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## War/Truth: Foucault, Heraclitus and the hoplite Homer

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**Abstract** *This article extends and critiques Michel Foucault's political sociology of war by taking it beyond its modern subjects. Positioning his work alongside Homer, Heraclitus and Plato, it analyses relations between war, truth and race in the transition from Archaic to Classical Greece. In doing so, it approaches philosophical texts as direct reflections on specific historical experiences of war, making the case for a political theory of fighting as a necessary and under-developed aspect of critical war studies. Such an approach, the article concludes, opens up new scholarly possibilities for the political sociology of war and resources political intervention against war-waging powers whose authority—inside and outside the academy—derives from a supposedly authoritative relation to the history and conduct of fighting.*

He crashed into the Thebans front-to-front. So smashing their shields together they pushed, fought, killed and were killed. (Xenophon 2004, 4.3.19)

### Introduction: war, truth and the political sociology of fighting

War for Michel Foucault, as Julian Reid notes, was 'the problem of political modernity *par excellence*' (2006, 127). The guiding questions of Foucault's 1975–1976 *Society must be defended* lectures—those of when 'civil order' was first imagined 'an order of battle' and who first 'saw war just beneath the surface of peace'—led him to historical subjects (English Levellers, aristocratic critics of French monarchy, and so on) of a particular, early-modern juncture (2003, 59, *passim*). In subsequent and final works, however, Foucault placed at least some of his assumptions regarding historical periodization and the origins of 'modern' problematics in question. The later *Security, territory, population* lectures, for example, examined classical and biblical sources in their discussion of modern arts of government. And while the first volume of *The history of sexuality* approached its subjects through nineteenth-century biopower, the next two resituated them within far longer histories requiring close attention to pre-modern texts. Running concurrent with the development of his position on war, this re-periodization was never extended to it, but Foucault's late scholarship surely suggests possibilities for doing so.

Taking its point of departure from the 1975–1976 lectures in particular, this article attends to concurrent developments in warfare, philosophy and *polis*

society in the transition from Archaic to Classical Greece. Suggesting relations between battlefield practices, the meaning attributed to them and the contestation of war in philosophical discourse, it is less concerned with historically ‘correcting’ Foucault’s modern account of the historical discourse of war than with refining and further developing some of the concerns that animated it. By drawing on recent efforts to frame a critical war studies, I elaborate a historic relation between war and a regime of truth—an instance of ‘War/Truth’—and suggest some implications for the study of war. The paper’s central focus is the Ionian revolt against Persia in the fifth century BC and particularly the defeat of the hoplite expeditionary force at Ephesus. By situating hoplite warfare within a wider regime of truth derived in part from Homer’s *Iliad*, I suggest ways to interpret the significance of this defeat and develop a new reading of Heraclitus’s fragments. Written at the time of the revolt, these have rarely been considered at any length as a reflection upon it. The crisis in War/Truth to which Heraclitus testified, I argue, signifies a politicized rejection of a particular ‘hoplite’ figure of Homer. This marks the beginning of the end of a War/Truth regime that frames and plays out within later Greek thought about war, Plato especially, against whose philosophical disposition Foucault repeatedly—I suggest problematically—distinguished his modern historical subjects. A significant origin for Greek thought on war is thus established in events historically overshadowed by the momentous wars of Greece and Persia, then Greek against Greek that were to follow. In place of the later, more familiar perspective of Thucydides’ metropolitan, war-waging elites I emphasize the existential crisis of a colony now colonized. Understanding the significance of this for the study of war, however, requires further attention to the Foucauldian questions introduced above.

*War and method: problematics, analytics and Foucault’s autogenealogy*

The 1976 lectures begin with a sequence of closely related problems. The first concerns the general status of war as ‘analyser’ of power relations when these are taken to be grounded in a ‘primitive and permanent war’ that can and should be ‘regarded as primary with respect to other relations’. Second, Foucault asks, ‘How, when, and why was it noticed or imagined that what is going on beneath and in power relations is a war ... that it is a sort of uninterrupted battle that shapes peace, and that civil order—its basis, its essence, its essential mechanisms—is basically an order of battle ... ?’ (2003, 47). Combined, these two registers of inquiry initiate a startlingly brave, although frequently implicit, autogenealogy. They represent Foucault’s ‘question to himself’ about the history and consequence of that Nietzschean ‘historical–philosophical’ account of truth that animated his engagement with archives of clinic, prison, barrack room and other sites of modern power/knowledge (Foucault 2000, 5–15; Reid 2006, 141; Dillon and Neal 2008, 8). Tracing his own intellectual lineage thus, Foucault critically elaborated on its implication in racialized politics and modern war, thereby developing new intellectual comportments and a sensitivity to polemic excess.

The intellectual disposition from which Foucault sought to depart situates truth claims and the socio-political forms they engender within historically specific antagonisms. It itself emerged, he argues, in antagonistic relation to an older, pre-modern, intellectually and historically distinct ‘juridical–philosophical’ tradition that presumed an ahistorical, harmonious origin for truth. This regime,

from which Foucault's modern historical–philosophical subjects emerged, he explicitly traced to Plato (for example: 2003, 173). Much, then, would seem to hang on Platonic metaphysics. But this receives little extended attention. What is presented—as he wryly acknowledged—largely amounts to a Nietzschean cartoon (2003, 173). Here, 'Plato' is synonymous with philosophy's capacity to ascertain truth through privileged access to a transcendental universality whose content—justice, right, the good and so on—always already exists as a warless, non-contradictory forms marked by 'congruence, love, unity and pacification' (2000, 12; 2003, 53). By implication, the Platonic schema asserts that, while the enlightened may fight for just causes, their capacity to do so exists on the basis of the general neutrality of truth with regard to the claims of combatants. 'Truth' is entirely distinct from the contingent, experiential processes of war.

