

## Peace and constituent conflict Paz e conflito constituinte

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### Resumo

O artigo tem como objetivo refletir sobre a relação entre ética e política no horizonte contemporâneo. A política identitária que ameaça o mundo representa o declínio da ética na sociedade globalizada; as leis do mercado e das finanças estabeleceram uma 'moralidade de dominação' centrada na individualidade. O conflito, portanto, volta a ser uma ponte cultural fundamental para recuperar e encontrar uma verdadeira democracia constituinte ligada a uma nova 'ética das multidões'. A paz torna-se o objetivo fundamental para criar uma nova ética constituinte onde a democracia seja uma prática concreta coletiva.

**Palavras-chave:** ética; paz; conflito; democracia; política.

### Abstract

The paper aims to reflect on the relationship between ethics and politics on the contemporary horizon. The identity politics that threatens the world represents the decline of ethics in globalized society; the laws of the market and finance have established a 'morality of domination' centered on individuality. The conflict, therefore, returns to being a fundamental cultural bridge to recover and found a true constituent democracy connected to a new 'ethics of the multitudes'. Peace becomes the fundamental objective to create a new constituent ethic where democracy is a collective concrete practice.

**Keyword:** ethics; peace; conflict; democracy; politics.

### Informações do artigo

Submetido em 13/01/2025  
Aprovado em 18/07/2025  
Publicado em 15/10/2025



<https://doi.org/10.25247/P1982-999X.2025.v25n3.p146-161>



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### Como ser citado (modelo ABNT)

SIMONETTI, Alberto. Peace and constituent conflict. *Ágora Filosófica*, Recife, v. 25, n. 3, p. 146-161, set./dez. 2025.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In the order of globalization the founding concepts of the West have taken on new forms both practical and theoretical. Peace and conflict represent two forces capable of being used in radically different ways. The current world is in a very dangerous phase of regression: racism, neo-colonialism, sovereignism and nationalism, xenophobics, absolute identities. The ethical problem has always been intertwined with the political one since the time of Aristotle; is it possible today to rethink the conflict in light of the ethical emergency? Philosophy must be the vanguard of this reflection and give voice to dissent against our present fact of war, famine and misery. In *Minima moralia* Theodor Adorno speaks of ethics as a 'sad science'<sup>1</sup>. The thought of the drama of Auschwitz is renewed in the terrible death halo of Gaza and every other city divided by weapons. 'Thinking' always means being in the midst of reality with a commitment that can generate that conflict for peace that opposes any war. It is an *ethical act*.

## 2 PEACE AND CONFLICT

Community life, as the cornerstone of the social being of living beings, concerns the entirety of existence, even if some would convince us that some aspects of life have nothing to do with politics. In *Politics*, Aristotle<sup>2</sup> defined the individual as πολιτικὸν ζῷον ('political animal'), because the essence of the 'human' subject is to structure his daily life in terms of relationships and, therefore, where there are relationships, there are clear and evident elements of politics (since we are all in the city and work for it, the famous πόλις). Peace and conflict are ambivalent terms. Peace is needed to develop community (*communitas*), but the beating heart of public life is debate, that is, conflict. Those who seek to dominate seek to 'pacify reality', and in this sense, 'peace' means being 'obedient', 'docile'; but this is not true peace; it is simply anesthesia and sterilization. The philosopher seeks to explore this subtle ambivalence. For him, this task becomes the goal of a committed, critical, and creative existence. *Cultural conflict* is a work of peace against conflict understood as war. The

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Adorno, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Aristotle, 1995.

question of formulating a collective agreement on ethics passes through Aristotle and Rousseau to Machiavelli and Marx, and finally to Rawls and Nozick. Brad Hooker says:

Basic moral theories might be highly systematic and monistic, grounding moral requirements, prohibitions, permissions, and supererogation in one foundational principle. Or they might be more pluralistic, postulating multiple foundational principles to be balanced off against one another in order to determine what is morally right or wrong in different situations. At the extreme end of pluralism is moral particularism, which holds that properties of an action that morally favor or morally oppose the action in one situation might, though present in another situation, have no, or even opposite, weight there, without there being deeper, general principles explaining such variance<sup>3</sup>.

Let us try to think about the fundamental philosophical necessity of an internationalization of law in terms of ethical sharing. Ethics and politics form a very relevant analogy.

