberg-Pedersen, 2015, p. 59) to situate within this fog of uncertainty a re-understanding of history. When he brings Scharnhorst into the narrative, in fact, it becomes evident that the critiques the latter moves to military history bear implications for the wider conceptualisation of history – which must now “represent the accidental as accidental” (Engberg-Pedersen, 2015, p. 133). When Scharnhorst “suggests that precisely what is excluded” (Engberg-Pedersen, 2015, p. 135) should become central to historiography, he is transcending teleology. He expounds in fact how “a partially uncontrollable and obscure mass of micro events”, should not be read “through the lens of a simple abstract schema” (Engberg-Pedersen, 2015, p. 133). A re-reading of this new possibilistic history in the light of a revolution of gnosis – an overthrowing of geometry within the *cognition* of war – enables to examine its legacies for subsequent historical cognition. For instance, Tooze’s account (2014) of the 20th-century interwar scenario accounts for complexity in ways that profoundly resent from a gnoseological shift. Allowing for friction beyond *nécessitarisme* and for multiple possible pathways with no scripted ending, Tooze’s history is *cognitively pluralistic*.

In addition to the historical implications, and tightly bound to these, the shift in the cognition of war profoundly impacts the development of poetics – the term being etymologically intended as *poiesis*, the demiurgical, creative representation akin to *techne*, the positivity in the Heideggerian sense. When the cognition of war changes, it impacts poetics, which comes to incorporate contingency. The gnoseological revolution of geometrical understandings of war is embodied by Berenhorst’s “critique of the historiographic exclusion of all future contingents” and imponderabilities (Engberg-Pedersen, 2015, p. 134). Proceeding from this, Scharnhorst “suggests a new poetics adequate to the contemporary state of war” (Engberg-Pedersen, 2015, p. 135). The new poetics reflects the contingency that “suffuses the geographical space” (Engberg-Pedersen, 2015, p. 142) and that impacts the experiential level. It is to simulate those very experiential grounds that Clausewitz, in Engberg-Pedersen’s account, takes on a poetic modality “that attempts to bring about the emotional effect” of chance (p. 142). The positive, the artificial, the poetic are made into technologies of experience intended to “train the users to manage contingency” (Engberg-Pedersen, 2015, p. 144). This new approach to representing the contingent is part of the gnoseological revolution and is firmly rooted within warfare, which makes available the shift in poetics. Indeed, poetics and war are mutually constitutive: “poetics is shaped by war”, and “the conception of war is itself a product of poetics” (Engberg-Pedersen, 2015, p. 147).

The metaphysics of the gnoseological revolution beyond E.P.

Building upon the world-historical implications and the impact on poetics produced by such cognitive revolution, *Empire of Chance* performs as a tool to transcend both the Hegelian historical teleology and the Aristotelian poetics of harmony. Engberg-Pedersen does converse with Hegel, but he does not fully expound the extent to which the latter is radically transcended by the world-historical implications of the post-1800 revolution. Indeed, “Hegel was an acute observer of the rupture in social life that we now call modernity” (Buck-Morss, 2009, p. 6) – but while he “brings contingency into the heart of the empirical, it is only in order to install an absolute division between the accidental and the necessity and teleology of the spirit” (Engberg-Pedersen, 2015, p. 55), thus eventually dismissing contingency. For Hegel (1807/1977), that the “real” is a noumenon allows to devalue the phenomenon, the idea being that contingency merely serves a superior *telos*. Ontologically, the finite is a manifestation of the infinite, while epistemically the understanding of the finite proceeds through and in light of the overall teleology of history. Thus, in a conception that can be reconducted to a monistic pantheism, what phenomenologically takes place is but a particular manifestation of the *Geist* – an implication that Engberg-Pedersen does not fully tease out. The attention Hegel devotes to Napoleon is not an acknowledgment of the “reality” of contingency: the General is rather a *transcendentally-real* embodiment of the *Geist*. For Hegel, history remains the realisation of Reason: Napoleon

Re-reading the Notion of Ontological Change in War: The Problem of Knowledge

Written by Giulia Tempo

performs as the synthesis, the *Aufhebung* born out of monarchy and revolution – in a teleological view in which the historical process could not have been different. Here, “chance resembles the efforts of Satan in Paradise Lost, whose attempts to subvert the Divine Plan actually fulfill it” (Morson, 1998, p. 289). Overall, therefore, tracing the portrait of a Tootzian history that might have taken a different path implies transcending Hegel’s *Aufhebung* and the teleology of the historical process.