Raising the question of his own commitment and its apparent other, the 1976 lectures outline that core work Jabri (2007) identifies as Foucault's 'analytics of war'. They also articulate questions enabling his progression from the research that made them possible. Within an overlapping historical series tracing war and 'the military dimensions of society' from discipline to governmentality and biopower endure provocative lines of enquiry he might thus have recognized as a 'problematics' of war. These begin in the autogenealogical question of the origin and operation of historical–philosophical discourse. Foucault then traces its implication in violent, racialized dividing practices that contemporary forms of polemic philosophical and political activism (potentially his own) risked reproducing, despite desubjectifying intent (Foucault 2003; Reid 2006). How, then, to conceptualize and function in relation to operations of power, discursive practices and modes of intervention from a place outside or irreducible to (racialized) relations of war? For Foucault, the answer rested in part on the ethical and political necessity of apolemic modes of address (1997, 111–119) and—as he argues in *The history of sexuality, volume 1*—the analytical distinction of 'war' as a proto-hierarchical, integrative rubric for multiple relations of force from 'power' as a primary, radically dispersed relational grid (1998, 93).

Foucault's analytics of war thus, as Jabri observes (2007, 71), move 'the remit of analysis beyond [war's] traditional battlefield sense', foregrounding those 'practices that constituted the actuality of relations of force' and the problem of incessant (auto)critique as the means by which that actuality might be resisted. A fundamental contribution to the political sociology of war, several of its guiding assumptions have proved problematic (2007, 71). In particular, moving 'beyond' battle too frequently amounts to an aversion to engaging it directly, missing the extent to which fighting is not solely constituted by wider historical discourse and practice but is itself a constitutive discourse and practice of fundamental importance (Barkawi and Brighton 2011). The contingent, violent reciprocation of fighting not only distinguishes war as a practice but introduces a continuous demand for war-waging powers to construct authoritative, historically specific 'truths' about war—War/Truth—which circulate as, recruit and are recruited by wider regimes of truth and power/knowledge (2011, 140, *passim*). Attention to War/Truth, then, first foregrounds the dependence of war-waging power on authoritative knowledges and narratives concerning armed force and war. Second, it insists on the precariousness of these knowledges and narratives in the face of a destructive activity marked by contingent reciprocation, uncertainty and evasion of conceptual capture (2011, 140, *passim*; Brighton 2011, 102). By

foregrounding War/Truth relations, fighting again becomes the focus of scholarship on war but, through Foucault, critically recovered from those who take it to refer to a discrete system of 'kinetic exchange' and situated within a wider field of power and knowledge from which little is presumed fully external (Barkawi and Brighton 2011, 136).

Several implications follow and inform the analysis below. The first is the importance of specific historical discourses and practices of fighting and the event of 'battle' (even when protracted and 'unconventional'). Second, historical experience of war is approached as reflective, destructive and constitutive of regimes of truth. This is largely missing from Foucault's analytics of war and reflects a wider theoretical reduction of fighting to an effect of other, apparently distinct and more important practices and discourses. Such abstraction significantly contradicts Foucault's engagements with the archive elsewhere. *The birth of the clinic* and *Discipline and punish*, for example, offer pungent examples of the practices and micro-processes exemplary to specific regimes of power. But the concrete meaning and practice of 'war' for Foucault's historical subjects goes almost entirely unexamined. Which historical experiences, particular forms, practices and ideas of war's nature, potentials and limits did these people mobilize? How did these shape the historical-philosophical discourse to which Foucault attended? This failure to attend to the specific relationalities of fighting is among the most consequential outcomes of Foucault's inattentiveness to the intersocietal and international. A corrective is necessary not just to 'supplement' existing critical scholarship on war, but to resource direct engagement with the forms of strategic positivism to which fighting is otherwise left. It is this which most directly and uncritically resources war-waging power, in both the application of violence and the production of authoritative War/Truth. Accordingly, the constitutive potential of fighting is approached below through reading Heraclitus's fragments not as the 'obscure', 'timeless' metaphysics they are ordinarily taken to be, but as direct reflection on an experience of war and its relation to perceived truths: the introduction of contingent relationality into a War/Truth regime that had reified fighting in convention. It also requires Foucault's question of how and by whom an 'order of battle' was first imagined in 'civil order' to be engaged at a vital point of emergence for civil order as such: the creation of the Greek *polis* and the system of societal, military and racial ordering that accompanied it. Doing so also, of necessity, requires engagement with the emergence of 'Western' philosophy: that discourse of truth which, as we shall see, problematically and ambivalently straddled Foucault's apparently opposed tendencies of juridical and historical consciousness. In conclusion, I trace the political tension between constitutive (Heraclitian) war and its supposed Platonic opposite and indicate another historic coupling of race and war, significant not least in that it suggests their co-articulation at the origin of juridical discourse.

