

# The wild bunch is enrolled to the army: Sorites paradox and the problems for the ontology of war

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**Abstract:** 1 gunshot is not a war, 2 gunshots are not a war... are *1 million* gunshots a war? There is no such thing so investigated as war and, at the same time, still so outcasted theoretically. Ambiguity, vagueness and logical conundrums lay unsolved in the very hardcore of the several theories that considered war from a general perspective and, then, philosophically committed explicitly or implicitly. It is not the experience and observational data we lack but the general ability to generalize and expand our knowledge beyond what we can directly observe empirically and historically. Sorites arguments are everywhere in war theories: vagueness and ambiguities of many shapes inform the literature. Only a philosophical account of war can solve some of those issues: an ontology of war is needed to bring light into the heart of darkness.

**Keywords:** *War, Ontology of War, Sorites Argument, Vagueness, Metaphysics.*

« This enlightenment requires nothing but freedom--and the most innocent of all that may be called „freedom“: freedom to make public use of one's reason in all matters ».

Immanuel Kant

« The endeavor entered into here is a philosophy of war that will be broad and wide-sweeping, generalizing where necessary, as philosophy should, yet also bringing the underlying currents to form a general philosophical theory that can be of use to philosophers and to historians, anthropologists, economists, and students of international relations, politics, and the general humanities. »

Alexander Moseley

« A single death is a tragedy; a million deaths is a statistic ».

Joseph Stalin

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 *Philosophy and theories of war: between the dark ages and modernity*

Human history was shaped by war and the evolution of the human civilization is grounded (importantly) also on military armed conflicts. The debate on the what is the very nature of war is still wide open. War studies, as it is conceived today [Luttwak (2001), Freedman (2012, 2013), Boyer (2012), Barkawi, Brighton (2011), Nordin, Öberg (2015)], is a multidisciplinary endeavor which brings together very different disciplines: sociology, history, economy and, more recently, critical studies just to name few. These are only few disciplines of a long list of all the others, which are part of the ‘multidisciplinary courses’ on war. Indeed, philosophy is not one of them because, historically, philosophy neglected war [Bernini (2009), Pili (2015, 2018)]. There is no such thing as philosophy of war at least nothing comparable to any other branch of philosophy.

Generally, philosophical accounts of war are very narrowly focused on the moral problems related to war. After all, the just war theory was indeed a long-lasting philosophical achievement, started by Augustine and Thomas Aquinas inside the philosophical Christian tradition [Augustine (1984), Aquinas (1988), Lazar (2016), Gagliano (2019)]. In addition, to the just war theory, philosophy considered war as part of the philosophy of history, where different interpretations of the human history brought different conclusions on the nature of war itself. For instance, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel considered war as a part of the human evolution, where it is basically a necessary component of history itself. Then, the evolution of the *Geist* is given through an endless dialectical process where the dialectical opposition could assume the shape of war [Hegel (1817)]. Even though the Hegel’s philosophy is influential, it crushed against another philosophical wall, which was erected before him and, coupled with some further developments in the political realm of the XX century, simply obscured the Hegel’s theses. To be sure, even Hegel did not consider war per se, and he did not investigate factually its logic, as far as he was more interested in the evolution of the *Geist* than in anything else. Much more can be said about Hegel’s position, but this is sufficient for our purposes. Then, if Hegel thought war as (natural) necessary component of history and, broadly speaking, of human evolution, the previous Enlightenment thinkers, globally considered, were quite hostile to war as such. They conceived war as a reliquial of the past.

The very idea of Enlightenment progress was extremely critical to warfare, practically speaking, and to war theoretically. Famously, Immanuel Kant proposed a universal vision of politics in which the main goal of international (foreign) politics is the promotion of the perpetual peace itself [Kant (1795), Pili (2015)]. In his masterpiece, Kant defended the idea that war is something morally bad but also unnecessary for the good (and healthy) evolution of the human history economically and physically speaking. Therefore, practically and theoretically, war *must* be excluded by the human evolution [Pili (2015)]. However, all the previous political thought since Hugo Grotius, Niccolò Machiavelli and Thomas Hobbes considered war as a natural condition of the humankind. Hobbes defended a thesis that simply was taken for granted ever since: the natural condition of humans, a fictitious imaginary scenario, is a fixed perpetual war among people [Hobbes (1651)]. Only an external force could bring together the different interests defended by different people at the same time. This force is the place where the legitimacy of the state relied itself and it was the basic political justification for its very existence: guaranteeing the peace among people through the use or threat of force is indeed the ultimate justification for the existence and surveillance of the state.

Interestingly, from Baruch Spinoza to John Locke, the main scholars and philosophers simply accepted the Hobbes' position coming to the "natural condition" [e.g. Spinoza (1677), Locke (1690), Kant (1795)]: natural condition is *war* and a particularly brutal one because none has the right or legitimacy to stop it or to constrain it. Peace is not the negation of war because war cannot be denied in the state of nature. The state of nature can be denied altogether by a completely different entity, which is the state: peace is an artificial condition imposed by the unilateral use of force by the *then* legitimate state. Now, again, the natural order is war among people and this thesis was indeed accepted even by Kant in its perpetual peace. In fact, the Kant's own problem was to ground a peaceful world order without the use of force *outside the borders of the states*.

### 1.2 *The Enlightenment's influence on theories of war and war studies*

Interestingly, the Enlightenment had a contradictory influence on war *and* warfare. Indeed, from one point of view, Enlightenment's influence toward academic and scholarly research was substantial. Basically, the negative judgment on war we still have today in some parts of the world and, especially in Europe (Bobbio (1979)), is grounded on the Enlightenment's conception of war (Freedman (2012)). According to the intuitive conception that war is the irrational event *par excellence* [Lazar (2016)], war is the negation of reason and reason is the basic value of Enlightenment. Quincy Wright summed up this point perfectly when he spoke about the cluster of researchers he named "scientifically minded" who could be re-named as neo-Enlightened: "In short, scientific investigators, giving due consideration to both the attribute war to immaturities in social knowledge and control, as one might attribute epidemics to insufficient medical knowledge or to inadequate public health services. The basic cause of war, in their opinion, is the failure of mankind to establish conditions of peace. War, they think, is inevitable in a jungle world; peace is an artificial construction". Wright (1964), p. 105. This exceptional paragraph is a real exposition of the Enlightenment's attitude toward war with all its Hobbesian debts. If war is something ruled out by progress, in this conception, it is because it is intrinsically in opposition with what is morally good. Even when war is limited by decisions and limits compatible with the just war theory, it still conceived as something barbaric, intended as the negation of what there is essentially good so much so much that this conception *must* be taken for granted, possibly without further investigation: all societies have their own hardcore self-image in which something is put outside of what can be even discussed. The apex of this intellectual conception brought to a general 'moralization' of war in the sense that it is impossible to escape any moral obligation to the general assumption that war is something intrinsically bad. This is not necessarily wrong, considering the nature of the thing investigate. However, this is not compatible with the Enlightenment's conception of the philosophical investigation as Kant repeated several times. The result is that we do not have war without judgments (right or wrong, informed or uninformed) and then it is impossible to study war as it is. In this respect, we are bounded to come back to the old conception of science, where something conceived as intrinsically bad had to be understood as the 'Evil' and then it is irreconcilable with any human understanding. In the old days, it was impossible to study the human body because it was just a bad thing (the human body...). However, curiously, this inversion of the Enlightenment's attitude toward a science/philosophy of war had a completely different result on the history of warfare (Gat (1991)). If this line of thought taken for granted by default, it freed the thought of the military thinkers, which is, of course, a quite paradoxical outcome.