Additionally, the new *poiesis*, which stems from a cognitively re-understood war, has the metaphysical implication of overcoming the Aristotelian poetics of harmony. To this respect, Engberg-Pedersen merely notes the role of the Greek philosopher in theorising probability, by acknowledging the plurality of events and calling them “potentialities” (Engberg-Pedersen, 2015, p. 58). Aristotle does indeed acknowledge the contingency of the world: in his view, “unlike Euclidean geometry and the perfect motion of the heavenly bodies, life in the sublunary world is radically uncertain” (Morson, 1998, p. 286). However, Aristotle’s *poiesis* ultimately overcomes and composes finitude, as for him and the tradition of poetics deriving from him “the harmony of art ideally eliminates all contingency” (Morson, 1998, p. 287). In the Aristotelian poetics, “nothing is contingent, if by the contingent we mean, as Aristotle defines the term, something that can either be or not be” (Morson, 1998, p. 287). My claim is that this ultimate recomposition of potentialities into a positive order is precisely what Engberg-Pedersen’s technologies of experience attempt to overcome. Albeit understood by the author as determined by a revolution in ontology, these technologies epitomise in fact a type of *poiesis* that cognitively incorporates contingency. This post-Aristotelian *poiesis* speaks back to practices of war, and in order to achieve this goal it boldly features contingency: it comes to exhibit – rather than attempting to contain – the imperfection of multiplicity, probability and chance. Aristotle’s poetics thus clashes with, and is ultimately transcended by, the post-1800 gnoseological revolution – the latter bearing profound implications for the positive representation of the world.

(2) The Cognitive Subject

This Chapter brings Engberg-Pedersen into conversation with Lisle (2016), to place the cognitive subject at the centre of the re-understood revolution of war. In fact, to expound how an *ontological change* can open up to what I claim to be a *revolution in gnosis* (the two pivotal notions of Chapter 1), emphasis must be placed on the subject – she who performs the act of cognition. Firstly, I disclose how the eventful change in war, together with socially-embedded factors, tinges with contingency the subject’s knowledge of herself – affecting her cognition of war. Concurrently, however, I aim at showing how the persistent extra-location of the subject ontologises the process, whose gnoseological character cannot surface. Secondly, through the subjective tool of the tourist sensibility, I investigate how the revolution can be re-understood as gnoseological. The cognitive re-materialisation of the subject is unveiled, and through it the geometrical cognition of war is revolutionarily overthrown. Thirdly, the Chapter addresses the tightness of a Eurocentric account of war, restoring empire through the de-linearization of war discourses. Overall, in Chapter 2 I build upon the revolution of war, re-understood beyond Engberg-Pedersen (Chapter 1), to locate at its very heart the subject. This theoretical move is both enabled and intellectually required by a re-conceptualisation of war that purports to play on gnosis.

Shifting war: the revolution of the cognitive subject and the obstacle of disembodiment

The revolution of war after 1800, being gnoseological rather than a mere shift in ontology, presupposes a revolution in the cognitive social subject, i.e. the socially-situated entity that positionally cogitates war. What I have argued, in fact, is that the *being* of war endures a continuum of eventful changes – whereas what comes to be overthrown is its *understanding*. The revolution not being one in “nature” or “essence”, what is revolutionised is the relation established by the subject with the object of war: the object historically mutates, but the revolution concerns the subject and her cognitive relation with the object. That is to say, for the ontological, eventful, historical changes described by Engberg-Pedersen to open up to a revolution in gnosis, the subject must take centre stage. Indeed, *Empire of Chance* does take into account the subject, but the latter is portrayed as forced to acknowledge a contingency stemming from an “ontological revolution” of war. Engberg-Pedersen’s subject is thus reactive rather than active, motioned by rather than the pivot of a revolution. In response, I argue that the subject is the hinge of the gnoseological revolution: war continually re-constitutes the subject, and at a revolutionary moment the subject punctually re-constitutes (her understanding of) war. The subject – and, more specifically, the subject’s materiality –

Re-reading the Notion of Ontological Change in War: The Problem of Knowledge

Written by Giulia Tempo

is the pivot around which this epistemic overthrowing revolves. Change in war brings her to a point where she has to acknowledge her materiality, framing through this consciousness her cognition of the object. The process – a complex, non-linear one which concurrently produces non-war and anti-war effects – brings her to acknowledge the contingency of war. This does not imply that she comes to “know” war, but that her cognition comes to revolutionarily encompass contingency, and that this subjective recognition is central to the revolution – the latter being far from an essentialised, ontic revolution in “substance”. This is a form of “*cogitatio* distinguished from “objective knowledge [*connaissance objective*]” (Lévinas, 1961, p. 84): the subject does not come to *know* war, but rather to cogitate it as contingent. In any case, the subject’s recognition can unfold when the boundary established between subject and object is renegotiated, with the former realising her involvement.