### **War/Truth and the *polis***

Scholarship on the rise of the Greek *polis* and its attendant relations of war, culture and thought is virtually unrivalled in its expanse and richness. Cultural forms, particularly tragedy, have provided the basis for exemplary discussion of how philosophy, 'the political' and historically specific politics of alterity were

produced and negotiated (for example: Hall 1989; Dillon 1996). Below, experience of war and cultural construction of battlefield practice—aspects of battle narrative—are similarly approached. ‘Reading’ Greek political culture through war is of course a commonplace, not least within Classical sources themselves. But importantly here, however, the attendant claim, consistently repeated by otherwise reliable modern scholars, that ‘the Greeks’ were ‘intimately familiar with’ and ‘constantly engaged in’ war is critically suspended (for example: Ray 2009, 7–8; Coker 2002, 19; Dawson and Dawson 1998, 49). As Shipley observes (1993, 20–23), once the *polis* is taken to include not just male citizens but the entire *oikos*, it becomes obvious that not all Greeks were soldiers and not all Greeks defined themselves in reference to war. Conversely, though, many more Greeks—typically, unfree ‘attendants’—deployed militarily and were required for war-waging than suggested by historical sources (Wees 2004; Gabrielsen 2002). Focusing, as the 1976 lectures tended to, on elite discourse is thus insufficient and a question persists about who made claims about the ‘truth’ of war, why and to what effect. Here, archaeological, military historical and other literatures are used to interpret philosophical claims about the meaning of war. Understood as War/Truth, such claims—classical and modern—are approached as competitive assertions in the context of changing, contested orders of power. For the Greeks, such contestation centred repeatedly on the Homeric canon and the *Iliad* in particular.

### *Homer and the dominion of force*

In the *Iliad*, war is subject and context. There appears little of consequence outside fighting: not even the causes, justification and resolution of the war. Combatants’ detailed lineages reveal war has brought blood relations into conflict and from all corners of the known world: ‘Their speech and dialects were all different, as they spoke a mixture of languages—the troops hailed from many parts’ (4.37). Thus Greeks and Trojans are universal and without a politics of alterity: of many races, but not racialized (Hall 1989, 54–5). As Nietzsche observed, moreover, Homer’s Greeks and Trojans are equally ‘good’ (2006, 123). Value and virtue in the *Iliad* are not established through battle narrative as a conflict of right. Rather, the epic starts nine years in. It concludes not with the fall of Troy but, almost arbitrarily, with the funeral rites of Hector, after which fighting resumes. The war is thus extended beyond Troy in numerous senses; it is all wars but also all of life, a fact simultaneously bemoaned and celebrated by Odysseus in his exhortation to Agamemnon to rejoin battle after the Greek ships have been successfully attacked:

Our lot from youth to age  
was given us by Zeus: danger and war  
to wind upon the spindle of our years  
until we die to the last man. (14.85)

This passage is instructive. Odysseus’s speech succeeds in persuading Agamemnon, who has just argued for retreat in recognition that Zeus favours the Trojans at this point of the battle. Far more important here than any relation of Greek and non-Greek, then, is the relation of human and divine. For Odysseus, war is the condition ordained by Zeus: from human perspective a world shaped by unknowable, divine caprice.



The proximity of Ilium's walls has been consistently referred to by scholars who emphasize their significance for Homer's *polis*-dwelling audience. But this misses the subsequent historical construction of that significance: siege motifs abound across ancient cultures well before the Greek *polis* and only in the most anachronistic imagining is the *Iliad* straightforwardly a drama of civic solidarity. Instead, its hierarchy of value is determined by the brute economy of fighting: the pure internality of war. Here alone the freely chosen actions of warriors—the aristocratic, chariot-borne *promachoi* who fight one to one—become subject to evaluation. For the *promachoi*, war is totality. It affirms them, individuating them only in the quality of their response to it, since anything else would suggest an external measure. Thus, the value of Homeric heroes is distinguished not by why they choose to fight, but how. Agamemnon is persuaded not by a claim that Zeus favours him after all, but that correct conduct takes the form of battlefield steadfastness in the face of death, the terms of which derive from exercising judgement within the contingent, reciprocal particularity of fighting.

This violent interiority and what it suggests of life beyond war (and thereby its limits) have been foregrounded by several of the *Iliad*'s notable modern interpreters. Simone Weil, alternatively titling it 'The Poem of Force', traced the presence of love—familial, romantic, fraternal—among otherwise thing-like protagonists (2005, 28–30). 'Accent' rather than iteration; rare, yet present 'enough to make us feel with sharp regret what it is that violence has killed and will kill again', the possibility of love introduces a transcendent exteriority: 'Only he who has measured the dominion of force, and knows how not to respect it, is capable of love and justice' (2005, 30, 35). Weil also foregrounds Homer's recurrent similes, in which warriors are likened to objects subject to forces of nature (Weil 2005, 26–27). The very possibility of similes suggests another existence combatants might have enjoyed, external to the dominion of force, but comparable such that its limit is made apparent. Typically, these refer not simply to nature but to working the land, so that we might envision fighting for a parapet as being like:

two men quarrelling over boundary stones,  
each with his measuring rod, in the common field,  
in a narrow place, disputing what is fair (12.421)

While elsewhere we learn of Euphorbus's death through an invitation to:

Think how a man might tend a comely shoot  
of olive in a lonely place, well-watered,  
so that it flourished, being blown upon  
by all winds, putting out silvery green leaves,  
till suddenly a great wind in a storm  
uprooted it and cast it down: so beautiful  
had been the son of Panthoos, Euphorbus,  
when Menelaus killed him and bent over  
to take his gear. (17.52)

War's dominion is here situated within a natural order that includes human participation in generation and becoming. But where moderns such as Weil—writing in 1939, observing a new totalizing violence—perceive paradox and irony, such intent is anything but obvious within the text itself. Suggesting how they might have shaped conduct, or even constituted a means to resist the logics of war,

among Homer's ancient audience requires such presumptions be suspended. We cannot attribute to Homer any suggestion that Menelaus (the Spartan Prince with the 'loudest war-cry') and Euphorbus should—even could—have been tending olives. While Homer's audience are here reminded that fighting exists among other alternatives, it is through recognizing warriors' longing for something other than destruction that he affirms their heroism and sacrifice. Where the parapet simile makes reference to 'fairness', its invocation of a 'quarrel' in a 'narrow place' appears only concerned with expressing the intimate spatial proximity of fighters. And, as Weil ultimately recognizes, the highest form of love in the *Iliad* is that of comrades-in-arms, so alternatives to war appear as something whose rejection provides the index of warrior conduct. That outside the dominion of force gains value—becomes comprehensible—only through its mode of entry into the economy of fighting. For Homer's *promachoi*, these alternatives are ultimately false. War is the defining, total condition of mortal life.