### 1.3 *The Enlightenment's influence on reality of war: the new way of war*

It is well known that Carl von Clausewitz, who wrote the milestone of all the modern thought and understanding of war, was deeply influenced and inspired by Enlightenment's thinkers and Kant in particular. Even more than the abstract Clausewitz's war theory, Antoine-Henri Jomini famously tried to reduce war to a set of practical principles comparable to a geometrical research: lines, military movements, division of functions among pieces of equipment and military components were part of a general equation where uncertainty and friction were solved by sheer calculation (Jomini (1838)). The commander's mind was able to undertake difficult situations thanks to his own reason. In addition, war started to be de-moralized by the military thinking: war could be understood considering emotion and will only as part of a complex equation with many more variables where most of them were not 'uncertainties' but calculable elements. And, indeed, a symptom of this kind of thinking is indeed the successful of the strategic thinking as such, which was not a given before the Enlightenment period as it was brilliantly showed by Azar Gat and Lawrence Freedman (Gat (1991), Freedman (2013)).

More and more the military domain was shaped and shaped the great revolution of the modern state, where the army put aside the old conception of war based on mercenary and religious conceptions of the military function. Warfare was the new domain of national soldiers whose values must mirror the army's society. Finally, Machiavelli had his own revenge on the old conception of war as a matter of chivalry and mercenaries (Machiavelli (1513, 1519)). After all, the first army of the Enlightenment was the French revolutionary military force, based on meritocracy and equality, whose strength was enough to push back all the attempts of the armies of the coalition of the anti-revolutionary foreign powers. But this is not all. Enlightenment's legacy is so profound because, de-moralizing war inside the circles of military thinkers and commanders, brought a new scientific approach to the *means* of war.

To be clear, the art of war was always influenced by science since the ancient time as it is clear even by the classic *Art of war* written by Sun Tzu (Sun Tzu (2011)). After the Enlightenment, science started to escalate in its quality sufficiently to lead the military revolution and it is still so today as much as we currently speak about revolution in military affairs (RMA – Revolution in Military Affairs) because of the changing mainly in ICTs technologies (Wang, Xiangsui (1999)). Science and military goals found a 'strange' alliance during and after the XVIII century and the Cold War was the apex of a quite irreversible process where science and war found a common way to talk for reaching (partially) common goals. Therefore, even if Enlightenment's legacy brought to a philosophical contradictory position toward war in the ivory towers, military thinkers and the new fighters in general didn't stuck in the XVIII century and moved on with an entire new set of ideas and conceptions partially (if not integrally) grounded on Enlightenment (Gat (1991)). Even if we desperately need to investigate the essence of war and to give it a definition once and for all (or to start a debate to try to do it), we are philosophically still stuck unilaterally on one side and the ontology and epistemology of war are far away and with it a possible pure theory of war (Pili (2015)).

#### *1.4 Toward a new approach to ontology of war*

The paper aims to start a new approach to ontology of war. Indeed, even though ontology is considered by the so called “new approach to war studies” or “critical war studies” (Barkawi, Brighton (2011) previously introduced, a philosophical analytical approach to war studies is still missing differently from the ethical domain. I generally agree with the new critical approach to war, especially when Nordin, Öberg advocate for a pluralistic conception of the ontology of war, that is a galaxy of different ontologies able to treat different aspects of the same object (war). Then, if this idea is correct, I would argue that analytic philosophy and its metaphysical-logical methodology could be maximally beneficial to start a new discourse on war. Many reasons sustain this simple idea. First, analytic ontology, applied ontologies and mereology could investigate properly the nature of a vague object, which is war. Indeed, as I will argue, war is a highly vague predicate which stands for a relation. Consistent theories of vagueness are considered in analytic philosophy and they could bring many interesting insights to the ‘dark matter’ of war as it is still conceived today. Second, social ontology [Bottazzi (2010), Meijers (2003), Searle (1990, 1995, 2007), Gilbert (1989), Bratman (2002)] could analyze the nature of the army and different military organizations. In addition, different theories could be beneficial for the same subject. Social ontology was elaborated by John Searle, who started from an analysis of the speech acts, a subfield of pragmatics, which is the branch of philosophy of language that investigates how we can do things with words, to recall a famous John Austin’s work (Austin (1962)). Then, if the new ontological approach inside the critical war studies recognizes the importance of a pluralistic attitude toward the investigation of the nature of war considered as a whole, analytic philosophy cannot be put aside especially in the field of metaphysics and ontology. I would argue that epistemology would also be a fundamental component of this investigation but, as far as we are just starting dealing with ontology, I would put aside the analytic theory of knowledge for another paper, though intelligence scholars are considering more and more the epistemological analyses and conceptions to clarify the nature of intelligence (Marrin, (2009),<sup>2</sup> Herbert (2006), Horn (2003), Bruce (2008), Vivaldi (2014)). Even though intelligence studies is still distinct from war studies, we can still find important and fruitful parallels and connections between sister disciplines.

The paper is structured as follows. First, a sketch of the general Sorites’ argument is given: it will be necessary to grasp the general form of the argument in order to apply it to war (as a word and as an object). Second, a set of definitions or theories of war will be considered and discussed and scrutinized under the Sorites’ argument. I will show that some definitions endorse implicitly the validity of the paradox where other positions reject it. An analysis of the main philosophical issues is considered. This paper has no positive solutions as far as it is just a critical overview of what we can find in the literature and how we are still quite far from having an ontology of war. Indeed, the paper is aimed to find the ultimate roots of the philosophical problems still open to develop a metaphysical understanding of war that could be also formally and logically satisfactory. A positive account of war was given elsewhere extensively (Pili (2015) and I will return to that theory in another paper. Finally, some further considerations on ontology of war will be taken into account in the conclusions.