Subjective recognition cannot surface as long as the social subject extra-locates herself *vis-à-vis* the contingency of war. Engberg-Pedersen’s lack of attention to the nuances of gnoseology *vis-à-vis* ontology, in fact, arguably stems from that which Lisle denounces as the “powerful subject-object distinction” (p. 21): as long as the cognitive subject is read as disentangled from the object, contingency can be considered as merely revolutionising the *ontology* of war. That is to say, the ontologising of the revolution proceeds from this extra-location of the subject in respect to contingent war: the geometry-to-contingency transition is simplistically located within the object, overlooking the subject-object entanglement. Engberg-Pedersen’s subject is extra-located *vis-à-vis* “objects, and materiality” (Lisle, 2016, p. 24), thus remaining a Hobbesian *phantasma sine corpore* (Hobbes, 1651/2006). Such a subject intellectually conceives contingency as the product of a change in the object’s *nature*. The post-1800 changes in war are, in other words, deemed to be ontological – for the subject is alienated from war, identifying herself with a disembodied *Engelskopf*, an “angel’s head” (Schopenhauer, 1819/2011, p. 61). Supra-locating herself *vis-à-vis* contingency, she does not conceive the multiple patterns through which war intervenes and shapes her sociality, while concurrently the social defines and informs war. Like the scientist in Gusterson’s nuclear laboratory (1996), she rigidly separates mind and body – the pivotality of the latter and its contingency not being considered in her relation with war. Not grasping the materiality of her own subjectivity and of her relationship with war, the cognitive subject locates the revolution within the ontology of the object itself – overlooking the ways in which the revolution may rather involve her own gnosis. She has not yet come to envision the “deeply embodied and profoundly material mode of encounter” (Lisle, 2016, p. 20) that will lead her to rearticulate her subjectivity, the object of war and the mutual relation of the two. The gnoseological revolution of war presupposes precisely this re-articulation, with the cognitive, socially-embedded subject assuming centrality (unlike in an ontic revolution) and with the boundary between her and the object being renegotiated. For this process to unfold, however, an intellectual device is needed.

Global tourist sensibilities and the cognitive re-materialisation of the subject

Tourist sensibilities, by unveiling the embeddedness of the subject in war, and the revolutionary impact of this embeddedness on the cognition of war, perform as subjective tools to expound the instantiation of a cognitive revolution *vis-à-vis* an ontological change. To spell out the gnoseological nature of the shift, in fact, a theoretical device is needed for the cognitive subject to acknowledge her own contingency and the contingency of her relationship with war – thus relocating the revolution from the “substance” of the object to the subject-object relation. The unexpected intertwining of war and tourism expounded by Lisle (2016) enables to apply a tourist sensibility to war, thus re-embedding – albeit *ex-post* – the subject. The tourist performs as an avatar, in Engberg-Pedersen’s terminology, into the world of warfare, and as a theoretical tool restoring materiality to the subject. In Lisle’s framework, “as the high politics of nuclear deterrence, arms control, and weapons treaties were shaping the international sphere, millions of tourists were travelling the world and shaping more mundane geopolitical realities” (Lisle, 2016, p. 142). Thus, expounding the interconnections between “high politics” and “the mundane” assists the subject in fully situating herself within the world of the material-and-contingent, re-positioning the revolution of contingency within her relationship with the object of war – rather than within war alone. Both the tourist and the soldier constitute themselves through shared productions of difference; both experience the contingency of war as not only a contingency of the object, but of the subject and of the subject’s relation with war. What the subject is called to face is not just the material environment of war, but also her materiality – and her material relationship with war and the enemy, absent in Engberg-Pedersen but pivotal for the subject to situate her *persona* within war. The subject is not a disembodied observer who reacts to changes in war’s ontology and theorises contingency; she is rather the pivot that, impacted by war, re-understands herself as contingent and, through this, revolutionises her

Re-reading the Notion of Ontological Change in War: The Problem of Knowledge

Written by Giulia Tempo

cognition of war. Through an experience of war “shaped by a touristic sensibility” (Lisle, 2016, p. 72), the subject’s very own relationship with war can be unveiled. Overall, therefore, the tourist performs as a social avatar to expound the subject’s own embeddedness in war and her pivotality in instantiating a cognitive revolution. Having renegotiated the subject-object boundaries, the contingency that revolutionises war is re-read as gnoseological.