There is no easy parallel to be drawn between the Homeric dominion of force and war as the 'analyser of power relations' applied by Foucault's historical-philosophical subjects. Doing so would, among other things, project a notion of 'society' where none existed. Nonetheless, the comparison is important. The Greek societies among whom Homer was read and celebrated (as opposed to those he imagined and wrote within) were undergoing a process of collective transformation inseparable from new forms of fighting. Where the aristocratic order of Homer's *promachoi* referred to the dominion of force and its interior economy of value, the emergence of the *polis* widened that system of reference across new constituencies through a citizen-soldiery whose organizational form was the hoplite phalanx. This new fighting practice, in ways discussed below, levied and projected mass on the battlefield through forms of selfhood and social organization—a new social class—which consistently referred to but was altogether distinct from the practice and social organization of Homeric war. Its extension of the military franchise, as Drake observes, was not simply 'a matter of military technique reflecting social forms ... since it required the construction of collective body on to which war could be transposed' (2002, 22). The meaning of that transposed—war—was thus integral to the production of regimes of truth, through which the new collective body, the *polis*, could be articulated and reflected upon. This understanding, moreover, was 'historical' in the sense that Homer and later Greeks such as Herodotus never questioned the historicity of the Trojan War: rather it was in part through its redescription that their sense of 'the historical' was developed (Saïd 2012). Where Foucault's historical-philosophical subjects invoke historic force relations to differentiate themselves and legitimate partisan projects, the Homeric dominion of force was reconstituted, in ways suggested below, as a shared—if contested—currency across diverse constituencies. These now, through the phalanx, expected to fight with 'common purpose' (Pritchett 1971, 32).

#### *Othismos: fighting, value and the military measuring rod*

In Greek antiquity war centred on raiding for profit. But Homer's readers, from the eighth century, increasingly lived within an economy wherein plundered prestige items circulated in markets driven by the surplus wealth of farming households (Wees 2000, 218–227; Jackson 1993, 71–75; Rihll 1993, 77–105). Although *polies* varied over time and place, a general pattern of agrarian surplus



has been associated with the monopolization of strategic technologies such as metallurgy by a landed 'middling' class who bound slaves to their households and developed their utility for agricultural service. A shift to cereal production also enabled urban populations within easy trading distance to expand, thereby becoming a primary market and assuring a greater proportion of trade for farmed produce (Foxhall 1998; Hanson 1995; Rich et al 1991). The canonical figure of Homer was thus constructed amid the spatial and constitutional *synoecism* of urban centres with surrounding farmlands: a common referent for rising landed agrarians and older, hereditary elites who now found themselves in dialogue, the latter including the largely urbanized, intellectual class through whom the idea and practice of philosophy were developed (Sandywell 1996, 78–80). This historical commonality, alongside novel discourses of 'constitution' and 'citizenship', took form amid the conflicted adaptation of archaic councils into a civic system capable of accommodating agrarian power. This figure of Homer was necessitated—paradoxically—as common referent amid the collapse of those social orders he imagined and experienced.

As an expression of landed power, the individuation of citizens accompanied an increased prominence of practices—plot inheritance and ownership, spatial measure, boundary, internality and externality—integral to the management of territory. Thus, alongside a system of political participation defined through a 'fully integrated triad of civic roles—citizen, farmer, soldier'—came new concepts and practices of war shaped by the necessities of territorial defence and constituencies defined through relations to land (Foxhall 1993, 143; Bowden 1993, 60–61). That which, over time, amounted to an agrarian 'military renaissance' (Hanson 1999, 49) not only disseminated the powers of war from an aristocratic elite to a wider constituency with its own mode of fighting—the hoplite phalanx—but remade war within the territorial logics of the *polis*.

While subject to variation across *polies*—and with the important exception of Sparta—the development of the hoplite phalanx required agrarian economic power, population and organization. Trained and levied at hamlet level, individual hoplites needed their own *panopoly* of heavy armour and weapons (*hopla*) and servile labour to carry it during short, self-financed campaigns (Ray 2009, 9; Sage 1996, 26; Morris 1987, 197). The phalanx—a close-order infantry formation combining columns of variable depth and heavily shielded ranks from which short swords and long, thrusting spears could be deployed—was less manoeuvrable than lighter-armed infantry, cavalry or charioteers, but far superior for holding ground and achieving decisive victory in a frontal, committed fight. The comparative advantage of mass over mobility, however, was largely beside the point: hoplite war was—for some 250 years after 700 BC—almost exclusively practised as tightly regulated, convention-bound 'agrarian duels' between near-identical phalanxes (Thucydides 2009, 1.15.2; Hanson 1995, 241; contrarily: Krentz 2002). These fought head on, typically over disputed borderlands between *polies* (Hanson 1999, 67). Each clash began and ended in ritualized exchanges: first, joint agreement of a battlefield, then acknowledgment of defeat by one side in the form of a request that their dead be returned. These ensured fighting was brief, seasonally specific and decisive—thus affordable, minimally disruptive to farming and ideally as clear as a measuring rod in apportioning territory (Sage 1996, 97–99; Shipley 1993, 20). Close to disputed land but rarely part of it, battlefields were selected to be flat and even (Herodotus 2007, 7.9.2). Phalanxes

could then advance simultaneously from pre-identified points and meet without unfair advantage. Prior to this, they faced each other across the appointed space for sustained periods, frequently inducing panicked withdrawal by one side (Goldsworthy 1997, 14). If both remained committed, advance to contact occurred in relatively close order but with increasing speed, thereby maintaining mutual defence and maximizing the shock of impact against the opposing ranks (Ray 2009, 11; Goldsworthy 1997, 14–15; Hanson 1999, 68).