Conflict, in the same way, can be for power (the *Reason of state* that always sacrifices the community, teaching of *The Prince* by Machiavelli, 1513)<sup>4</sup> and therefore can destroy the possibilities of conflict as a debate as it is not interested in the *res publica* but only to his monocratic interest. Opposing through conflict means organizing the exploited; the *The Wretched of the Earth*<sup>5</sup> (Fanon, 1961) to return to that peace that makes conflict possible as a free and horizontal, or democratic, space for debate. Contrast represents a way of expression of the human, conflict is a fundamental dimension of the social; it is an ancestral, primordial discourse, starting from the tradition in which friend-enemy dualism was radical up to contemporaneity where the contrastive relationship is in the link between *body* and *transformation*. The link between ethics and politics needs to create that particular conflict to regain spaces of real and direct democracy. Noam Chomsky says it plainly:

How far can this go? Will it really be possible to construct an international society on something like the Third World model, with islands of great privilege in a sea of misery – fairly large islands, in the richer countries – and with controls of a totalitarian nature within democratic forms that increasingly become a facade? Or will popular resistance, which must itself become

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<sup>3</sup> Hooker, 2017, p. 97.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Machiavelli, 1988.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Fanon, 2021.

internationalized to succeed, be able to dismantle these evolving structures of violence and domination, and carry forth the centuries-old expansion of freedom, justice and democracy that is now being aborted, even reversed? These are the large questions for the future<sup>6</sup>.

A future that needs to be constituent. The aggressive element was interpreted by Freud who identified, anticipating what Jung will theorize in more depth, in the *collective unconscious* that formed our civilization; only the repression of instincts and their regimentation led to the construction of the political and social superstructure. Aristotle had intuited this inseparable unity between *individual* and *group*, and today the two sides of the conflict are played out between these two categories. The individual or small group that claims primacy of race, ethnicity, or territory generates a divisive conflict, a war of war, a true colonization. On the contrary, the conflict that arises from individuals who feel like a non-hierarchical multitudinous group produces a conflict for peace, a struggle of resistance and resilience against usurpers and oppressors.

Man in society is not partly social and partly individual. More precisely, his existence is shaped by a fundamental unity, which cannot be accounted for in any other way except through the synthesis or coincidence of two logically contradictory determinations: man both in social connection and in being for himself, both of which are products of society and life from an independent center<sup>7</sup>.

There is a threshold that divides morality from ethics. *Morality* finds its origin only in the needs and environment of the individual; on the contrary, *Ethics* is openness to the *Other*, comparison, and dialogue between individuals. This is not a stable framework. The discussion concerns the profound difference between ethics and morality, but also their mutual relationship. If morality is an arbitrary righteousness of the individual, ethics is the measure of comparison with others; it is what draws the individual out of himself and opens him to sharing, to the presence of the *Other*. If morality remains closed in on itself, we will only have moralism, a violence that seeks to impose a specific way of life. If, on the other hand, morality opens itself to ethics, we will have a plural construction of collective forces. This need to renew the community in a “common” sense is also of great

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<sup>6</sup> Chomsky, 1997, p. 188.

<sup>7</sup> Coser and Ridener, 2005, p. 127.

urgency in Europe. The crisis that has led to new xenophobic, nationalist and racist majorities calls philosophers and intellectuals to open a new and fruitful dialogue with the productive forces. Open new transversal spaces of struggle starting from the singularities that form the *General Intellect*. The concept of *vital relationship* has primacy in the contemporary world. Is it possible that philosophical thought could become the international avant-garde that creates a new *communitas* from Europe? In a formal sense a European Union exists. However, the problem is transcendental. In fact, Edmund Husserl<sup>8</sup> allows us to ask forcefully and intelligently what are the conditions on which the meaning of Europe was built. Husserl's phenomenology of foundation marks a closing track.

There is a fundamental relationship between the One and the Many which finds its openness in ethics and its closure in identity morals. Deleuze clarifies this relationship:

Expressionism is on the one hand an explication, an unfolding of what expresses itself, the One manifesting itself in the Many (substance manifesting itself in the attributes, and these attributes manifesting themselves in their modes). Its multiple expression, on the other hand, involves Unity. The One remains involved in what expresses it, imprinted in what unfolds it, immanent in whatever manifests it<sup>9</sup>.

