

A STRANGE HOMOLOGY: BUBER'S AND JÜNGER'S DESCRIPTIONS OF THE FIGHTING INDIVIDUAL

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ŠAJDA, P.: A Strange Homology: Buber's and Jünger's Descriptions of the
Fighting Individual
FILOZOFIA, 78, 2023, No 7, pp. 533 – 547

A complex approach to Martin Buber's oeuvre requires a consideration of both his dialogical and pre-dialogical writings. The latter include in some cases emphases that differ substantially from the emphases promulgated in *Ich und Du*. I will focus on three essays from the final stage of Buber's pre-dialogical period which contain reflections on the fighting individual. The comparison with Ernst Jünger's reflections on the same motif will show the intellectual proximity between the two authors and will help us understand how Buber's thought was positioned shortly before his dialogical turn. While after this turn Buber and Jünger could be easily seen as polar opposites, this is not the case when we juxtapose their early reflections on the fighting individual in World War I. There are striking similarities which I denote as a *homology*, as there is no evidence of influence in either direction. The presented analysis provides an insight into Buber's controversial pre-dialogical positions as well as into the more general processing of the World War I experience in Germanophone philosophy.

Keywords: The Fighting Individual – War – Community – the Enemy – Martin Buber
– Ernst Jünger

This thematic issue of *Filozofia* commemorates the centenary of the appearance of Martin Buber's magnum opus *Ich und Du* (1923). This is Buber's most famous work, and it is often presented as an epitome of his entire philosophy of dialogue. In this context it is important to bear in mind that Buber was forty-five years old when *Ich und Du* was published, and his dialogical project began to take shape seven years earlier. Thus, if we are to approach his philosophy in a complex way, we need to take into account also his extensive *pre-dialogical* authorship. The role of this authorship in Buber's overall intellectual development was explored in depth by Paul Mendes-Flohr in *Von der Mystik zum Dialog. Martin Bubers geistige Entwicklung bis hin zu „Ich und Du“* (Mendes-Flohr 1978). In this paper I wish to continue this line of exploration by examining Buber's pre-dialogical reflections on the fighting individual in World War I

and by comparing them to Ernst Jünger's reflections on the same motif. The intellectual proximity between the two authors will come into view and will help us understand how Buber's thought was positioned shortly before his dialogical turn.

In the early 1920s when Buber's and Jünger's key works – *Ich und Du* and *In Stahlgewittern* respectively – were published, the philosophical positions of the two thinkers were largely incompatible. Buber was a prominent figure of the nascent tradition of philosophy of dialogue and was known for having developed a theory of positive relation building. Jünger was a decorated officer, whose war memoirs were mostly interpreted as promoting nationalism, militarism, and the cult of the heroic stormtrooper. While Buber brought into the forefront the productive connection "I and Thou," Jünger was concerned with the tragic choice "Thou or I" characteristic of the clash with the enemy in combat.¹ Although in the interwar years Buber and Jünger could be easily seen as polar opposites, this is not the case when we compare their early reflections on the existential-social processes unfolding during World War I. Buber's pre-dialogical thinking is markedly closer to Jünger's philosophical positions. The emphases of Buber's pre-dialogical philosophy of the individual and his relational patterns differ substantially from the emphases he would subsequently introduce in *Ich und Du*. From the perspective of Buber's intellectual development, his wartime writings represent a controversial chapter that is often overlooked, and Buber himself later avoided drawing attention to this part of his authorship.

As I will show below, there are striking similarities between Buber's and Jünger's descriptions of the fighting individual. I speak in this case of a *homology*, as there is no evidence of influence in either direction. I will focus on three essays from Buber's pre-dialogical period – "Die Tempelweihe" (1914), "Bewegung. Aus einem Brief an einen Holländer" (1915) and "Die Losung" (1916) – and on Jünger's treatise *Der Kampf als inneres Erlebnis* (1922). The presented analysis will provide an insight into Buber's pre-dialogical philosophical positions, which he would ultimately abandon after embracing the philosophy of dialogue, as well as into the more general processing of the World War I experience in Germanophone philosophy.²

I. Martin Buber: The Community of Committed (Jewish) Fighters

Buber's essays stem from the 1914 – 1916 period which represents the final stage of his pre-dialogical thinking. In 1916 Buber experienced a dramatic personal and intellectual transformation and wrote the first draft of his dialogical manifesto *Ich und Du* (Buber 1984, 122; Horwitz 1978, 155). Buber's complex transformation from 1916 onwards

¹ Jünger summed up the merciless logic of the clash with the enemy on the frontline with the slogan "Du oder ich" (Jünger 2013, 543).