Exactly what occurred after contact is contested by military historians. Generally accepted is that phalanxes sought opponents' collapse and retreat through overwhelming the shield wall, probably with fatal loss of footing among those where this occurred (Schwartz 2009, 199–200; Matthew 2012, 236–237). Subsequently, the hoplite killing mechanism comprised sharp spear-butts driven down into enemies who—pushed to the floor, weighed down by armour—could no longer defend themselves, while advancing troops stabbed and speared the ill-protected backs and flanks of the retreating (Bowden 1993, 53). Disagreement centres on how this was achieved: specifically, what exactly is implied by the verb *othismos*—to 'shove'—which recurs in contemporary descriptions of hoplite battle (Matthew 2012; Schwartz 2009; Goldsworthy 1997; Luginbill 1994). For 'orthodox' historians, *othismos* denotes the intimate wedging of the front ranks' bodies and shields against those of their neighbours, who then slam into a tight 'scrum' with the enemy front rank, their forward momentum sustained by pushing from the columns behind (Cawkwell 1989; Luginbill 1994, 53–54). By implication, individual acts of valour were tactically unimportant, physically limited and—if they involved breaking ranks—potentially catastrophic, since victory depended almost entirely on the capacity of weighed-down, frightened, close-packed groups of men retaining mutual defence and forward motion until the opposing line either collapsed or was penetrated. Contrarily, *othismos* 'heretics' argue that, while the scrum may have occurred, it did so only exceptionally, possibly in short bursts and when initial sword- and spear-fighting proved indecisive (Goldsworthy 1997; Schwartz 2009, 199).

Such arguments exist because historical sources offer no conclusive account of *othismos* (Goldsworthy 1997, 9–10; Matthew 2012, 237). Recurrence of *otheo* verb forms in historical descriptions of hoplite fighting, however, is beyond dispute. So, too, is the Homeric heritage of the term and thus—importantly—its passage from different historical societies, between different forms of war and from epic poetry to the descriptive prose of classical writers (for example, Homer 2003, 4.46, 16.210–215; Schwartz 2009, 198; Goldsworthy 1997, 4). As such, whatever the descriptive precision sought by military historians, the importance of *othismos* may importantly be derived from its expression of a value: the exemplary conduct of determined, decisive face-to-face fighting rather than a specific arrangement of shields. The Odyssean imperative towards pragmatic fatalism was thus rearticulated—in an entirely literal sense—as unswerving commitment to frontal impact and continued forward motion once battle was joined. The form of fighting Homer shaped, unlike that he described, required forms of conduct that would enable collective nerve in the initial face-off between phalanxes and a terrifying advance to contact across open ground. Where the Homeric expression of heroism emphasized killing and dying among aristocrats who, manoeuvring rapidly by chariot, sought each other out on the battlefield, in hoplite war the (not infrequent)

death of military commanders took place in the collapsed phalanx, amid fellow citizens from whom they were effectively indistinguishable (Schwartz 2009, 200).

Its discursive weight afforded by continuity with Homer's duelling *promachoi*, *othismos*—now a potentiality of the mobilized *demos*—was remade to affirm another dominion of force: phalanx war. The collective 'push' was an organizing principle for war waged by a territorially defined citizen-mass, each hoplite reliant on neighbours whose shields and land abutted their own. Phalanx practice entirely abandoned manoeuvre in favour of linear, spatial displacement of a near identical opposite. Waging war to impose and maintain boundaries, the hoplites conventionalized fighting to reward those able to shove their enemies—symbolically and physically—across them. At its centre, the forceful meeting of shield walls generated the spatial horizon between politics and produced the means for its negotiation. Thus, while Homer's agrarian similes may strike modern readers as consciously ironic, provocative juxtapositions, the hoplite Homer more likely affirmed a naturally determined order in which war and farming were not alternatives but necessary counterparts. The simile of measuring rod and embattled parapet expressed the natural relation of agrarian and military practices: a form of war through which land plots were measured and distributed and by whose economy of force, in the last instance, their value was determined.

Hoplite war was *for*, but not *of* the city. Its practice of fighting rarely approached urban walls or contested what lay within. But the forms and gradations of value deriving from its domain of force certainly entered urban consciousness. As it developed towards the fifth century, phalanx service gathered in social prestige, being increasingly dominated by the wealthier landed and less representative of an agrarian class in its entirety (Bowden 1993, 48–49). Aristocrats—entitled to cavalry service by hereditary right—came instead to serve voluntarily in the phalanx as civic consciousness was increasingly dominated by the landed *demos* (Hanson 1999, 56). With the expansion of a democratic constitution, moreover, the decision to resort to war itself became a civic issue: the middling landed not only determining the object and form of fighting, but debating and voting on its application within the same councils that oversaw all *polis* affairs and in which they now predominated (Hanson 1999, 50, 118–119; Pritchard 2010). Where Foucault's early-modern elites framed society as war in partisan contestation of monarchical–juridical power, the hoplites asserted themselves within an extant War/Truth schema, democratically rearticulating it as a means of political self-realization.