Our era is once again forced into dangerous regime-enclosures of personalistic, territorial, religious and moral claims; this is a question that does not concern the so-called "backward" countries, but the nations that have the supremacist violence of calling themselves "bearers of civilization". The problem is the movement of individuality in the trajectory of its contemporary world. The search for a legitimation group is not authentic sharing with *Other-Others* because it is simply an increase in the Ego, an obsessed repetition of oneself out of fear, cowardice and ignorance. *Mass* is not *multitude*. The masses copy the One because it produces indifference and it is the path to fanatical, xenophobic and racist revanchism. The multitude, however, considers the transversality of the producing singularities, creates common subjectivities capable of expanding cognitive strength to the Many. For Balibar, the individualities

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Husserl, 1970.

<sup>9</sup> Deleuze, 1992, p. 16.

[...] are not 'perfect' in a final sense; they are active, or productive. But their construction as well as their activity always involves a previous, originally [sic] connexion with other individuals: not only an adaptive reciprocity of the individual and its environment, or the 'interior' and the 'exterior', but rather a reciprocity of interconnected or interdependent processes of individuation and individualization<sup>10</sup>.

Gilbert Simondon in fact spoke of a *psychic-collective identification*<sup>11</sup> precisely in the sense of removing the living from the closed paths of personalism and selfishness.

### 3 LAW, ETHICS AND WAR

How can we build peace? One answer might be: making *conflict constitutive*. What does this mean? It means understanding conflict as a non-destructive, foundational concept, that is, constitutive and affirmative. We shouldn't unleash conflict to seize control and then crush it in an empty peace that only makes us bow our heads; instead, we should develop conflict as shared growth in debate, as a confrontation between knowledge and practices, starting in schools. Conciliation risks becoming indifference. Instead, against the follies of a world that today resorts to weapons, deports migrants, and commits genocide, we must create vital spaces for conflict, that is, real dimensions of freedom through processes of emancipation from below, of direct democracy against every technocratic-capitalist oligarchy (see Balibar, Negri, Deleuze)<sup>12</sup>. Violence is often on the side of morality. Ethics, on the other hand, can control violence and transform it into a productive and collective *desiring force* (Spinoza meant this with his political concept of *conatus*).

Violence is a slippery concept – nonlinear, productive, destructive, and reproductive. It is mimetic, like imitative magic... Violence gives birth to itself. So we can rightly speak of... a *continuum* of violence. [...] Violence can never be understood solely in terms of its physicality – force, assault, or the infliction of pain – alone. Violence also includes assaults on the personhood, dignity, sense of worth or value of the victim. The social and cultural dimensions of violence are what gives violence its power and meaning. Focusing exclusively on the

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<sup>10</sup> Balibar, 1997, p. 9.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Simondon, 2020.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Negri and Hardt, 2004; Balibar, 2015; Deleuze and Guattari, 1987.

physical aspects of torture/terror/violence misses the point and transforms the project into a clinical, literary or artistic exercise, which runs the risk of degenerating into a theatre or pornography of violence in which the voyeuristic impulse subverts the larger project of witnessing, critiquing, and writing against violence, injustice, and suffering<sup>13</sup>.

Moralism is the millenary violence of dualism, of spiritualistic Manichaeism, of the *logic of Two* which does not allow us to fully understand situations and people. The *theory of conflict* is linked to law since critical tension brings with it the urgency of a different justice, of one world 'another'. Peace is not remaining in obsessive identity. Peace is constituting the force of a conflict that addresses Other and Others. Philosophizing is thinking about *Other*. It is a meeting, as Spinoza recalled. Politics is not a private territory, made for oligarchs who hold the financial resources of the planet. Politics is a *common universe*. Desire and politics need to share the same paths and the same ways of imagining the future life of the community.

the point is not for utopia [...] to assign 'true' or 'just' goals to desire but rather to educate desire, to stimulate it, to awaken it – not to assign it a goal but to open a path for it [...] Desire must be taught to desire, to desire better, to desire more, and above all to desire otherwise; it must learn to shatter the dead weight, to alleviate the weakness of appetite, to liberate the firebirds of desire, to give free reign to the impulse of adventure<sup>14</sup>.