² In this article I am building on the ideas I presented in Šajda (2020 and 2022).

has been discussed by several authors,³ and thus I will not dwell on it in greater detail. I wish to mention right at the outset, however, that it was closely connected to Buber's reconsideration of his view of World War I and its dynamics. An important part in this process was played by Gustav Landauer who criticized Buber's positive descriptions of the war including those I will discuss below. Landauer's letter from May 12, 1916 (Buber 1972-75, vol. 1, 433 – 438) was a decisive impetus for Buber to question not only his interpretation of the war but even the foundations of his thinking. A key target of Landauer's criticism was Buber's concept of the fighting individual, whose key features I am going to explore.

Buber presented "Die Tempelweihe" as a speech at the Berlin Zionist Union on December 19, 1914. The central motif of the text is the Jewish holiday Hanukkah which commemorates the Dedication of the Jerusalem Temple (*Tempelweihe*) after the successful revolt of the Maccabees against Antiochus IV Epiphanes in the second century BC. Buber aims to establish a connection between the ancient Maccabees, who fought for the freedom of the Jewish people, and contemporary European Jews, who find themselves in the initial stages of World War I. He suggests that while in the past the *religious* aspect of Hanukkah was prominent, with the advent of the Zionist movement the *national* aspect has come to the forefront. In the long era of the Jewish diaspora "the powerful national core of this holiday was increasingly shrouded in and buried under a purely religious ceremony" (Buber 1916b, 233).⁴ This development was recently reversed, as Zionism "turned the feast of the Dedication of the Temple into a celebration of the Maccabees" (Buber 1916b, 233). Buber describes the Maccabees as the epitome of ancient heroism and the fight against both outer and inner enemies (Buber 1916b, 234). These fierce fighters, who did not hesitate to risk their lives for the cause of freedom and national identity, are highly relevant at the moment when Jews are again called to join the fight for a common cause and to strengthen their collective identity.

Buber presents an existential-social diagnosis of the situation of the European Jews taking into account both its individual and collective dimension. Contrary to other diagnoses, he does not see the primary problem of the contemporary Jewry in its *assimilation*, but rather in its *atomization* (Buber 1916b, 240). Especially the western European Jew is characterized by an excessive focus on his personal needs and wishes: he lives "without connection" lacking "a living community," entangled in his self-will (Buber 1916b, 240 – 241). This self-centeredness prompts him to withdraw to a closed-off private zone maintaining only superficial links with the outside world.

³ See, for example, Friedman (1991, 73 – 99, 125 – 144) and Mendes-Flohr (1978, 131 – 164). Paul Mendes-Flohr's article in this volume also touches upon the topic. For a Slovak treatment of the foundations of Buber's dialogical thinking see Bizoň (2017).

⁴ Translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

The existential emphasis on *having* rather than *being* (Buber 1916b, 237) isolates him from other Jews as well as from society at large.

The outbreak of World War I shook the foundations of European society and threw the nations into a catastrophic bloodbath. Buber claims, however, that the war also produced a series of positive effects which seem to be even more important for the atomized Jews than for other nations. The war is a time when the individual is called to *prove himself* (Buber 1916b, 240), join others in the fight and endure a common fate. The Jews are on the one hand scattered among the warring European nations and confronted with the absurdity of facing each other in battle, and, on the other hand, individual European nations invited them to be part of the process of national unification vis-à-vis external enemies. Buber sees the latter fact as a unique chance for the atomized Jews to experience “the great life of a community” (Buber 1916b, 241). In fact, the Jewish response was highly positive and a true reciprocity ensued. At the existential level, the Jewish individual chose “not to remain an atom; he was carried away; he ardently joined the community which thus revealed its life to him: the community needed him the most in this moment” (Buber 1916b, 241). In this way, for instance, the German nation needed its Jews to join the fight side by side with their non-Jewish fellow Germans.