### **Ionia, *logos* and the thought of force**

On the eastern periphery of the hoplite world, with a federation of smaller colonies stretching across the Mediterranean, Ionia proper comprised just under ninety narrow miles of coastal settlement on the edge of Asia Minor and a triad of economically successful, diplomatically active *polies*: Miletus, Colophon and Ephesus. Configured thus, it experienced little of the agrarian development that shaped *polis* life elsewhere. Ionian polity was correspondingly distinct, its elites still recognizably descended from clan aristocracy and distinguished in more narrowly economic fashion from the urban poor (Winspear and Preus 2011, 125–126; Sandywell 1996, 78). Unlike the plot-specific struggle with nature from which

agrarian power was produced, Ionia's economic and political status derived from its centrality to trade networks extending from the Black Sea to the Nile, the Western Mediterranean and beyond. Alongside social, economic and political intercourse with Magna Graecia, Ionian metropolises thus possessed a particularity born of distinct municipal politics and uniquely extensive engagement with non-Greeks.

This transaction with a wider world is generally assumed to be fundamental to the emergence of the Ionian intellectual tradition. As the birthplace of Homer, Ionia enjoyed a cultural centrality within the Greek world and—prior to dispersal in the Persian invasion of 545—the intellectual milieu in which later Hellenic philosophy identified its own 'pre-Socratic' origins was almost entirely concentrated in its metropolises (Sandywell 1996, 30; Collins 2000, 85–86). Heterogeneous in origin, developed across several generations, Ionian thought offered a productive tension between pursuit of systematic, experientially tested knowledge and speculative reflection on the underlying order of things: *kosmos*. Both assumed a continuity between cosmological order, nature and human affairs. Heraclitus, to whom we now turn, was born into an aristocratic family shortly after the conquest and appears to have thought in relative intellectual isolation (Collins 2000, 85; McKirahan 2011, 124). Later writers, recording him refusing public office, suggest his isolation was matter of temperament as well as circumstance. This and similar apocrypha, however, are probably conjecture based on the contempt for the Ephesian *demos* and violent dismissal of pre-eminent Ionian thinkers to be found in surviving fragments of Heraclitus's only known work, *Peri phusis* (On nature).

The historian's picture of an 'obscure', 'riddling' misanthrope also reflect Heraclitus's style of argument: short, aphoristic formulations replete with wilful challenges to the interpretive powers of 'the Few' for whom he wrote. His object was a reflexive philosophy not only articulated in his writing but practised as polemic assertion (Sandywell 1996, 236–237). Presuming the intimate binding of language and *kosmos*, this both articulated the dislocation of a *demos* who 'could neither listen, nor speak' from a *kosmos* that spoke only to those able to hear (DK19)<sup>1</sup> and demonstrated it through consistently hectoring, wilfully difficult formulations. Each reflected upon the true order of things and, in its form of address, the obliviousness of those trapped in the complacent, common-sense life-world of the *polis*. For a privileged Few though, the cosmological binding of truth and language became accessible through extraordinary use of an ordinary term: *logos* (word, discourse). Etymologically implying both the 'laying down' of things in their necessary relations but also 'law', the principle of their ordering, *logos* is that totality of relations to which language attests and of which it is part (Sallis 1996, 7; Luchte 2011, 128). To this totality, the Many—even Homer himself, whom Heraclitus wished beaten and sardonically titled 'the wisest of Greeks'—were as deaf when they had heard it as 'before they had ever heard it at all' (DK56, DK1).

Heraclitus's philosophical position was already advanced when Ionia revolted against Persia in 498, reinforced by Athenian and Eritrian hoplites from across the Aegean. Militarily, their short-lived offensive demonstrated two things: early

<sup>1</sup> DK numbers refer to the surviving fragments of Heraclitus's writings (see Heraclitus 1981).

victories proved the tactical worth of the phalanx against lighter Persian forces, while what followed demonstrated its strategic limits outside the context of agrarian duelling (Herodotus 2007, 5.102; Hanson 1999, 82). Lacking any conception of coordinated alliance and the logistics needed for protracted foreign campaigns, Greek resistance rapidly lost momentum. The offensive ended quickly with defeat—almost certainly to Persian cavalry, chariot, light infantry and a system of war founded on speed and flanking manoeuvre—at the battle of Ephesus, Heraclitus's home *polis*. The sack of Miletus four years later marked the end of Ionia. Heraclitus was almost certainly a witness to the defeat at Ephesus (Sandywell 1996, 234–235). While we lack an exact chronology, there is sufficient ground to speculate that this experience, or at very least the wider rebellion, informed his most famous comment on war:

War, as father of all things, and king, names few to serve as gods, and of the rest makes these men slaves, those free. (DK53, 2003, 29)

Continuous with several other fragments on war, DK53 has been interpreted in numerous ways. Most commonly it is taken as a timeless, 'tragic' statement of the inevitability of conflict (for example: Hanson 2010, xii, *passim*). Others emphasize its metaphorical character, variously assuming an intent to liken war to the agonistic spirit of the *polis*, the foundation of harmony on flux, the primordial 'binding-together' of being or the 'world-creating', 'constitutive powers' of war (Barkawi and Brighton 2011; Coker 2002, 18–19; Curtis 2005, 1–2; Heidegger 2000, 64–65). An additional sense emerges, though, from considering it as a philosophical reflection on the experience of war or—perhaps more consistent with the reflexive logics of *Peri phusis*—as itself 'fathered' by the force it seeks to articulate. On this view, there can be no anachronistic assertion, such as Coker's, that Heraclitus's claim as to the generative powers of war wasn't 'literal' (2002, 19). Nor is it possible to agree with Heidegger that 'the *polemos* named here is ... not a war in the human sense' (although we might agree with his later suggestion that, for Heraclitus, '*polemos* and *logos* are the same') (2000, 65). Rather, it is to see the unity of a *logos* that expresses itself in battle and proposition: to suppose Heraclitus found ultimate confirmation of the constitutive power to which DK53 testified in the extent to which war itself made necessary and generated this statement.