The methodological path to productive critical thinking is necessarily encountered with ethics and politics. The law is beyond the morality of tradition and must have profound knowledge of the various ethical positions before defining a rigid regulatory path. Philosophy has the task of criticizing. *Criticism* is the public exercise of reason and Husserl's idea of Europe starts precisely from the crisis whose Greek etymology is κρίνω "opening a fault, a rupture"; the Greek root also demonstrates the relationship between "judge" and "criticize". Perhaps a *real community* and not just a formal legal or virtual community must start from this relationship to found an *Europa gentium*. The *Lebenswelt* opens up to plural worlds and experiences and is never closed in a single, linear or rigid field. This characteristic already has within itself the embryonic expression of the community because "being in common" immediately means "being in plurality". Critical

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<sup>13</sup> Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2004, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> Abensour, 1999, p. 145-146.

thinking breaks the discussion of war starting from the subjective body of opponents. Husserl's thought placed philosophy in a vanguard position in the fight against the law of war by opposing it with the force of plurality. The *eidos* immanent to thought experiences its contradiction as a field of possibilities. It is in these *possibilia* that the task of philosophy finds its meaning; among the possible ones there is the sense of community, the intentionality that becomes concrete. What are the points of contact with reality? By what means can we make the philosophical idea of community a human beings? Husserl clearly explains that the objectivity of *eidos* does not concern the model of the natural sciences but represents that *universal field* valid for everyone. This objectivity is animated and affirmed by the subjects understood as relationships in progress, *in fieri*. Only in this relationality can the natural world become *Lebenswelt*, "the world of life" (in the same way as bodies, in the only organic vision, *Körper* and in the existential one, *Leib*).

The moderate aspects of *deliberative democracy* (Habermas) do not have sufficient capacity to break with the system of interests that has totally erased ethics. Chantal Mouffe writes:

[...] the process of public discussion can be guaranteed to have reasonable outcomes only to the extent that it realizes the conditions of ideal discourse: the more equal and impartial, the more open that process is and the less participants are coerced and ready to be guided by the force of the better argument, the more likely truly generalizable interests will be accepted by all persons relevantly affected<sup>15</sup>.

The reconquest of public space is the reconquest of ethics over private morality. The *telos* that passes from the *ego* to the *Others* lives *in* difference and expands *on* the difference (Deleuze<sup>16</sup>). The conflict shows that with this *Mit-Sein* intentionality reflects on history itself. This is how the horizon of the history of world appears. The "validity of being" finds meaning only in community. The sad scenario of our times (conflicts and wars, barbarism in relationships) coincides with a crisis of education and a deviant mythologization of information. If morality defines a model of rationality closed in on itself and often one-way, ethics determines a shared rationality where the Other is considered an obligatory term

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<sup>15</sup> Mouffe, 1999, p. 748.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Deleuze, 1994.

of relationship. There is a conflict between models of rationality: *reductive rationality* versus *theoretical rationality*. Reductive rationality does not want to consider the globality of the living being and its relationships and therefore loses the concept of community; on the contrary, theoretical rationality intends to radically activate that intentional process by which Europe is philosophy. Europe as a *philosophical community*. Kant's old idea finds a sequel in Husserl because the cosmopolitan community builds peace in difference and difference in peace. According to Maffesoli, the transition from ethics to morality marks a regressive

path that makes us go from a progressivism (which was vigorous, which gave good results but which becomes a little unhealthy) to a progressivity that reinvests in 'archaisms': people, territory, nature, feelings, moods... that we thought that had been left behind<sup>17</sup>.

The power of morality that claims war prevents the development of the collective power of ethics. The humanism has links with ancient Greece where the birth of philosophy occurred because the fallacious answers of myth and religion were rejected. This is the key to the theoretical attitude: philosophical Europe is the Europe against all dogmatism.