Although the involvement of the Jews in the process of inner unification of individual European nations is a sign of their increased acceptance and an antidote to atomization, it could potentially be a step towards assimilation. Buber does not share this concern, as the participation of the Jewish individual in national unification predisposes him to hear “the call of the deep community of his blood and kind,” which the Zionist movement aims to promote (Buber 1916b, 241 – 242). Thus, the individual participates ultimately in a double process of unification: fighting with fellow citizens under a common flag and recreating his bond with fellow Jews throughout the continent.

Buber acknowledges the necessity of fighting the *outer* enemy – declaring that “we fight against greedy people, nations and states” – but his primary focus is on fighting the *inner* enemy: “we must eradicate greed itself” (Buber 1916b, 237 – 238). Having emphasized the rediscovered national aspect of the Hanukkah festival, he now shifts his attention to the religious aspect. Drawing inspiration from the Hasidic Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav he suggests that the primary fight takes place in one’s own soul (Buber 1916b, 238). When the soul is divided, outer unity cannot be properly achieved. The individual is first to seek inner unity and liberate himself from greed, opportunism and self-will that prevent him from a whole-hearted focus on the good: “The outer enemy can only threaten what is outside; what humiliates us on the inside and desecrates our sanctuary is that we are not whole but fragmented” (Buber 1916b, 238). Thus, the primary fight concerns the defects of one’s own character: egoism and excessive desire

for ownership. Once the individual has progressed on the way of achieving inner unity, he will be able to bolster outer unity with his fellow fighters against the outer enemy. Existential self-transformation paves way for social transformation.

We can see here a clear example of a poetization and spiritualization of the war events and of the fighting individual. Buber avails himself of ancient Jewish history to exhort his contemporaries to abandon their usual focus on private matters and join the war effort with a view of the positive developments that it has set into motion. Buber avoids, however, mentioning the horrors of the war and the large-scale destruction it caused, as his primary emphasis concerns its liberating moment which the individual is called to embrace. This line of interpretation will persist in the other two works that I am going to examine.

The double focus on the existential and the social sphere is present also in Buber's essay "Bewegung: Aus einem Brief an einen Holländer."⁵ This text was born out of his polemic with Frederik van Eeden about the causes and nature of the war, and it is not addressed to a specifically Jewish audience. Buber begins by dismissing the notion that the war enthusiasm in Germany is merely an inauthentic product of "mass suggestion" (Buber 1915, 489).⁶ On the basis of his first-hand experience he describes the prevalent attitude of German citizens as "composed self-sacrificing determination" which is entirely autonomous and authentic (Buber 1915, 489). A key component of this attitude is "an unreserved belief in an absolute value" which guides the lives of committed individuals (Buber 1915, 489). To reduce this attitude to a kind of manipulation is a blatant misinterpretation of facts.

In line with his reflections in "Die Tempelweihe" Buber refrains from promoting a concrete kind of nationalism. He claims to speak about something deeper and more foundational than an emotional allegiance to a specific nation or a country. He explores "our connection with the Absolute" (Buber 1915, 490) which manifests itself not so much in our thinking but rather in our action. In this context, Buber distinguishes two kinds of individuals: those who translate their opinions and will into action (*die entscheidenden Menschen*), and those who fail to do so (*die vorübergleitenden Menschen*) (Buber 1915, 490). With reference to Aristotle he claims that the life of the former is characterized by *kinesis* (*Bewegung*) – potentiality is translated into actuality – while the life of the latter lacks *kinesis*. It is precisely in *kinesis* that the Absolute reveals itself (Buber 1915, 490). Thus, the medium in which the Absolute appears is

⁵ The essay is based on Buber's letter to the Dutch writer Frederik van Eeden from mid-September 1914. In the letter Buber reacts to Van Eeden's public and private criticism of German imperialism and the German intellectuals' moral complicity (Buber 1972-75, vol. 1, 374 – 380; Friedman 1991, 86).

