

From the Editors

Last August, Societas Ethica organized its 51st annual conference in Maribor, on the topic of 'The Ethics of War and Peace'. Both the time and the place for the conference were historically significant: Slovenia saw frontline fighting and atrocities in both World Wars, and the conference date, in August 2014, marked the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War, the great war that was, according to deluded nationalist rhetoric, supposed to end all wars.

One hundred years later, philosophical and theological reflection on war and peace is more important than ever. Both the end of the Second World War and the end of the Cold War fueled hopes for the establishment of a permanent and peaceful international order. But such hopes have been dashed again and again. While the sheer number and the intensity of armed conflicts have decreased over the previous decades, the specter of war continues to haunt us. Violent conflicts – many of them forgotten or barely noticed in the West – continue to rage on, for instance in the Congo or in Myanmar.

The civil war in Syria has turned out to be one of the worst failures of the international community in terms of containing and restraining violence. Arms continue to flood into the country, while eleven million refugees are still trapped inside it and there are not enough funds to support the four million who were able to flee.

Europe feels once again threatened by an expanding Russia. The War against Terror is being conducted on a global scale, with new and ever more comprehensive surveillance technology and an American president who has assumed the right to order the remote killing of anyone, anywhere on Earth. Meanwhile, a terror organization like IS is assuming the habits of the nation-state, but continues to draw recruits from various affluent countries in Europe and other parts of the world and vows a return to medieval forms of governance and law.

War is still with us, but its face is continually changing. In order to understand this change, we need to be aware and wary of its history. The articles assembled in this special issue are in various ways cognizant of the history of warfare and the special issues they illuminate. Nigel Biggar, in an article that builds on the keynote lecture he delivered at the Societas Ethica conference last year, draws upon historical and theological scholarship to sketch a Christian theory of Just War. And Jasna Nimac reminds us of the reconstructive nature of memory, and the special ethical responsibilities that this entails for remembering violence – or acts that can lead to violence through the ways in which they are remembered.

Ronnie Hjorth provides us with a secular take on the right to armed interventions for humanitarian reasons, building on the work of P. F. Strawson – and like Biggar's, his article is steeped in historical awareness. And finally, Werner Wolbert offers

a take on one of the newest topics of the ethics of war and peace: targeted killings. He reflects on what targeted killings actually are: acts of warfare, of punishment, or of police action.

These papers span a broad range of topics and of argumentative styles, and we are very glad to present them together in this special issue. The publication of this issue coincides with another anniversary - it has been seventy years since the end of the Second World War and the Nazi reign of terror. To hope for eternal peace in light of this anniversary would be presumptuous. But perhaps what we can hope for is clearer thinking around questions of war and peace, and for these articles to make a contribution in that direction.