## 2. The wild bunch is enrolled into the army

### 2.1 *Sorites paradox in war zones: intensional and extensional aspects and borderline cases in vague terms*

The Sorites paradox is one of the most ancient and fundamental paradoxes in the history of philosophy (Hyde, Raffman (2018)). It was fully considered since the Greek philosophers basically as an argument against the capacity of language to represent truthfully the physical reality, if any (Varzi (2001, 2003)). It can be formulated in different ways but let's start with the classic heap problem. A single grain is not a heap. Two grains are not a heap too because, the argument says, two grains are not enough to make a big difference with one single grain. Three grains are not a heap and then  $N$  grains are not a heap too. Indeed, it is never possible to fix the boundary of an object 'heap' where  $n$  does not make the difference but also  $n + 1$  is not able to make the difference too and then, the argument runs, nothing seems to be able to make *any* difference: supposing  $n$  is the starting number, then  $n + m$  with  $m$  substantially bigger than  $n$  does not make any difference too for the same reasons. The interesting feature of Sorites' logic applies also backward. As the title prompts us, I will enroll the "wild bunch".<sup>2</sup> A bunch of 100.000 soldiers could be intuitively considered as an army. After all, if the USSR would have deployed 100.000 soldiers in the East Germany, she would have given troubles to the NATO intelligence analysts to figure out what was going on on the other side of the Iron curtain. In the end, 100.000 soldiers seem to be a substantial number such that we can legitimately speak of being facing an army. And if the USSR would have said: ok let's take out a soldier, nothing more. Intuitively it would not have been very reassuring. 999.999 seems to be sufficiently big to be still consider as an army. Then, let's say then the USSR would consider the possibility to relocate one soldier again. Would have NATO been reassured? I don't think so. Now there are 999.998 soldiers. Then, again, the USSR could have considered the possibility to relocate another soldier etc. So, the question is: when the NATO would have been reassured? What would have been the 'reassuring number' definitively speaking? The argument is inverted: if  $n$  defines a set  $S$ , then  $n - 1$  identifies the set  $S$  and then  $n - m$  identifies still the same set  $S$  whatever the number  $m$  is. Whatever the answer would be, the question would lay on an arbitrary threshold, other things being equal. What is the general problem?

First, it seems that vague terms bring to Sorites and this works for singular terms (names and descriptions) and for predicates (properties and relations) Russell (1923), Varzi (2001, 2003), Bueno, Colyvan (2012), Dinis (2017): heaps and armies seem to be part of these vague terms. War is not a name for any object, but it is a predicate which stands for a relation and it brings to the same problem as we will see. Even though we think ordinarily to employ the term 'war' as a proper name, it should be intended properly as a predicate which stands for a particular relation. Indeed, when we really want to identify wars, we need to create new proper names starting from descriptions. This suggests that 'war' stands for a predicate (relationship) whose extension applies to a set of specific events (processes) intended to be the elements of the set identified by the word 'war': WWI, WWII, the seven years war, the Korean War etc. are examples of names for processes between two different fighting entities which stand in a particular relation between them.

Then, if war identifies a relation, war names are used to identify elements included in the

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2 Peckinpah, S., (1969), *The Wild Bunch*, USA.

set identified by that particular predicate 'war'. Indeed, according to some influential scholars, vagueness brings always the Sorites so much so that Sorites *could be used* to identify vague terms, that is to say: if  $x$  is a term and a Sorites argument can be construed with  $x$ , then  $x$  is a vague term. If  $x$  does not allow any form of Sorites arguments, it is simply not vague Bueno, Colyvan (2012). Vagueness allows boundaries and borderline cases, which are two important conditions to having the Sorites as well as vague terms: "Standardly, one says that vagueness arises whenever a concept or linguistic expression admits of borderline cases of application. A predicate such as 'bald', for example, is vague because there can be situations in which it is indeterminate whether or not it applies to (a name of) a certain object". Varzi (2003), p. 459.

Indeed, second, there are two different issues involved in the paradox: (a) the extension of the term (enumeration issue) and (b) its intension (where to draw the boundary). The extension side calls for a quantitative conundrum, whereas the problem resides on how to count (include) a borderline element inside a specific set. The intensional side, instead, brings the question on where drawing the line between two different predicates, whatever their extensions will be. The *extensional* vagueness depends of the problem of saying if an element is part of a set or not given a principle of inclusion. So, coming back to the wild bunch problem: the object '999.999 soldiers' is part of the set 'army'? This is not a problem of considering a certain number of soldiers as an army or not: they should be because the easy proof is that without soldiers no army is possible (put aside other social ontological constraints). At the same time, it seems that to call 'a bunch of soldiers' an 'army' requires something more. Indeed, a bunch of soldiers of different armies of different states is not per se an army but it still a set (bunch) of soldiers. After all, also the set of two different armies involved in a single war is indeed a bunch of soldiers which *is not* an army itself! As it is clear, this shows the paradox from an intensional perspective much more than from the extensional point of view: the problem is how to define the ontological rule through which we uniquely identify an army as a particular set of soldiers.

To sum up, the Sorites paradox arises everywhere there are vague terms. Indeed, some scholars tried to identify rules to define vagueness through Sorites: where there is vagueness there is the Sorites and where there is the Sorites there is vagueness. All the recent and classical scholars recognize that natural language is indeed based on vague terms and, therefore, Sorites could arise everywhere. Thus, the problem is how to think about a language where vagueness is simply one of its intrinsic features. However, even though Sorites could strike everywhere, this does not mean that its consequences are always the same. Ordinarily, we set a level of abstraction which defines the threshold of precision of our language: when we ask the outside temperature we are not asking for any precise measurement but we just want *the information needed* to plan how to dress: 'It's warm today' is really very vague but it could be a successful answer in an ordinary context where its vagueness is not vicious, as far as the level of precision required is indeed met. As far as precision comes in degrees, 'precision' is a vague term itself as 'vague' is indeed another vague predicate (Russell (1923), Varzi (2001)). That said, again, this is not something so striking to fell in desperation unless something else happens. Indeed, sometimes the level of precision required escalates because the pragmatic or theoretical consequences are such that we need more. And this is what I started to consider bringing Sorites to war: was the USSR reassuring saying that 999.999 soldiers are not an army? Maybe we would discover that the only reassuring solution would be to have 0 soldiers near the border, a paradoxical answer itself!

## 2.2 Two possible interpretations of the Sorites paradox inside and outside war zones

Before turning our attention toward the application of Sorites paradox to war definitions, it would be important to clarify another relevant, and general, aspect of the argument. As Achille Varzi showed clearly, vagueness and Sorites could be interpreted in two different ways: (a) ontologically and (b) semantically (e.g. Varzi (2001), p. 143). Let's consider an example from war:

(1) The first tank was employed in the WWI.

(1) is a 'trivial' historical truth. In fact, this innocent statement is indeed exposed to Sorites in many ways. First, when WWI started? Do we really have a clear-cut answer? Historically speaking the answer is not positive but *ontologically* is even worst. Starting recalling Wright: "From the military point of view a war does not usually have such clear time and space limitations as does a battle or a campaign (...) Thus the time-space continuum which in a legal sense is designated a war, has not necessarily been accompanied by a unity or uniformity of intense military activity" Wright (1964), pp. 10-11. What could be the starting event of the process 'WWI'? For instance, can we completely be sure that the Balkans wars were not the starting point of WWI? This question calls for a description of an event such that it could be used as a rule for judging what WWI really consisted. Second, of course, it is very hard to defend a definitive answer on the real *time slice* of WWI as far as one second after or before the usual conception of its timeframe seems to not make any difference at all (and then the Sorites punctually starts to amplify the borderline issue extensionally): in fact establishing the beginning and the end of a war is always a major historical problem. Third, the tank itself is indeed problematic. Indeed, it looks as a hard fact, but a tank is the result of a long evolution which started before the WWI and it is not ended even today, where updating tanks is still a very lively sport in the military industry. For instance, the first tank prototype did not have the long gun: it was essentially a tractor. The essence of the tank is the combination of a tracked armored vehicle combined with a long-range cannon put inside it. Actually, the most important piece of all the tank is indeed its tracks, which were the main single revolution in this piece of military equipment. Now, the issue is how to define the first tank ontologically.