⁶ In his letter to Hans Kohn from September 30, 1914 Buber describes the war enthusiasm of large parts of the German population and expresses his regret at being denied the opportunity to join the army (Buber 1972-75, vol. 1, 370 – 371).

lived experience, not abstract thinking. It appears not as a theoretical object (*what*) but as a way (*how*) of realizing the individual's convictions. Buber sees as the deepest connection between individuals the *kinetic* connection in which the Absolute is present: "Thus, not those people are closest to each other and connected, who...confess the same, but those, who practice what they confess with the same intensity, sincerity and directness" (Buber 1915, 490). It is obvious that this *kinetic* connection is not limited to a certain group or nation. It establishes relations across boundaries and political camps, it is a transnational and transfrontal phenomenon.

Although *kinesis* creates a metaphysical connection between committed individuals from different nations, ultimately it is aimed at a commitment to a concrete form of the Absolute. Buber insists that the guiding value must be absolute, dismissing Van Eeden's relativist proposal to compare existing legal systems and opt for the better ones. As far as Buber is concerned, in times of war resolute individuals do not rely on a disinterested comparison of different kinds of commitments: "The one who truly fights, knows no comparative" (Buber 1915, 491). The true face of the Absolute may be elusive, but the divine power waits in all things "as a seed and a possibility of becoming" to be unleashed by the fighting individual (Buber 1915, 492). An attachment to a concrete form of the Absolute is necessary, and for the fighting individual the *fatherland* becomes the "visible, accessible, graspable form of the Absolute" (Buber 1915, 491). The individual's passionate service to his country includes a willingness to sacrifice even his life for the absolute value. Such belief and willingness can be found in every nation in which individuals relate to the Absolute by resolutely realizing their convictions. Although the absolute value of the fighting individual is concretized in the fatherland, Buber still insists that the primary focus concerns something deeper and universal: "Only the one, who with a dark or light urge means God when he says fatherland, is a fighter" (Buber 1915, 491 – 492).⁷ Such fighters may struggle to achieve mutually opposed objectives; nonetheless they each fight with utmost commitment, which sets them apart even from their compatriots who do not share their passion. A metaphysical *kinetic* community of fighting individuals arises which Buber considers an unambiguously positive aspect of the war.

Buber's essay "Die Losung" appeared as a leading article in the newly founded journal *Der Jude*, whose target audience was the Jewish literary public. Buber's diagnosis of the European Jewry's situation overlaps largely with his diagnosis in "Die Tempelweihe" with additional insights derived from the course of the war. Although the collective tragedy of humanity's self-destruction has been further aggravated, the

⁷ Paul Mendes-Flohr and Martin Jay have shown that Buber's descriptions of the fighting individual and the kinetic community are based on his theory of mystical experience (Mendes-Flohr 1978, 131; Jay 2005, 126).

widespread phenomenon of committed service to one's nation and fatherland still persists. This is also the case with the Jews who serve in different armies of the continent. Despite outer fragmentation they are inwardly united by the same spirit of service, willingness to fight and a newfound sense of community. This is true across the board – from England to Russia – regardless of political conditions: “Hundreds of thousands of Jews fight against each other; but the decisive thing is: they do not fight out of compulsion, but out of the sense of a paramount duty... They give their utmost, and their innermost, too” (Buber 1916a, 1). Jews involved in the military service to the fatherland are part of a “great and vital community” united by *kinesis* (Buber 1916a, 1). Buber repeats his observation from “Die Tempelweihe” that a duty-based community is a remedy to the Jewish individual's atomization and loss of identity. Having lost the connection with his roots and traditions, he became absorbed in the pursuit of his private life (Buber 1916a, 1). With the advent of the war the Jews were invited by their fellow citizens to fight for a common cause and were drawn into “the great life of community” (Buber 1916a, 2). Buber claims that the newly recovered sense of community will help the Jews reconnect also with the “deep community of their blood and kind” (Buber 1916a, 2). He bases this claim on his experience with Jewish soldiers returning from the front, all of whom have strengthened their Jewish identity and their sense of responsibility for their people's future. Furthermore, Buber believes that the Jewish people have a special calling among the nations of the world. They are not merely a nationality alongside other nationalities, since they ultimately focus on something greater than just their own interests. They have been entrusted with the task to create a fraternal, spiritual bond between nations. Buber insists that this “function of connecting nations” (Buber, 1916a, 3) can only be realized if the Jews are deeply conscious of their own identity and know their place in the world.