This condition of possibility reflects war in its abstract unity with *logos*, but also their manifestation in a specific, experiential juncture. Confining our interpretation of DK53 to the former captures its polemic force only in its emptiest, most banal form. Its real violence derives from its observation (entirely lost once its history is removed) of a civic–military system—with all the societal and political investments thus implied—stretched beyond limits. As such, rather than offering 'timeless' affirmation of 'the Greeks' tragic fatalism about war, it directly contradicts long-established assumptions about the meaning of war among the particular Greek constituency that had come to dominate it—the middling hoplite class—and does so in reference to military collapse outside the city in which it was written. Key here is Heraclitus's emphasis on slavery and freedom. DK53 introduces the unfree into a societal discourse of war that repeatedly denied and suppressed their presence. Only exceptionally did the agrarian duels of Magna Graecia result in enslavement, ransom and release being the predominant outcome for defeated troops who failed to escape the



battlefield (Sage 1996, 104; Ducrey 1968). Yet DK53 makes *polemos* gatekeeper between the free and unfree: a worldly dividing practice that distinguishes warriors from property. And where phalanx fighting was assumed to be the pure *agon* of free citizens—that which in part defined them as such—here war is made the *precondition* of freedom and slavery: the passage of an order of battle into the civic order of *polies* that resonates powerfully with Foucault's subjects of historical consciousness. To be sure, there are multiple historical precedents for enslavement by war at this time. Sparta's conquest of the Messenians, for example, still utterly determined the mode of life of victors and helots. And yet Heraclitus, whose mode of address is consistently that of polemic assault on the unconsidered life-world of his readers—a life-world profoundly invested in a civic militarism and a public philosophy of war—felt the need to assert the relation of war and slavery with an emphatic force that can only suggest its forgottenness.

Perhaps an even greater provocation for Heraclitus's contemporaries was fragment DK53's deliberate blasphemy. Naming *polemos* as 'father of all things, and king' directly contradicts the familiar Homeric epithet for Zeus, the 'father of gods and men'. War is the ordering principle, the *logos*, in which the gods are contained—'named to serve'—not simply that desperate striving to which they subject mortals. Thus where, for the Odysseus of the *Iliad*, divine will is a basic referent in human affairs, in DK53 the continuity of the heavens themselves is at stake. The Persian order to which Ephesus was now subject introduced new gods whose status had decisively shifted with their victory. In this sense, the reordering of war is total.

No longer the self-affirming, rule-bound expression of agrarian practice and civic principle, at Ephesus, *polemos* extended beyond the military measuring rod. In doing so, it called into question the order within which it had been defined. Outside the agrarian logics of the *polies*, in an entirely different geopolitics, exerted against an empire, in every sense deployed beyond the spatial horizons from which it gained meaning, the phalanx shove lost direction. The shared force-economy the hoplites conventionalized from Homer was now been subject to a properly relational, far more contingent exteriority. Simultaneously for Heraclitus, the hubris of the hoplite class—its reified totality and presumption of exclusive, natural legitimacy, its unhearing Homer—had been brutally unmade. Read thus, he becomes the untimely herald of new war-society relations: ultimately, a racialized Hellenism and an altogether distinct dominion of force.

### Conclusion: *philosophia* and fighting

Noting the prescience of Heraclitus's comments on war, as I have interpreted them, should not permit us to read back into his thought those colossal, war-driven transformations of Greek politics, society and philosophy of the fifth century. Doing so would occlude what is importantly different between the definition of war offered in DK53 and that, a century or so after Heraclitus's death, which Plato has Socrates argue for in the *Republic*:

the two words 'war' [*polemos*] and 'civil strife' [*stasis*] refer to two different realities. They are used of disputes which arise in two different spheres, the one internal and



domestic, the other external and foreign; and we call a domestic quarrel ‘civil strife’ and an external one ‘war’. (1961, 470b)<sup>2</sup>

Considering this alongside DK53, a first distinction here is between war as *generative of* and war as a *relation presuming* polity. As a potentiality—an instrument—of a preconstituted polity, a relation with foreigners, war as Socrates defines it affirms extant certitudes of *polis* life. On this view, the expression of war as totality in DK53 is, in the end, too Homeric: a different Homer from the hoplites, but still indebted to the dominion of force as the primary expression of truth. Socrates’ task—as Plato saw it—was to leave Heraclitus behind in the cave and decisively win the contest with Homer for the title of ‘teacher of the Greeks—or of mankind’ (Bloom 1991, 354). At stake here, not least, was the understanding of war that would prevail in the ideal republic and the necessary instrumentalization implied by Socrates’ rhetorical question, ‘was any war of Homer’s time fought well because of his decisions or advice?’ (Plato 1961, 599e–600a). This was a question Heraclitus could never have asked. Like DK53 and his other statements on war, though, it took form in a rearticulation of truth inextricable from new forms and experiences of fighting and the wider destruction of certitudes they introduced. While Socrates fought in *hopla* at Delphi and the *Republic*’s politics repeatedly tend to Spartan-style hyper-hoplitism, the meaning of ‘fighting well’ had entirely changed from that which shaped the agrarian duel, the figure of the hoplite and the regimes of truth from which both gained coherence.