In this interpretation of vagueness, the problem is not grounded on the vagueness of the *word* 'tank' but on the very nature of the *object* itself. It is not a matter of linguistic precision but a question on how to identify an object and all its features. For instance, we could identify a tank (object) as an object whose main features are described as 'tracked armored vehicle with a gun inside it' and then we should consider the 'first tank' as the first chronological instance of this concept. However, this means that many things that would be intuitively identified *as* tanks are excluded: tracked armored vehicles with machine guns or rockets are simply ruled out from the set of tanks. Other problems could be found but this is sufficient to enlighten the ontological vagueness: it resides *in the thing* not in our language, that is to say that even if we found the very best possible expression, that would be still unsatisfactory to identify an object (or a set or a property) as far as there is nothing wrong with language because language is not vague: it is the object which is indeed vague. Its very nature is without clear borders.

A second way to conceive vagueness is related to semantics instead of ontology, namely vagueness is not in the thing but in the language. To be clear, this is a completely different way to conceive vagueness, even though combinations of the two interpretations are indeed possible. Let's come back to (1). For instance, it can be argued that there is nothing vague in a tank ontologically,

because the problem arises from our incapacity to express what is it clearly. If only we had the right linguistic expressions, then we would be perfectly able to identify a tank. Maybe a description employing all the mathematical tools of the physical science could solve the problem. Then, whatever the solution will be, it will require a set of rules to constraint the linguistic expressions sufficiently to identify a tank according to our level of abstraction. These two different points of view are completely different as far as they lay the diagnosis of the conundrum in two very different points of view: the ontological conception calls for an intrinsic vagueness in the thing whereas the semantical interpretation does not assume any vagueness in the thing but in the language. As we shall see in a moment, there is an ambiguity in the war studies and philosophy of war literatures about this specific point, namely if war is vague ontologically or semantically. I would argue that the thinkers and scholars implicitly pointed out different issues in the definition of war which bring different Sorites interpretations. However, if there is a hardcore common notion is indeed that war is something really murky and difficult to be clearly-cut identified.

### *2.3 Sorites fights his own war: Clausewitz, Moseley, Bernini, Freedman, Wright, and the critical war studies face the ancient conundrum*

Even though it will be impossible to consider the details of each position, I will try to show how Sorites strikes many influential definitions and accounts of war. First, let's start from Carl von Clausewitz's proposal. He stated that: "War is thus an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will" Clausewitz (1832), p. 75. Sorites attacks this definition in two ways: (a) what would count as an act of force? That is to say: what is *not* an act of force? (b) The enemy is itself a social entity whose nature is not entirely clear because it is vague. For instance, what was the real 'enemy' of the Allies in the WWII? It can be said 'Nazi Germany', but it can be argued, for instance, that only the Nazi Party or its chiefs were indeed the *real* enemies. After all, the single soldiers did not make any difference in this respect. Then, this specific point could be re-formulated in a different way: who is the 'owner' of the enemy's will? As far as this definition is concerned, enemy's will is the real target of military force because it is his/her will that must be compelled by the use of force. However, the identity conditions for identifying the enemy's will are not very clear and in fact the notion of center of gravity, firstly conceived by Clausewitz himself, change in time and place. Of course, this is indeed an open problem in the current wars where the center of gravity of the enemies are difficult to be identified, whereas in the conventional wars it is easier to find a good approximation of where the enemy's will ultimately resides. Clausewitz considered also another famous definition of war: "When whole communities go to war—whole peoples, and especially civilized peoples—the reason always lies in some political situation, and the occasion is always due to some political object. War, therefore, is an act of policy... Policy ...will permeate all military operations, and, in so far as their violent nature will admit, it will have a continuous influence on them... *War is not a mere act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political activity by other means...* The political object is the goal, war is the means of reaching it, and means can never be considered in isolation from their purpose". Clausewitz (1832), 86–87 (italics added). The single one most important definition of war available indeed is sensible to Sorites. The question would be if there is any difference between war and politics. After all, if war is "a true political instrument" or "a continuation of political activity", then war is politics *sic et simpliciter*. As far as the means are considered as extrinsic features of the same event (object), and

in fact they change according to time and place, it is not clear where the difference between war and politics resides. I would argue that Clausewitz would accept this point altogether as far as this is his main contribution to military and political thought, that is war is a component of politics. However, the Sorites is still a reasonable objection: then what is left out from this definition? It seems that war is not a borderline case of politics but one of its main ways to appear or even to be. Then, why is *not* the ordinary political life an act of war? The second way in which Sorites strikes the Clausewitz's position is, of course, in the nature of the means: when and where are they *not* military instruments anymore? For instance, in the Clausewitz account, economic warfare is just a metaphor but not a real act of war (as Wright recognized (Wright (1964) p. 5). In the same line of thought, more recently, Thomas Rid ruled out cyber war as a real war (Rid (2011, 2012): there is no use of (military) force in the cyber domain because the use of (physical) force is a necessary feature of war, according to the Clausewitzian account Rid followed. But Sorites does not care: a tank is still a tank, a battleship is still a battleship in war and peace, they are the same tools, the same things but in war and peace they behave quite differently. Indeed, so differently that Wright considered the 'military activity' as a way to discriminate war from peace (the military components start to move quickly and often etc.) Wright (1964) pp. 9-11. But this is not a very convincing way to avoid a Sorites. Therefore, the Sorites applies intensionally and extensionally. Intensionally because it is not clear where the predicate 'war' draws the line with the opposite predicate 'peace' and extensionally because it is not clear what elements are included (or excluded) in the set identified by the predicate 'war'.

The British philosopher, Alexander Moseley, is one of the few real philosophers of war. Let's consider his own definition: "The definition offered is that war is *a state of organised open-ended collective conflict*. This is a robust and working definition of war that aptly fits the commonalities evident in wars. It also provides a means, albeit necessarily incomplete and empirically vague, to distinguish wars from fights, riots, and brawls. War is organised, unlike, for example, a street brawl; it is open-ended, unlike a boxing match; it is collective, unlike a personal feud; and it involves conflict that implies non-violent as well as violent hostilities. This definition does not claim war to be a series of battles or clashes, for wars may exist without battles occurring; nor does it claim that the concept includes declarations, states, or the lack of morality and rules. If we establish war as a collective endeavour, other sociological disruptions may compete for inclusion and we must admit that, at the periphery, commotions such as riots may overlap into a low level form of warfare". Moseley (2003), p. 14. The definition is "war is *a state of organised open-ended collective conflict*" is explicitly vague as far as it does not identify what are the entities that can stand in that kind of relation, where this definition is indeed the identification of a predicate. This predicate (war) is intended to be a relation: it is supposed in the fact of being a conflict (there is no conflict without two different intentional opposite parts). Then, it is a particular (conflictual) relation: it is organized. That is fair enough. In addition, as far as Moseley is a philosopher, he immediately avoids two possible objections: he recognizes that it is "necessarily incomplete and empirically vague". And then Sorites is there with him but peacefully accepted because Moseley consider 'war' as an intrinsically vague term. However, there is still a latent vicious vagueness in the definition, which brings to an unpleasant Sorites: what does "open-ended" mean? It can be interpreted spatially or chronologically. Of course, I think Moseley would accept this vagueness as part of war, but it could imply that a war can be infinite in time and space or, at least, perpetual. Actually, this is not what happens, and it is logically impossible, as I tried to argue elsewhere (Pili

(2015). Moseley accepts the vagueness of war (as a term) and its definition cannot be completely precise unless we use the word in an un-ordinary way. Maybe the Sorites does not damage so much the Moseley's proposal but it suggests something unpleasant into it.