As we have seen, Buber interprets the war primarily as an opportunity for the fighting individuals to create a community. Although the community is rather abstract, Buber believes it to be an efficient antidote to the pre-war processes of social disintegration. It is an unfortunate fact, however, that he turns a blind eye to the extensive social disintegration caused by the war.

II. Ernst Jünger: Formal Unity of the Individuals Fighting for an Idea

Jünger wrote *Der Kampf als inneres Erlebnis* as a thematically structured war memoir.⁸ He reflects on different aspects of his war experience drawing from them general conclusions. He paints a complex picture of the war taking into account a broad spectrum of phenomena from impressive individual heroism to senseless large-scale

⁸ For more detail on the historical context and the thematic emphases of the work see Sieferle (2019); Weitin (2003 and 2014); Horňáček (2010); Pekar (2012) and Kiesel (2009).

destruction of human life. While acknowledging that the fighting individuals' experience was extremely varied and ambivalent, he distinguishes two basic poles of this experience: the positive pole of the individual's *inner experience* and the negative pole of his *outer experience*. The former represents a noble counterpole to the passive mass mentality: "The individual, who sensed in this war only negation and his own suffering, but not affirmation and a higher movement, lived through it as a slave. He had no inner experience, only an outer one" (Jünger 2015, 103).

Jünger describes the fight both as a natural given and a higher movement of the idea. From the first perspective, the fight is an inevitable component of human society, as it is an expression of a human instinct that can be regulated but not eliminated: "The true source of war lies deep in our chest and all the horror that from time to time fills the world, is merely a mirror image of the human soul" (Jünger 2015, 43). While moral and cultural formation aims to minimize human pugnaciousness, the fighting instinct itself is a key predisposition for one's own survival. Its dysfunction can be deeply problematic and result in self-destruction. In a standard peace-time context conflicts are regulated by social norms, but as soon as the validity of the norms is radically questioned or they collapse altogether, the fighting instinct becomes prominent again. Jünger maintains that the initial waves of World War I swept away the existing social order and created a space for "the rebirth of barbarism" and "the rediscovery of violence." (Jünger 2015, 35). The war brought to the forefront the fighting instinct which played only a marginal role in pre-war society.

The individual who joins the fight is thrown into a situation that demands his full attention and the presence of his whole personality. In order to survive he needs to reach the utmost limits of his capacities and appropriate *the will to fight*. This will is a fundamental precondition for the self-preservation of both the individual and the collective (Jünger 2015, 41). The fight brings about an encounter with the enemy which provokes intense emotions. The encounter is marked by the fear of death, but it also includes a liberating moment, as it releases accumulated pressure (Jünger 2015, 17). Deep animal layers of human personality come to the fore, and the animal instinct to attack prompts the individual to cast himself upon the enemy and defeat him in a merciless struggle. The individual is seized by the primitive urge to destroy the enemy, as they threaten each other in an existential way.

The fight is, however, not just a clash of primal instincts and irrational stirrings, but it is also a confrontation of opposing ideas. Jünger interprets the conflict of rational designs as a higher movement of the idea. He describes the fight as "God's judgement over two ideas" (Jünger 2015, 49) and the last rational instance for the resolution of a dispute that cannot be resolved in a peaceful way.