The global embeddedness of the tourist thus generates a punctuative moment of subversion in a continuum of change, enabling to unveil the transition that the cognitive, socially-embedded subject has undergone: she has assumed an amphibious nature, acknowledging the contingency of her subjectivity. As long as the subject identifies with an *Engelskopf*, in fact, she neglects the bodily implications of her relationship with war. As Lisle’s tourist encounters the soldier, however, a reframing of war enables to reveal not only the ever-present contingency of war, but also – revolutionarily – *subjective* contingency. As epitomised by Fussell’s work (2009), the soldier is deeply constituted by war. His body and his own contingency are central to the relationship he establishes with the object of war – and the encounter with the tourist contributes to expounding the subject’s embeddedness. The “contingent, complex, heterogeneous nature of colonial enterprise” (Lisle, 2016, p. 44) and of colonial war drags the super-located subject directly into the depths of contingency. Incalculability, error, and illness re-materialise the *Engelskopf* and put an end to its immaterial estrangement: the embodied *cognition* of the change that the subject withstands in war and of its impact, rather than the change *per se*, assumes centre stage. The subject’s body is entrenched in that change, producing a revolutionary punctuative event in subjective gnosis of war. War does not “become contingent” at this moment – not being a revolution in *ousia*: rather, the subject comes to acknowledge and subjectify such contingency. With the unveiling of “heterogeneous circuits of agency and materiality” (Lisle, 2016, p. 57), wars cease to be read as “objects” clearly separated from the subject, “empty receptacles of human desires” (Lisle, 2016, p. 272). Renegotiating the “separation of mind and body” (Gusterson, 1996, p. 102) and of subject and object, therefore, the re-materialised, amphibious subject assumes centrality in a revolution of war that pivots around her cognition. Overall, the simplistic framework that situates the revolution within the object – the latter being the sole expression of contingency in a rigid subject-object Manicheism – is overturned by the conscience of “being rooted in a world of objects in a way in which the pure transcendental subject of knowledge can never be” (Ansell-Pearson, 2012, p. 122).

Cognitive openings: restoring empire through the subject

In the space of the present analysis, the de-linearization of the narrative of war implies looking at how certain imperial simplifications enable Engberg-Pedersen to ontologise the war revolution. As the subject is re-materialised in a global framework, the tightness of Engberg-Pedersen’s warscape is disclosed. Firstly, his account of war is markedly state-centric, with the state being conceptualised largely on the basis of the European (Prussian) state. It is within this common Eurocentric epistemological space about war that Engberg-Pedersen can ontologise the revolution in war, building upon a supposedly geometrical pre-1800 framework. Embedding the subject within global war-society relations, however, expounds the way military geographies transcend the circumscribed European confrontation (Lisle, 2016). Secondly, this account of war is indebted to Napoleon: Napoleonic wars are asked to bear the entire weight of what he considers a revolution in ontology – with war being deprived of agency until its “rescue” at the hands of Napoleon. What I argue is that the process of mutual subject-object re-constitution uncovered through Lisle’s work allows – and compels – to address these two limitations, expounding the erasure of empire. Lisle enables in fact to expound the gaps in a German-based, Eurocentric knowledge and to “reveal the fragments of another story behind the official one” (Buck-Morss, 2009, p. 13). For instance, had *Empire of Chance* looked into the wars against the “Indians” in North America, these encounters would have provided an example of pre-1800 wars that are not fought *more geometrico*. In this context, as in numerous others, misinterpretation and communicational misunderstandings (Todorov, 1982) contingently shape war; concurrently, terrain and illness perform as elements of contingency.