Stefano Bernini conceived a different philosophical theory of war. Bernini is in debt of two great thinkers on war and politics: Clausewitz and Carl Schmitt. The Bernini's conception is particularly interesting for our study because it has a perfect answer to any Sorites counterargument. Even though his work is entitled "Philosophy of war – An epistemological approach",<sup>3</sup> his first chapter is an *ontological* analysis of war. Indeed, if Clausewitz considered war completely inscribed and dominated by the nature of politics ("the grammar"), there is still left an open door to the opposite direction, that is politics itself is inscribed and dominated by war. This could be a possible interpretation of the Schmitt's idea of politics as grounded on the archetypical category of the enemy. The Bernini's move is based on the philosophical possibility to inscribe war and politics *inside* a common concept. According to him, this common concept is conflict. War and politics are just two *opposite* ways to conduct a perpetual condition of conflict between different social groups. Basically, according to Bernini, history is a perpetual condition of conflictual situations inside the same groups or among different groups of human beings. Then he concludes: "Guerra e politica si configurano pertanto come due facce di una stessa medaglia, e questa Medaglia è il conflitto. Come una moneta, possiamo lanciarla in aria, e una volta caduta a terra potrebbe presentarci la faccia della politica. Potremmo rilanciarla, e questa volta potrebbe presentarci la faccia della guerra. Potremmo rilanciarla ancora, e constatare che può rimanere addirittura in equilibrio, come nel caso della strategia della tensione. Ma non potremo mai farne a meno, perché è con questa moneta che paghiamo il prezzo della storia" Bernini (2009), p. 26. The main counterargument to the Bernini's conception is based on the Sorites but in an opposite way than for the Clausewitz's and Moseley's definitions. Indeed, Bernini simply *accepts* the Sorites. He argues that war and politics are *not* something essentially distinct because they are simply two different ways the human history presents itself from a general perspective. After all, this was the problem I tried to underline even for the Clausewitz's own account because, after all, discriminating war from politics only from the means seems to be quite counterintuitive, at least *prima facie*. At any rate, Bernini's position can be sum up as follow: there is one *ontological* category, which is conflict. Conflict can be conceived not in binary way but in degrees. One extreme is politics and the other extreme is war. There are infinite degrees in between. Bernini gives many examples of intermediate conditions: terrorism, information warfare etc. All the sheds of grey are possible so much that grey definitely dominates black and white. Thus, Bernini conceives conflict as a fuzzy predicate Zadeh (1964), Varzi (2001, 2003): there are infinite sheds from war to politics. Bernini seems to have won the first round against the Sorites but Sorites can strike him in two different ways. The first is a common observation against the fuzzy treatment of vagueness: even though war and politics allow infinite intermediate forms of conflict, it is still counterintuitive to consider war and politics, and all the intermediate forms of conflict, as something clearly distinct. After all, if they were so confused, we would *not* expect to be able to distinguish all of them clearly. This is a general objection and it can be convincing only to a certain extent. However, there is a second, stronger objection. If war and politics (not peace, which is ontologically meaningless in this conception) are only two different shapes of the same category, then what is the real difference between them? After all, we would

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3 The original title is "Filosofia della guerra – Un approccio epistemologico".

like to have a conception, theory or definition of war able to help us to understand better the very nature of war per se, making us able to discriminate what is war and what is *not* war. Implicitly accepting the Sorites, Bernini must accept all its consequences. Interestingly, the paradox here is generated extensionally but not intensionally because the problem resides only on what is part of conflict and how to discriminate the different cases inside it. However, at least, intensionally there is no paradox: there is conflict or not but as far as human history is concerned, it must be a perpetual state of conflict between humans.

Freedman wrote influential works about war also from a theoretical perspective (Freedman (2012, 2013)). He considered explicitly the problem of a definition of war. I would argue that Freedman was much more interested in a general understanding and characterization of war than anything else. “War may end up as a chaotic state of affairs but it starts for reasons. It happens because human groups believe that by resorting to armed force they can gain advantage, or at least prevent disadvantage. As conflicts resolved without violence do not count as wars, wars by definition always involve suffering and destruction” Freedman (2012), p. 21. According to Freedman, war is an intentional act based on goals and reasons. This does not mean that those goals are necessarily rational, but that war is not the negation of reason per se. Then, he goes on: “Though ‘war’ will often be adopted as a metaphor whenever a conflict becomes angry or intense, the core meaning depends on the association with purposive violence. Simply put there can be no war without acts of warfare. It is not enough to break diplomatic relations, exert economic pressure, or threaten force without actually doing so (as in a ‘cold war’). It is (...) indispensable that some armed force be employed. War involves organized, purposive violence, undertaken by one wilful group against another”. Freedman (2012), p. 21. Then, war is a state of affairs based on the intention of two different subjects to use violence and force to achieve a specific, desired state of affairs. Therefore, violence and *military* force is not something inessential: the bloodshed and destructions are a necessary component of war. In addition, this violence is not without purpose as it could be the brute result of a serial killer’s action: violence is needed to coerce the enemy to follow the desired path. Violence and military force are so important that: “Without the element of violence the study of war loses all focus” Freedman (2012), p. 21. Then, the Freedman’s account is quite similar to Clausewitz when it comes to the first definition offered: “War is thus an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will”. This general definition does not require any state intervention in war, as it is implied by the second Clausewitz’s definition. However, violence and military force are indeed two essential features of war as such. This is recognized also by the recent critical war studies literature, where the scholars agree on the fact that basically war is about fighting. We will come back on these proposals below. Focusing our attention to the general Freedman’s characterization of war, Sorites has something to say. The problem is how to discriminate the kind of violence that applies only to war and not, for instance, to serial killers. Let’s say that a group of serial murderers start to kill brutally many people with the only purpose to enjoy the act of killing. This would count as an act of war because it is a very violent activity toward a group of civilians: violence is not an extrinsic component of these murderers as far as they are killing exactly for (and through) an act of extreme violence. Then, violence is simply too vague even if we can count only *physical* violence, as suggested (ruling out many other forms of coercion and malevolent activity). The armed force presence poses a different open issue, whose symptom was underlined by Wright in trying to show how armed forces behave differently in war and peace. Armed forces exist in war and peace, thus if we discriminate war from peace by their behavior, we fall under a circularity:

armed forces' behavior defines war and peace, but war and peace determine their behavior. Indeed, if war is a conflict based on violence produced by the clash of two or more different armed forces, then it is trivial to say that armed forces' behavior defines war! Then, this option seems to be not acceptable. Of course, I am not arguing that Freedman's conception is trivial because it brings to a circular argument. I am only stating that this formulation is not acceptable philosophically and we should try to find something better.