Jünger's descriptions of *the idea* are characterized by a tension. On the one hand, he places it at the metaphysical level and attributes to it an independent dynamic, on the other hand, he presents it as the fighting individual's conviction. Jünger explores the abstract metaphysical form of the idea when analyzing the will that drives the fighter in moments of anxiety. The individual becomes paralyzed and is able to act only because "a higher will supports him" (Jünger 2015, 89).⁹ This will is at odds with his current personal disposition and ultimately prevails. Jünger explains similarly the general way in which the idea operates in soldiers. He acknowledges that the soldiers' motivation is usually simple; they are concerned with their own safety and needs, and are not concerned with the essence of war. They are prone to the manipulation of mass media, as they see the war as an external process and interpret it in a fragmentary way. Even then, however, the idea permeates the soldiers' existence and uses them as "material for its own purposes, without them even knowing" (Jünger 2015, 81). Jünger employs here the concept of unconscious service to the idea which guides the soldiers even when they neither understand nor accept it.

A far more intriguing phenomenon is, however, conscious service to the idea by those who understand it and have turned the fight into an inner experience. They are willing to "sacrifice their personality for the idea" (Jünger 2015, 100) and subordinate their individual good to the collective good represented by the idea. A key aspect of Jünger's reflection is that the idea is not dependent on a concrete content, and the act of the individual's submission is crucial. Focusing on *the form* not *the content*, he declares that "to die for one's conviction is the highest thing" (Jünger 2015, 100). The decisive factor is the individual's commitment to the idea and his readiness to give his utmost. Thus, even death for an erroneous conviction is authentic heroism (Jünger 2015, 101).

Jünger describes conscious service to the idea as knightliness. The soldier who resolutely fights for an idea increasingly discovers the essence of the fighting spirit and sees that the fight is not merely an instinctive matter but can be "ennobled by knightliness" (Jünger 2015, 49 – 50). This involves the recognition of the idea's presence in every fighting individual who is unreservedly committed to it. This has substantial consequences, as the individual knight does not stand alone, but rather a transnational and transfrontal community of knights is formed. This metaphysical community relativizes the external frontlines between the different warring nations and camps.

While the proximity of the enemy stirs primitive instincts in the fighting individual, a parallel dynamic emerges that is at odds with the irrational desire to destroy the enemy. Politicians and intellectuals in the rear promote hate against the enemy, but this negative

⁹ The connection between the idea and the fight is also explored in Großheim (2014, 332).

emotion is not widespread among the soldiers on the front (Jünger 2015, 49). Due to their shared life routine, paradoxical solidarity ensues between the adversaries. In direct combat they seek to defeat the other, but they refuse to *degrade* one another (Jünger 2015, 62). Respect for the enemy is shown in various ways, most visibly during ceasefire (Jünger 2015, 49). The shared danger as well as acts of courage connect the adversaries while distancing them from their compatriots in the rear: “How much the man on the frontline despised the whole supply machinery in the rear. He felt closer to the fighting adversary... Every hate cry is suspicious, it is weakness. Only courage recognizes courage” (Jünger 2015, 54).

Jünger interprets the solidarity with the enemy as an expression of knightliness and a higher movement of the idea. The committed fighter considers the idea more important than himself and encounters the same radicality in the enemy, thus gaining common ground with him (Jünger 2015, 51, 53). Even though their goals are contrary and they seek to vanquish the other, the idea unites them in a metaphysical community of knights. They respect the fighting spirit of all committed individuals: both friends and foes. Through the community of knightly fighters a constructive dimension of the fight is manifested, as they jointly steer the course of history: “The fight is not merely destruction, it is also a male form of procreation; thus, even the one who fought for errors did not fight in vain. Today’s and tomorrow’s enemies are united in manifestations of the future that they create together” (Jünger 2015, 50).

It is clear that in Jünger *the form* unites the enemies while *the content* divides them. They are united by commitment, courage and faith in something that transcends them. Although they fight against the content of the adversary’s faith, they respect the faith itself (Jünger 2015, 50). The unequivocal disposition of commitment and faith unites the enemies while distancing them from their compatriots who do not share their disposition. The most succinct expression of Jünger’s *formalism* is the slogan “It is not essential *for what* we fight, but *how* we fight” (Jünger 2015, 74). This slogan reflects the fighting individuals’ passionate service to the idea and points to their metaphysical community which transcends the division into friends and enemies. This community may be manifested in a physical way – through helping the prisoners of war or paying the last respects to the fallen enemies (Jünger 2015, 46 – 47, 49) – but it persists even in moments when no physical manifestations occur.