#### *Foucault, truth as war and truth about war*

Constructing a formal meaning of war against which Homer and Heraclitus could be decisively tested, composed amid a war-ravaged society, the *Republic* places far more at stake than Foucault’s Platonic caricature suggests. This view of Plato, in fairness, reflects a disciplinary figure of philosophy from which Foucault repeatedly distanced himself. Nonetheless, recent philosophical works identify a much more complex, ambivalent engagement with war in the *Republic* (for example: Baracchi 2002; Craig 1996; Frank 2007). In different ways, these all frame that text as a specific response to the pan-Peloponnesian conflagrations that dominated Greece after Persia had been repelled. The *Republic*’s iterations of War/Truth emerge here in a consistently intimate coupling of *polemos* and *logos*. Like the *Iliad*, it begins amid extant force relations: Socrates and Glaucon’s forcible detention by Polemarchus’s party as they ascend to the city. The dialogue begins when Polemarchus (*Polem-Archus*: War-Leader) challenges them to ‘prove stronger than these men or stay here’. Socrates responds, ‘Isn’t there another possibility? That we pursued you to let us go?’ (Plato 1961, 327c). As Baracchi emphasizes, this marks neither surrender or refusal of confrontation. Rather, it simultaneously initiates a tactical shift and a discursive form from which war is inextricable: ‘enacted, not only discussed’ (2002, 2). The ambivalence of War/Truth in the *Republic* concerns the disjuncture between this discursive form and a

<sup>2</sup> The original text distinguishes *πόλεμος* from *πόλεμος τε καὶ στάσις*. Although some translators (GMA Grube and CDC Reeve, in the *Complete works* (Plato 1997), for example) translate the latter as ‘civil war’, most drop the qualification *polemos* and offer ‘factionalism’ or ‘civil strife’ to emphasize the formality of the distinction.

content centred above all on the education of a Guardian class from which the sovereign will be selected and comprising those ‘proved best in philosophy and war’ (Plato 1961, 543a). The coupling is not arbitrary, since both ‘take place at the level of *logos*’ (Barrachi 2002, 155).

The *Republic* thus asserts the possibility of mediating the constitutive powers of war through making philosophy sovereign, but—at the same time—affirms the reality of those powers as the necessity from which it itself derives. Plato *presupposes* rather than *disproves* DK53 to develop, as Frank observes, the ‘especially urgent ... practice of independent judgement’ necessary to remake ‘hitherto settled rules of engagement and categories of identification, including, especially, that of friend and foe’ (2007, 445). Making these categories authoritative, mobilizing the structure of interiority and exteriority they bring into being, requires the force necessitating them be mastered in thought: the meaning of war decided, asserted and claimed for a Few. After war is framed as an elite instrument for relation with foreigners at 470b, Socrates immediately adds a new qualification that it could only properly exist between Greeks and barbarians (Plato 1961, 470c). In Plato, the supposed origin of ‘juridical–philosophical’ consciousness, War/Truth is thus racialized, directly contradicting Foucault’s situation of racialized war with historical–philosophical discourse. Distinct from the economies of force between Homeric soldiery, who have race but are not racialized, in Plato the very idea of war comes to rest on a racial division. A new societal principle is introduced and with it new violent potentialities.

The relation of war and thinking in discursive practice, recognition of the determinacy of this for lived politics, and racialized polemology suggest important continuities between Foucault’s problematics and Plato’s metaphysics. Their shared tendency to presume fighting is constituted by prior regimes of truth and practice is equally haunted by war’s constitutive powers. In this regard, the notion of war deployed by Foucault’s historic subjects is as removed from its truth effects as that of Hobbes or Plato. Above, I have sought a comprehensive departure from this abstraction and its occlusions. Tracing the co-constitutive relations between the practice, meaning and experience of phalanx fighting and the societal regime of power it formed and took form in opens a different account of what happened at Ephesus. Situating Heraclitus’s fragments within the historic crisis of a War/Truth regime—that of the hoplite Homer—foregrounds the coextensive relation of truth and fighting as both Heraclitus’s claim *and* the generative condition that made it utterable. What emerges is the properly consequential relation between *polemos* and *logos* lost when philosophical discourse on war is complacently reduced to ‘timeless’, ‘tragic’ reflection as distinct from ‘timely’, ‘useful’ strategic positivism. From the perspective of critical war studies, this distinction can no longer stand. DK53 is only ‘timeless’ if the meaning of war is reified, whereas its historical truth testifies to its constitutive force for its own meaning and the order of power that establishes it. The killing mechanism is a truth mechanism.

Privileging *logos* by presuming in favour of, as Habermas put it, ‘the forceless force of the better argument’ entirely obscures the consequential relations of force and argument. By extension, the risks of turning from fighting in favour of exclusive attention to the societal logics of war should now be apparent. Doing so, first, risks the self-regarding delusion of beautiful souls uncontaminated by engagement with the killing mechanism: as though oblivion to fighting and

fighters is somehow inherently 'progressive'. Among other effects, the result is a politics of condescension towards a contemporary combatant generation shaped in the disconnect between militarist truth projects and the actualities of their wars. Their subaltern testimony is a critical resource. Secondly, decentring critical research on war from fighting abandons the determining power of fighting to those reactionary, totalizing regimes of truth which presume to precede, know and command it. Correcting this through a political theory of fighting opens up new archives, analytical possibilities and lines of political intervention, as well as the basis for new historical and political sociologies of war.

### Notes on contributor

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