The recent critical war studies literature stresses on the centrality of the role of fighting in war as a key feature (and then a predicate) essential to war. Tarak Barkawi and Shane Brighton argue for a new conception of war studies, which is considered "underdeveloped": "War, then, is in the situation of being both taken for granted in its meaning and radically underdeveloped as an object of inquiry. (...) the most basic questions regarding the ontology and epistemology of war have hardly been asked, much less have they issued in a substantial body of theory" Barkawi, Brighton (2011), p. 127. They argue for a new conception of war studies calling for a development of an ontology of war as a product of our understanding of war: "War studies has no such enabling coherence. It lacks both the ontological problematization of its subject and the multiple exchanges between foundation and inquiry that might sustain it. War studies exists in the fragmented form we have identified because war goes largely under-theorized at the most basic level: ontology. Accordingly, our focus for this section is the ontology of war and its relationship to knowledge about war" Barkawi, Brighton (2011), p. 134. Then, they conclude that fighting is what is needed for *any* ontology of war: "Participant perspectives, with varying degrees of directness, center on *fighting*, past, current, or potential. Fighting is that which thematically unifies war in general and in particular — 'war' with 'wars'—and no ontology of war can exclude it. Attention to fighting is that which marks out war-centered analysis from that reducing war to a secondary effect. Fighting and the violence of war exercise a profound grasp on the imagination, constituting the practical test to which strategic thought is oriented and the conventional mode for the achievement of victory" Barkawi, Brighton (2011), p. 135. This conception is, of course, reasonable and grounded, again, on Clausewitz's account of war explicitly. In addition, it was followed by Astrid H.M. Nordin and Dan Öberg even though the two scholars defend a pluralistic attitude toward an ontology of war. Sorites argument is easy to be constructed inside this theoretical framework, though it is not intended to be centered on a single definition of war. Thus, the scholars consider war as an act whose nature is mixed with subjective elements so strongly to be intrinsic to *any conception* of war. However, the objective condition of war – and its consequences – is not violence or military operations but the ubiquitous presence of fighting: "war is defined by fighting or its immanent possibility..." Barkawi, Brighton (2011), p. 135. As far as I understood it, these scholars argue that war resists a simple objective reduction because it forces unilateral positions subjectively and, then, an entire spectrum of different (and possibly) opposite points of view are required to try to understand the nature of war and, then, to define its ontology. This seems to embrace a radical Sorites conception: theory is never fixed because vagueness is in the very nature of war, where the only clear-cut unifying concept is indeed fighting. Therefore, language is insufficient to describe a so vague object. The Sorites is embraced ontologically and semantically, which could bring to a general sense of philosophical desperation as far as it seems that knowledge is dispersed, intrinsically subjective and difficult to articulate and share without misunderstandings. However, at the same time, Sorites could be used against the very notion of fighting which is indeed super-vague: from chess to boxing everything that could be defined as a two-side game implies fights. In addition, it

is philosophically questionable to solve a vague problem with a new even vaguer one. After all, it seems that war is indeed *less* vague than fighting per se and exchanging war with fighting does not seem to lead anywhere unless we try to fix a very specific way of fighting. In addition, from Clausewitz to Freedman a wide branch of the war literature is indeed focused on the *specific* means of fighting as far as not all of them are compatible with war. As Wright put it: “war has tended to become a function not of the fighting unit but of the entire human community of which all fighting units are parts. Thus the problem of war has shifted from that of classifying fighting units to that of analyzing the organization of human society as a whole” Wright (1964), p. 89. Then, it seems that fighting per se is insufficient to ground a solid foundation for an ontology on war *unless* further specifications and conditions are given.

Another influential account is presented by Quincy Wright’s masterpiece *A study of war*. Following the legal tradition, Wright introduced a definition of war which is very general: “In the broadest sense war is a *violent contact* of *distinct* but *similar* entities” Wright (1964), p. 5. It is so broad to be extremely inclusive as it was noted by the author himself: “In this sense a collision of stars, a fight between a lion and a tiger, a battle between two primitive tribes, and hostilities between two modern nations would all be war. This broad definition has been elaborated for professional purposes by lawyers, diplomats, and soldiers and for scientific discussion by sociologists and psychologists”. Wright (1964), p. 5. Wright does not provide a unifying definition of war and he tries to characterize war much more than defining it. His work is definitely one of the most interesting understandings of war since Clausewitz’s *On war*. That said, Wright’s strategy consists in identifying the main features that wars have always had. Basically, his analysis is in between a pure conceptual approach and a real empirical one. Indeed, he is not very interested in a detailed, quantitative analysis of war but he does not get rid of evidence gathered basically through observation. Then, his position is not a philosophy of war and it is limited in its level of abstraction. That said, this does not mean that Wright should not be seriously considered philosophically in this context. Indeed, Wright poses different philosophical problems quite explicitly and some of them underline ontological concerns. First, he explicitly speaks about the problem of *conditions of identity* of war, which are, indeed, the main issue metaphysically. “From the military point of view, it is more difficult to identify wars than either battles or campaigns. The unity of a war derives more from legal or political than from military activities” Wright (1964), p. 10. Indeed, war is defined by different categories of social aspects: legal, economic, political and military components are all parts of war, even though war cannot be equated to each single category. Indeed, these categories are defined as “variables” by Wright, where with it he means only that war is necessarily a combination of economic, social, military and political factors, even though it is not exhausted by them: “This description of the military, psychological, legal and sociological manifestations of war suggests that all may be regarded as variables which reach a certain threshold of intensity in actual war” Wright (1964), p. 17. I think these passages are better interpreted thinking to war as a unique category for a particular kind of conflict, as Wright explicitly stated. Again, Wright does not give a unifying vision of war, even a universal characterization of it but he gives only a general understanding of it. This means that his theory is relatively sensible to the Sorites argument whereas his theory is silent toward the very nature of war, which is indeed simply a complex conjunction of different social events and processes (economic, social, military, political processes). However, Wright is quite clear in refusing the idea that war can be identified with violence or conflict alone, against what the critical war studies

seems to suggest: “War is thus at the same time an exceptional legal condition, a phenomenon of intergroup social psychology, a species of conflict and a species of violence. While these aspects of war suggest an approach to its study, war must not be identified with any of them” Wright (1964), p. 19. Then, Wright posed the right questions and even tried to start the effort of finding the identity conditions of war, but he stopped to a very general account of war as a part of human history and international relations among powers. This could be sufficient for his purposes and he definitely is able to give an insightful position, but this could not by any means considered satisfying philosophically and ontologically: Sorites is intrinsically inside the theory itself and then it is even difficult to understand where the vagueness resides.

### 3. Toward an ontology of war thinking through the Sorites paradox

#### 3.1 *The roots of the problem(s) of war theories*

It seems we reached a point where everything seems vague and questionable. Interesting insights and intuitions but still many residual vagueness is inside the theories about war. We did not consider the military doctrines and military thinkers such as Basil Liddell Hart and Edward Luttwak [Liddell Hart (1954), Luttwak (2001)] but we think we showed something substantial about the way some of the most influential scholars conceived war. There are some interesting observations to be drawn because we should ask the main metaphysical question about war: where does war vagueness reside? There are several general aspects of this question and all of them must be considered: (a) there are two different ambiguities in war studies, (a.1) normative aspirations and descriptive desires; (a.2) war as a term and war as an object (*de dicto* vs *de re* conceptions of war). (b) are related to (a.2): (b.1) war theories are in between analyzing the use of the (military) words (military semantics) and trying to clarify the very nature of war itself. Finally, (b.2) analyses of war seem unable to distinguish among intentional issues and extensional inclusions, that is if war is a predicate for identifying a set or if war is indeed a name of a general object. I will briefly consider each problem showing how deep they are and why we should try to solve them philosophically.