Jünger insists on the metaphysical connection between the knightly fighters even during their immediate clash on the frontline. The positive bond does not cease to exist even in merciless life and death combat: “[W]hen we clash in a cloud of fire and smoke, we are united, we are two parts of a single force... The one who understands this, affirms both himself and the enemy and lives simultaneously in the whole and in its parts” (Jünger 2015, 97). The image of enemies as two parts – or two poles – of a single force

corresponds to the dynamic of content and form in Jünger's reflections. From the point of view of content, the enemies are antipoles that negate each other. From the formal point of view, they are parts of the same force, as they both serve the idea and recognize its active presence in all knightly fighters.

Although Jünger emphasizes the role of the individual in modern warfare, he admits that the rise of military technology has changed the character of the fight in an unforeseen way. Direct confrontation with other human beings is rare, the soldiers are instead flooded with waves of deadly steel and gas. The fighting individual's experience is increasingly determined by technology: "Sometimes we forget that we fight against people. The enemy appears as an enormous impersonal force" (Jünger 2015, 96). The modern war machine disrupts Jünger's poetics, as it turns the knightly fighter into a machine operator. The use of machines may still be determined by humans, but technological warfare changes man himself. Jünger maintains that the individual is increasingly suppressed by the mass which was created by the industrial war machine (Jünger 2015, 54 – 55). Knightly virtues are bound to fade away, as the mass operation of the war machinery gets the upper hand.

III. A Strange Homology: Four Areas of Overlap

There are four main areas of overlap in Buber's and Jünger's descriptions of the fighting individual and his war experience.

First, in both cases there is a strong emphasis on *formalism*. The way *how* the individual fights is more important than *for what* he fights. Both authors focus on the individual's commitment, resoluteness, sense of duty and passionate service. They extol his ability to make an unequivocal decision and remain consistent in implementing it. The individual consciously adopts a duty that transcends his subjective good and subordinates his personal needs and wishes to the service of this duty. The fight requires intense presence of his whole personality and capacities: it is a radical and exclusive commitment. The fighting individual's radicality is in stark contrast to a disinterested comparison of different potential commitments which can make sense in peace time but not in the heat of the war. Buber's central term is *kinesis* which denotes the individual's realization of his convictions regardless of their content. Jünger's central concept is service to *the idea* regardless of its content. He highlights the importance of faith without specifying its object. There is an explicit religious component in the authors' reflections, as Buber claims the Absolute is revealed in *kinesis* and Jünger sees the clash of ideas as God's judgement. In both cases the fighting individual's action is key to the manifestation of the divine power.

Second, the *nation is not the primary value* in either author. This is important, as both were enthusiastic about the wave of German nationalism brought about by the war and explicitly supported the war effort of the Central Powers. They consider the nation

an essential value but subordinate it to a higher, more abstract, universal value. The nation is among the crucial factors in the analyzed writings, in which the authors adopt an unambiguous position and present it as an ideal for the fighting individual. Buber hails the rediscovery of the national aspect of the Hannukah festival and considers the Maccabees a relevant epitome of the fight for national identity. He combines the promotion of the Jewish national identity with a call to all fighting individuals to gather under the flag of their country. He points to the fatherland as a concrete and visible form of the Absolute while resisting the temptation to promote a specific, say, German or Austro-Hungarian nationalism.¹⁰ Having defended both the German and the Jewish national movements, Buber insists that the fighting individual needs to look beyond the concrete form of the Absolute and remain open to the Absolute itself. The concretization of the Absolute must not be the ultimate instance of his allegiance, as the primary value is not particular but universal. Similarly, Jünger knows from his own experience that soldiers need to rally around a concrete watchword, such as the fight for their nation and country. His war memoir is a systematic analysis of his experience of such a fight. Also he sees the need, however, to go beyond the concept of the nation when capturing the overall dynamic of the fighter's experience. He speaks of a higher movement of the idea and points to a higher will indicating that the individual comes into contact with a transcendent reality that is not bound to a particular nation or country. The idea belongs to a more abstract realm and operates across national contexts. It is universal, as it affects fighting individuals in all nations, but it calls each individual to concretize and implement it in his own particular situation. The individual is, however, not to lose sight of the idea beyond its concrete manifestations, as it is the primary value guiding and supporting his actions. The universal concepts of the Absolute and the idea enable Buber and Jünger to discover new types of unity.