The analytical de-linearization that I have performed through Lisle’s work thus calls for a reintegration of empire. The analysis conducted so far has dealt with a number of complexities, revealing the plurality and intricacy of the interaction between the ontological and the gnoseological in warfare. However, this investigation opens up the space for further complexity – which I here only briefly touch upon – to be analysed. Precisely through a narrative that becomes less linear, more convoluted, Engberg-Pedersen can be re-read avoiding reproducing a “narrative of global

Re-reading the Notion of Ontological Change in War: The Problem of Knowledge

Written by Giulia Tempo

domination" (Trouillot, 1995, p. 107). Lisle's work lays the foundation upon which a globally-implicated subject can look into pre-1800 contingent, complex, heterogeneous frameworks such as the Haitian Revolution – which was "unthinkable as it happened" (Trouillot, 1995, p. 27). Haiti thus performs as an "example of both the possibilities and dangers of such struggles" (Dubois, 2004, p. 2), the Revolution being "ripe with possibility" (Dubois, 2004, p. 73). An example of a Tootian conception of history, Haiti thus makes evident the geometry-to-chance transition in the gnoseology of war beyond the Prussian "core". Here, through the deployment of global tourist sensibilities, Lisle's re-materialised contingent subject can re-understand within empire her relationship with war. What is acknowledged is not only the contingency of warfare, but also that of the subject's relation with it – with a gnoseological revolution thus being ignited beyond Engberg-Pedersen.

Conclusion

It has been argued that, although war's ontology changes in rich, eventful ways, the punctuative moment of revolutionary overthrow is one that involves gnosis. Firstly, I have re-read Engberg-Pedersen's revolution of war as cognitive. Building upon this, the impact on history and poetics has been teased out, to then examine the metaphysical implications of such a re-reading. Secondly, the revolution being one in gnosis, the subject-object relation has been allowed centre stage. Facing a subject that extra-locates herself *vis-à-vis* the object, I have deployed the tool of tourist sensibilities to re-embed the subject, driving her into the object of war. This strategy has enabled to re-materialise the subject, thus rearticulating the subject-object relation as contingent – and enabling a re-understanding of the revolution as gnoseological. Having embedded the subject within global war-society relations, I have eventually allowed for further complexity to be investigated. Engberg-Pedersen's framework is in fact geographically and historically fixed, and this tightness is exposed when the previously extra-located subject is re-materialised through a set of tourist sensibilities. In other words, the de-linearization of the understanding of war, through the performance of a subject-object re-articulation, calls to address the global asymmetrical frameworks within which the cognitive subject acknowledges her materiality.

Overall, what I have performed throughout the present work is a re-reading in a gnoseological key of Engberg-Pedersen's revolution, which has then mandated a recentralisation of the cognitive subject and of her relationship with the object of war. I have in fact shown that the gnoseological revolutionary movement in the understanding of war is premised upon an act of cognitive re-materialisation: through Lisle, I have driven the subject into a corporeal encounter with the object of war, and the resulting re-embodiment has shed light on cognition. The subject has thus proven fundamental to show that the process is not an ontological one, where war's "substance" re-constitutes a passive subject. It is rather signified as a complex, cognitive process of mutual re-constitution, where changing war re-constitutes the subject, and the subject revolutionarily re-constitutes (her cognition of) war. On the whole, I have analysed war as a problem of knowledge in and beyond the examined texts, signifying the revolution as one in gnosis rather than in the nature of being.

Bibliography

- Ansell-Pearson, K. (Ed.). (2012). *Nietzsche and Modern German Thought*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Buck-Morss, S. (2009). *Hegel, Haiti, and universal history*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Dubois, L. (2005). *Avengers of the new world*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Engberg-Pedersen, A. (2015). *Empire of Chance*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Fussell, P. (2009). *The Great War and Modern Memory*. New York, NY: Sterling Publishing.
- Gusterson, H. (1996). *Nuclear Rights*. Berkley, CA: University of California Press.
- Hegel, G. W. F., Miller, A. V., & Findlay, J. N. (1977). *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press. (Original work published in 1807)

Re-reading the Notion of Ontological Change in War: The Problem of Knowledge

Written by Giulia Tempo

Hobbes, T. (2006). *Leviathan*. London, UK: A&C Black. (Original work published in 1651)

Linebaugh, P., & Rediker, M. (2013). *The many-headed hydra: sailors, slaves, commoners, and the hidden history of the revolutionary Atlantic*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Lisle, D. (2016). *Holidays in the danger zone: Entanglements of war and tourism*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Morson, G. S. (1998). Contingency and poetics. *Philosophy and literature*, 22(2), 286-308.

Schopenhauer, A. (1819/2011). *The World as Will and Idea*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Todorov, T. (1982). *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.

Tooze, A. (2015). *The Deluge: The Great War, America and The Remaking of the Global Order, 1916-1931*. London, UK: Penguin Group.

Trouillot, M. R. (1995). *Silencing the past: Power and the production of history*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Written at: London School of Economics and Political Science

Written for: Prof. Tarak Barkawi

Date written: May 2019