##### 3.1.1 *Normative aspirations and descriptive desires*

The intensional Sorites showed the problem of the boundary between different predicates such as ‘war’ and ‘peace’. Indeed, the first ambiguity in the literature is grounded on the different uses of the words ‘war’ and ‘peace’ which are implicitly conceived as nouns and predicates at the same time. Interestingly, they are usually defined as *predicates*, at least in the explicit definitions considered, but the distinction between the two different uses of the words is not always so sharp. This will bring us to a different problem we will consider in the next paragraph.

Intensional problems arise because it is not clear the neat distinction between ‘war’ and ‘peace’ interpreted as *predicates*. In fact, this is less problematic when we use ‘war’ and ‘peace’ as names (putting aside the linguistic construction of *proper* names or equivalent descriptions), as far as they identify a condition through a statement whose truth-value depends on the event considered, for instance if the language represents appropriately a correspondent event in the world. How and where drawing the line is indeed a matter of identifying the conditions under which an element can be said it is part of a set or not. The main issue with many theories of war and with all the

theories which considered ontological positions started with a major ambiguity, that is the tension between a normative perspective and the descriptive/explanatory declaration of intents. I would argue, as I tried elsewhere Pili (2015, 2018), that this is the single most problematic issue in all the theories considered insofar.

Indeed, the clearest example of this tension can be found in *On War* itself. From one point of view, Clausewitz's account of war is aimed to *evaluate* what a specific state of affairs we would like to call 'war' is. In other words, what he tries to accomplish is to ground a *judgment* on what a set of facts is (war). Indeed, from one point of view, he is not satisfied by a historical account of war, whatever it could be from a general point of view, maybe something like Wright's *A study of war*. Then, he indeed is interested by a general perspective of war which is based on a set of historical facts (descriptions – mainly the Napoleonic wars in his case) but it is not limited to them because the main goal is to formulate a definitive judgment on what counts as war and what does not count as it. At the same time, Clausewitz is not explicitly normative, though his definitions of war have a normative component: they do not give a simple set of constraints to identify clearly states of affairs that then *count as* acts of wars. His definitions try to capture identity conditions whose nature is normative in the sense that they are aimed to value all the elements that are part of the set of events they capture. To put it simply, the Clausewitz's definitions have three different functions at the same time reunited in single statements (his definitions): (I) they identify a predicate, (II) *then* they identify a set of elements captured by that predicate, and (III) the predicate is also intended to be a justifier for evaluating the elements captured by it. Then there is a tripartite tension. If the (II) identifies facts, processes and events – which can be exhausted by descriptions – *without any evaluation*, (III) instead is aimed to associate to each element identified in (II) a value (war/politics). (I) and (III) have two different functions: (I) is simply a classical mathematical way to identify an element of a class of things (e.g. numbers). In Fregean terms, (I) is simply the way in which we give a concept, that is the property which identifies a set. Again, there is no evaluation involved here, apart from the mere relation of inclusiveness, which is sufficiently free from valuative concerns. Instead, (III) is the key element: Clausewitz wants to give an account of what has to be *counted as* war and what has not to. The notion of 'counting as' is normatively laden: it is a short way to say 'I consider *x* as *y* in the context *C* according to the rule of interpretation *r*'.<sup>4</sup> Instead, Clausewitz (and the likes) gives us a set of statements which is descriptive, intensional and normative at the same time. This philosophical strategy leads to the main issues of the entire field: the latent ambiguity between descriptive concerns and normative aspirations. From one point of view, all the military thinkers and scholars ground their analysis on history, which is mainly a descriptive discipline. However, at the same time, they want to get rid of history to speak broadly on theories of war and on war in general. In fact, they land to the shores of philosophy, even though they did not realize it and, maybe, they would not like to recognize that. Indeed, leaving the historical analyses of war means leaving the pure descriptive attitude toward war coming to a normative account of it. When a historian says 'war is explained by *x* and then *x* is a general cause of war' she is not a historian anymore but a philosopher, as far as this is a kind of argument that is free from any direct personal experience and the generalization brings the kind of universality and generality that Kant conceived as a landmark of metaphysical conceptions (Kant (1787)). Nothing wrong, but we should be aware of these kinds of philosophical moves.

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4 This form of "counting as" is a reformulation of the Searle's definition of function [Searle (1995)].

As I tried to show elsewhere (Pili (2015)), this brings to unsatisfactory definitions, whose feature is an explicit ambiguity in the definitions themselves. In fact, all the definitions and accounts considered show this particular aspect and the Sorites enlightens this problem in different ways both extensionally and intensionally. Indeed, if there is such ambiguity, Sorites arguments can be always constructed to show the vagueness between the evaluative and descriptive components (and I will close with one clear example of this). Then, one solution could be to accept the idea that our empirical knowledge is based on history and all the other empirical disciplines, but that war is also an evaluative term which cannot be exhausted by sheer facts and their descriptions. This means that we cannot discharge the normative component without losing the usual way to use the words 'war' and 'peace'. Therefore, normative and philosophical theories of war are needed because we should investigate war also from a necessary and universal perspective that should be free but not independent from a case to case knowledge.

### 3.1.2 *Military semantics and ontological concerns: de dicto and de re conceptions of war*

Another major source of ambiguity inside the literature considered and, broadly speaking, inside the disciplines that consider war at their center is indeed the misunderstanding of the distinction between the use and mention of the words 'war' and 'peace': this leads to the confusion between the logic of the language and the nature of the reality outside, which was the main problem of philosophy according to Bertrand Russell and that led to the evolution of analytic philosophy as a way to win the "bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language" (Wittgenstein (1953), p. 47. For instance, it is often impossible to say when Clausewitz and the other military thinkers are studying war as a word or as a property/object or whatever its nature is, that is to say *the thing itself*. For instance, the vagueness of war is a well-known theme in the literature: is this vagueness intrinsic to war, that is to say it is in the thing or it is in our way to express it? To say that vagueness is caused by uncertainty (a classic slogan) is not clear at all: (a) Is an epistemological problem? Namely, is vagueness caused by the limits of human understanding? (b) Is the epistemological conundrum based on an ontological consideration? That is to say that our uncertainty is determined by the intrinsically chaotic nature of war. Or it is just a problem of data and observational evidence? (c) Could it be that there is nothing wrong with our cognitive capacity, but that vagueness is solely grounded on our misuse of language? For the moment, we do not have answers to these questions because, as far as I know, nobody raised those problems. This analysis would suggest that there is still a great deal to work to be done in the clarification of the language itself, putting aside all the other *substantial* epistemological and ontological issues especially when we face vagueness. Again, what is the ultimate cause, the origin of the vagueness of war?

