

# Foreword

Conflict, violence and war, as instantiation of violence through history, are quite widely analyzed within Platonic academic literature. It is well known that Plato's views were certainly influenced by the civil war in Athens at the very end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.-C. and at the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.-C. as stated, for instance, in the *Seventh Letter* (325cd):

The more I reflected upon what was happening, upon what kind of men were active in politics, and upon the state of our laws and customs, and the older I grew, the more I realized how difficult it is to manage a city's affairs rightly.<sup>1</sup>

In this passage, "what was happening" refers to the Thirty Tyrants' oligarchy and the following democratic restoration that followed. Both were unable to restrain violence and reestablish justice within the city.

Moreover, it is well known that Plato's political philosophy mainly aims to establish happiness, harmony and peace within the city as expressed, for instance, in the *Republic* (519e-520a) and the *Laws* (628cd):

You are forgetting again that it isn't the law's concern to make anyone class in the city outstandingly happy but to contrive to spread happiness throughout the city by bringing the citizens into harmony with each other through persuasion or compulsion and by making them share with each other the benefits that each class can confer on the community. The law produces such people in the city, not in order to allow them to turn in whatever direction they want, but to make use of them to bind the city together.<sup>2</sup>

ATHENIAN: The greatest good, however, is neither war nor civil war (God forbid we should ever need to resort to either of them), but peace and goodwill among men. And so the victory of a state over itself, it seems, does not after all come into the category of ideals; it is just one of those things in which we've no choice.<sup>3</sup>

In outline, Plato's views about conflict, violence and war may be summarized as follows: (1) conflict, violence and war are the most dangerous threats for the city and, besides the militaristic nature of the society at this time,<sup>4</sup> they urgently need to be eliminated and (2) this challenge can only be met by the instauration of a new political regime grounded on an

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<sup>1</sup> Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 1647. For a precise analysis of this historical context, see Joan-Antoine Mallet, "War and Peace in Plato's Political Thought," *Philosophical Journal of Conflict and Violence* 1/1 (May 2017): 87-95. DOI:10.22618/TP.PJCV.20171.1.95008.

<sup>2</sup> Plato, *Complete Works*, 1137.

<sup>3</sup> Plato, 1323.

<sup>4</sup> Regarding the debate about the militaristic nature of the ancient Greek society, see Simon Hornblower, "Warfare in Ancient Literature: the Paradox of War," in *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Warfare*, ed. Philip Sabin, Hans van Wees, and Michael Whitby, First edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 27.

harmonious balance between the different parts of the city guaranteed by the combined activities of political leadership and philosophy (either directly as in the *Republic* or through legislation as in the *Laws*).

However, such a summary does not do at all justice to the profoundness and complexity of Plato's philosophical views about conflict, violence and war. This special issue of the *Philosophical Journal of Conflict and Violence* aims to shed light on the fact that Plato's positions on these topics are far from being solely a matter of political theory or historical determinism.

"Plato's Sound Language against the Harm done to Language" by Magalie Année, shows in a quite remarkable way that Plato's conception of conflict is not restricted to politics by examining the non-metaphorical role of conflict within language itself and its potential consequences on the good balance of the human soul. In her paper "Psychology and Violence in Plato's *Phaedrus*, *Republic* and *Timaeus*," Camille Guigon deepens this idea of non-metaphorical violence in Plato's writings by renewing the analysis of the specific role of violence within the human soul. More specifically, her essay highlights that violence between the different parts of the soul (*logos*, *epithumia*, *thumos*) shall be understood in the literal sense in order to explain and understand human behaviors.

The remaining papers inquire into the close relations between Plato and some of his predecessors and heirs regarding conflict, violence and war. In "Plato's views about conflict, violence and war," Pierre Ponchon analyzes an unfortunately too often disregarded work of Plato, the *Laws*, in the light of Thucydides' writings and Heraclitus' fragments. Corentin Tresnie investigates the way Neoplatonism, especially Plotinus, Porphyry and Iamblichus, deals with conflict and violence: this study fills a gap in the Neoplatonic studies by paying attention to the often-neglected issue of conflict and violence. The likely influence of Plato's conception of conflict, violence, and war on Clausewitz is highlighted in a compelling way (and, at least to my knowledge, for the very first time) in Fulcran Teisserenc's contribution to this special issue. Finally, Sequoya Yiaueki's paper analyzes the commonalities between Plato and Eric Weil, a key figure in twentieth-century French philosophy still undeservedly too little known and studied in the English-speaking world, regarding the issues of violence and discourse.

Ultimately, Plato's conceptions of conflict, violence and war still constitute a stimulating field of study which is far from being totally explored. I believe that the articles featured in this special issue will contribute to a deeper and renewed interpretation of these topics.

*Joan-Antoine Mallet*

*CRISES – Centre de Recherches Interdisciplinaires en Sciences humaines et Sociales (EA 4424)  
Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier, France*