Together with Machiavelli, Baruch Spinoza sought to understand the ambivalence of the relationship between *law* and *conflict*. The economic question has always been central to this dispute because the ruling class has always imposed money and morality; on the other side, acts of rebellion and resistance (today we can add resilience, but its meaning is weaker in the political sense) have always had a different richness, a creative richness that could imagine new forms of life. Spinoza writes:

[...] if we reflect on what happens in practice, or on human nature in general [...] patricians will always think those are the best men who are wealthy, or near akin to themselves, or close friends. It is true that, if patricians were of such a nature that in choosing their colleagues they could free themselves from all bias and be guided only by zeal for the public good, there would be no state to compare with aristocracy. But experience has abundantly taught us that the very opposite is the case, especially with oligarchies where the will of the patricians, in the absence of rivals, is quite unrestrained by law<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Maffesoli, 2010, p. 62.

<sup>18</sup> Spinoza, 2002, p. 752-753.

Domination has always produced a morality and relied on it to secure its own tradition, and with this false past it has deceived entire generations. These seem like political archaisms, but today they have sadly returned to us. In the same way, Machiavelli reflects on forms of government (as Polybius had done in antiquity) and shows the ex post genealogy of notions of values and ethics themselves. There is no human nature, but there are forms of construction based on the experience of the Many:

These variations of government among men are due to chance. For in the beginning of the world, when its inhabitants are few, they lived for a time scattered like the beasts. Then, with the multiplication of their offspring, they drew together and, in order the better to be able to defend themselves, began to look about for a man stronger and more courageous than the rest, made him their head and obeyed him. It was thus that men learned how to distinguish what is honest and good from what is pernicious and wicked, for the sight of someone injuring his benefactor evoked in them hatred and sympathy and they blamed the ungrateful and respected those who showed gratitude, well aware that the same injuries might have been done to themselves. Hence, to prevent evil of this kind they took to making laws and to assigning punishments to those who contravened them. The notion of justice thus came into being<sup>19</sup>.

Machiavelli sees the Principate as an obligation against disorder, but his political ideal is clearly democratic, an element demonstrated in the *Discourses*.

#### 4 THE CONTEMPORARY COMMONWEALTH

As with scientific revolutions, according to Thomas Kuhn<sup>20</sup>, the *dialectic of contrast* in society needs the past to improve. Today, however, globalization, particularly communicative and financial, has defined a pacification of the conflict through weapons and the confusion between true and false in social media. Work, school, healthcare, ecology, women's issues represent political-philosophical fields that are in crisis because they are not affected by the constituent conflict, a critical debate of theoretical and practical growth for the community. Being ethically 'international' means being 'in between', 'between', that is, in Latin *inter*; against the nationalism of racial identity, true peace is 'being

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<sup>19</sup> Machiavelli, 2003, p. 106-107.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Kuhn, 1962.

in between' others bringing culture, passions, knowledge and justice that redistributes equality.

Popular revolt against materially strong rulers [...] may engender an almost irresistible power even if it foregoes the use of violence [emphasis added] in the face of materially vastly superior forces. To call this 'passive resistance' is certainly an ironic idea; it is one of the most active and efficient ways of action ever devised, because it cannot be countered by fighting, where there may be defeat or victory, but only by mass slaughter in which even the victor is defeated, cheated of his prize, since nobody can rule over dead men<sup>21</sup>.

The construction of the Commonwealth is the *intersectionality* of multiple realities, territories, men and women, languages and cultures. The unifying objective is an ethical primacy where the various singularities can position themselves without being crushed by authoritarian morals; morality remains, it is true, but it is no longer a dogma but a first access to *critical thinking* which must then be shared.

The structure of the capitalist financial economy has increased the notion of *anthropocentrism* which considers it an absolute and incontrovertible privilege to dispose of the planet and its resources as it sees fit, without any constraints; the speeding up of exchanges and communications contrasts radically with the times of bio-physiological evolution causing a clear imbalance between the social and natural components. What is defined as the Anthropocene today becomes that peculiar strong identity ethnocentrism that in no way constructs democratic processes or equity. There is a link between the racist matrix and environmental inequality because European white supremacism has always conceived the planet at its disposal, an entity for the total use and consumption of so-called 'civilized' man. As Giordano Bruno recalled with the example of the hand, man has always been technical. But technocracy is something else, it is a domination of the planet by profit and its representatives. This trend has been opposed by resistance groups among indigenous peoples and, more generally, by those third world movements that have been able to extend the field of conflict to issues related to water, forest protection, the fight against pollution and unbridled trade (remember the activity of trade unionist Chico Mendes among rubber collectors

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<sup>21</sup> Arendt, 1998, p. 200-201.

in the Amazon), like *Fridays for Future* today (this is the centrality of the category of *ecosophy*, Arne Naess and the Amerindian perspectivism of Viveiros de Castro)<sup>22</sup>.