Third, both authors' theories *relativize the friend/enemy distinction*. To be sure, they acknowledge the reality of the external enemy and the necessity to combat him. This means fighting against the content of his conviction and faith. War is a conflict of contrary aims, as its participants seek to prevail in different kinds of confrontations. Both Buber and Jünger, however, complement the merciless logic of war with an emphasis on the respect for the enemy pointing to his physical and spiritual proximity. In a concrete frontline situation the enemy is not just dissimilar but also similar, not just distant but also close. This bipolarity prevents the spread of monopolar attitudes, such as blind hate. Such attitudes are more common in the rear where a mentality develops which is often more alien to the soldier than the mentality of the enemy on the other side of the frontline. Thus, a political friend can appear more distant to the fighting individual

¹⁰ Buber was an Austrian citizen living in Germany.

than a political enemy who seeks to destroy him in combat. Acts of courage in combat as well as shared lifestyle and gestures of respect during ceasefire create points of connection between the fighting adversaries. Both authors see the committed enemy as someone the fighting individual can relate to, in contrast to the indifferent compatriot, with whom he has little in common. Both emphasize the inner experience of the fighting individual, which Buber uses to further relativize the enemy. The inner enemy – one's own egoism and greed – represents the primary problem, rather than the outer enemy.

Fourth, both Buber and Jünger point to *two types of unity and community*. Alongside the apparent national unity the latent transnational unity is highlighted. The war brought about a deep crisis which prompted the individual European nations to rally around their basic characteristics and symbols. A process of national unification took place in which individuals with varying degree of commitment were called to participate in order to strengthen their collective identity. Both authors observe that this process occurred in different nations across the continent and was spearheaded by individuals whose resoluteness inspired others. Thus a higher cohesion of the national community was achieved at the time when inner unity was seen as crucial vis-à-vis outer enemies. Parallel to national unification a transnational unification took place, as a result of which a metaphysical community of committed fighters was created. This community relies on the *formal* connection between the fighters: they fight out of the sense of a paramount duty, passionately practice their convictions and are ready to give their utmost. They are divided with regard to their goals and sometimes even oppose each other, but they are parts of the same force which unites them in a transfrontal community of knights. They recognize the work of the idea or the Absolute in each other, and even inspire each other through acts of courage and respect for the adversary. In Buber, the notion of a transfrontal community is applied also to the committed Jewish fighters who experience a new kind of unity after a period of atomization. The concept of the metaphysical community of passionate fighters is the most poetic but also the most fragile element in Buber's and Jünger's theories. It was largely downplayed in their later works, as Buber turned to concrete interpersonal relations, and Jünger embraced the decisive role of the working masses.

As a final critical observation we can say that there is an obvious blind spot in both authors' interpretations of the fighting individual and the community he builds. While the authors highlight the new social cohesion brought about by the war, they pay minimal attention to the concurrent social disintegration. Basic social units – such as marriage, family or local community – were irreparably damaged or even destroyed on a large scale. The tragic break-up of these existential frameworks is not subject to philosophical scrutiny, which renders the presented theories unbalanced.

The *homology* of the two accounts can be summed up in such a way that they both provide intriguing existential-social descriptions of the fighting individual's experience. These descriptions are formulated in a general way so that they can apply to various contexts. They focus on positive dynamics of the individual's experience and capture them in a poetic way. Both authors counterpose these dynamics to the brutal reality of technological war and clashing nationalisms. Given their different backgrounds and later intellectual developments, it is surprising they do so in a very similar way.

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This work was produced at the Institute of Philosophy, Slovak Academy of Sciences, as part of the grant project VEGA 2/0130/23.

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