Another important question must be raised: what are the definitions of war asking for? That is: do they currently fix war linguistically or are they fixing the *meaning* outside the language? Even if we concede that this distinction is clear in the mind of the authors, but not so much in their expressions, it is still an open problem because we should need both analyses which in fact are aimed to two different goals: from one side, we would try to fix the meaning of the words 'war' and 'peace' looking to their ontology, intended as the study of the being as such. From another side, we still would like to have an account of the logic of the words 'war' and 'peace'. This should be similar of what Wittgenstein suggested (Wittgenstein (1953) as far as this would require a logical analysis of the use of the words 'war' and 'peace' in the ordinary linguistic expressions. In fact,

the study of the logic of the words would help us in identifying better identity conditions to fix the meanings of the two terms. Even though I cannot give an exhaustive account here, something I tried to do elsewhere, I just give the gist of my proposal.

‘War’ and ‘peace’ are predicates which identify a  $n$ -ary relations though usually binary:  $W(a,b\dots n)$ . This means that we can safely say that ordinarily the word ‘war’ is interpreted as a binary relation (as ‘being the mother of...’) but broadly speaking it is a relation for an indefinite number of elements. Indeed, as it was underlined by many scholars, war is a particular kind of conflict, which is a  $n$ -ary relation itself, but it requires at least two different stakeholders, whatever their nature is. Then, as a particular relation, there are also some *formal* constraints to be considered. What kind of relation ‘war’ is? For sure, it is an *intransitive* relation. If  $a$  is at war with  $b$  and  $b$  is at war with  $c$  then ‘ $a$  is at war with  $c$ ’ is false logically speaking: often  $c$  would be an ally of  $a$  but it could be also that  $c$  is neutral with  $a$  or even an *enemy*. Therefore, war is an intransitive relation and it is also irreflexive:  $a$  cannot be in war with  $a$ . Indeed, a civil war is not  $a$  against  $a$  but something like this: the relation between the two parts obtained by the partition of  $a$  such that we have two distinct subparts  $a_1$  and  $a_2$  such that  $a_1$  and  $a_2$  are at war:  $W(a_1, a_2) = \text{true}$ . Therefore, war is an irreflexive relation. Finally, the war-relation is symmetric because if  $a$  is at war with  $b$  then *necessarily*  $b$  is at war with  $a$ . Let’s suppose that this would not be the case:  $a$  is at war with  $b$  but not vice versa. How could it be possible? Let’s say that  $b$  does whatever  $a$  asks. Then,  $a$  is not at war with  $b$  anymore as far as  $b$  is accepting  $a$ ’s conditions. Instead, if  $b$  is reacting to  $a$ , then it is indeed fighting in some ways. Therefore, war is a symmetric relation. Many metaphorical uses of the word ‘war’ are based on braking these formal constraints which are all part of the use of the war-relation: ‘Jack is at war with his conscience’ is a metaphorical expression that captures a specific human condition but, of course, it is not a true statement. Exactly for this reason it works as a metaphor. Even limiting the analysis to these formal aspects, we see how we conceive reality outside language. This kind of analysis should be the starting point and it is not intended to be exhaustive but, at least, it shows how beneficial analytic philosophy could be if only it starts to apply its methods to predicates such as ‘war’ and ‘peace’. In addition, the spillover effect from language to understanding reality is sufficiently clear, at least I hope so.

### 3.1.3 *War theories: between analyzing the use of the (military) words and the very nature of war itself*

Ontological accounts of war should consider explicitly the nature of war, but they should also draw the line between language and meanings. This is something rarely considered important by the literature. In fact, many Sorites arguments can be faced distinguishing the two different levels as it was recalled before. Treatment of vagueness are possible, but they all have to treat vagueness ontologically *or* semantically, with combinations between the two possible. This was showed by Varzi (2003). But without any awareness of this tension, it is impossible to grasp the problem rightly and then we are condemned to spin freely between ontological statements, implicit metaphysical commitments and semantical observations. Philosophically speaking, and theoretically, this is not the appropriate way even to start facing the problem.

### 3.1.4 *Quality from quantity and quantity from quality*

Analyses of war seem unable to distinguish among intensional issues and extensional inclusions, whether war is a predicate for identifying a set of facts or war is indeed a name of a general object. If it is an object, it could be intended as a process, like a movie or a symphony: their identity conditions are based on a set of events related together inside a precise window of time. Quadridimensionalism is the ontological theory that considers processes as the basic ontological entity. Another possible view is thinking about war as a social object such as states, nations, money etc.. After all, it seems that war is a social activity as far as it involves at least two different groups of people. It should be said that even in this metaphysical assumption there is no universal consensus because some scholars think war can be fought between animals or single individuals. For instance, Hobbes' account considers war as a condition for *each* human existing in the state of nature. Emanuel Lasker considered conflict metaphysically part of all the realm of the existing things: this is definitely the most extreme case, as far as I know but it recalls the Spinoza's conception in which *literally* everything thrives to exist [Spinoza (1677), Lasker (1907)]. After all, famously, Heraclitus stated that all reality is shaped by war (*polemos*). All these positions seem to be too extreme, but they cannot be ruled out if we are not able to set the intension of the predicate 'war' constraining it to the logic of language and to our philosophical concerns. Basically, without clarifying what is the ordinary use of the word and what could be its meaning, we are condemned to an intrinsic state of ambiguity and vagueness, which is even perilous practically speaking. Finally, in addition to the intensional conundrum, posing our capacity to emerge the quality from quantity, we have the other side of the coin still vague: extensionally it will be impossible to demarcate war from other things, namely we will be unable to say if  $x$  is an element of 'war' or not. These are all open problems and then it is time to turn to the conclusions.

## 4. Conclusions

There is no such thing so investigated as war and, at the same time, still so outcasted theoretically. Moral presuppositions, semantic and ontological ambiguities, vagueness and logical conundrums lay unsolved in the very hardcore of the several theories that considered war from a general perspective and, then, philosophically committed explicitly or implicitly. It is not the experience and observational data we lack. This is the case in which the object of investigation did not lack of sense data and observations, which is how we get our knowledge, according to Kant. But this shows also that science is indeed not only based on sense data and observations because it needs also a general account free from case-to case scenarios: this is where reason, its generality, unity and vision *should* come into play rescuing the jigsaw puzzles given by the single data to transform them in a universal picture. Providing a theory of war whose principles are carefully investigated logically, syntactically and semantically should be the first interests of philosophers and other theoreticians. In fact, Sorites is everywhere in war disciplines and theories and, then, I would cast a call for solving those arguments once and for all. After all, once we have solved all our logical concerns, we can leave the stage to the empirical sciences happy to do so and silencing at least one important side of the philosophical research. „Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent” philosophically as Wittgenstein suggested. But, at the moment, we are far from that point. “A single death is a tragedy; a million deaths is a statistic” allegedly stated Stalin is in fact familiar

to us as far as this bleak joke is based on Sorites argument. And closing with another one attuned with the Stalin's back humor statement, 1 gunshot is not a war, 2 gunshots are not a war... are *1 million* gunshots a war? For the moment, we don't know because, for that matter, *each shot can be war or not war while everything else remains the same.*