Viveiros de Castro himself talks about ethical multiplicity starting from natural ontology; from here man changes his position in the world and returns to ethically consider the environment, habitat and others. Only in this way will living things be able to bond again in common practices and theories.

Hence, where our modern, anthropological multiculturalist ontology is founded on the mutual implication of the unity of nature and the plurality of cultures, the Amerindian conception would suppose a spiritual unity and a corporeal diversity – por, in other words, one ‘culture,’ multiple ‘natures.’ In this sense, perspectivism is not relativism as we know it – asubjective or cultural relativism – but an objective or natural relativism – a multinaturalism. Cultural relativism imagines a diversity of subjective and partial representations (cultures) referring to an objective and universal nature, exterior to representation. Amerindians, on the other hand, propose a representative or phenomenological unity that is purely pronominal in kind applied to a real radical diversity<sup>23</sup>.

War is the inability to truly see others starting from the understanding that every living being is not a dominant but only a fragment, an *operating part* of the work of the cosmos. Ethical experience intends to truly reveal the horizon of a happy life, of a “good life” in the Greek sense that is truly “political”, for people. Merleau-Ponty says:

those events in an experience which endow the experience with durable dimensions, in relation to which a whole series of other experiences will make sense, will form a thinkable sequel or a history – or again the events which deposit a sense in me, not just something surviving or as a residue, but as the call to follow, the demand of a future<sup>24</sup>.

Politics is the expression of immanent temporality that involves everyone. Today philosophical work is an important invitation to take sides against the brutality and barbarity of religious fanaticism, against the myth of identity, against all nationalism, against il patriarcato politico. From ethical perspective we can understand that the Europe of globalization used a highly reductive rationality.

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. Naess, 1990; Viveiros de Castro, 2012.

<sup>23</sup> Viveiros de Castro, 2004, p. 6.

<sup>24</sup> Merleau-Ponty, 2010, p. 77.

On the contrary, the strength of theoretical rationality (philosophy itself) is to reconstruct from below (in my opinion precisely from school and education) the category of *communitas* as a vital force (the concept of “vital relationship” returns). Philosophical lesson contains the universal ethical sense of the philosophical value of the *Mit-Sein*; humanism is not a force of the past but is a performance of change.

The Greek term στάσις (“stasis”) already had many possible definitions for Aristotle:

*Stasis* is the Greek word that Aristotle, and the ancient Greeks in general, use to characterize the whole range of political conflict. It is important to keep in mind that stasis refers for Aristotle to a broad range of phenomena from everyday competition between political factions to extraordinary violent events such as civil wars and other attempts to overthrow established governments<sup>25</sup>.

In fact, for Aristotle, politics necessarily had a close relationship with ethics, while morality could not make a collective contribution; it was a personalism that reduced the political problem to a private matter.

## 5 CONCLUSION

The threat of global rearmament is a threat against culture, against philosophy. Sustainability is the key to the subsistence of the planet as such, it is the pivot of the continuation of the ecosystem and also of the possibility, where it is not too late, of reversing the trajectory; already Pasolini distinguished progress from development; progress can only take place if there are conditions of peace and therefore conditions of affirmative, desiring conflict, while development is only the will to overwhelm for profit, war and enrichment of the few against the many. Philosophical research is always research with Other and Others, it can build peace as a space of constituent conflict, that polemical force which, as Heraclitus recalls, is the *flame of reason*, freedom and civil coexistence between all the peoples of the planet. The action (*Handlung*) is the center of philosophical intentionality and that the Other always involves myself in a common project. Philosophy is the main road against the Ego's regression to violence; the

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<sup>25</sup> Yack, 1993, p. 219, n. 31.

community starts from the Other and starts from the Others. From the Crisis Husserl tells us that Europe can be a common force if it exercises thought and its criticism. All equal in difference. Remember Marx. Husserl knows that nations have different ideas about freedom, ethics, responsibility. The phenomenological task is precisely to find a common critical-rational space. Europe needs philosophy because it needs freedom. If Europe needs freedom then it needs philosophy.

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