

The Meaning of the Russian-Ukrainian War from the Perspective of Stefan Baley's Intentionalism

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The article is devoted to the search for the meaning of the Russian-Ukrainian war from the perspective of intentionalism of the Ukrainian philosopher Stefan Baley. This article attempts to actualise Baley's intentionalist approach to war in the context of the philosophy of war, especially the ethics of warfare. The article analyses from a philosophical point Baley's views on the meaning of war, attempts to find the meaning of the Russian-Ukrainian war by method of analogy, and formulates several inductive conclusions on the lessons from this war for the future. In conclusion, the article argues that the Russians' justification of their armed invasion of Ukraine by a common history and the need for self-defense is hypocritical and self-deceptive. The article also suggests that such 'morality' of the Russians requires attention from the international community so that everyone in it does not mistake good for evil.

Keywords: intentionalism, Stefan Baley, meaning of war, Russian-Ukrainian war, philosophy of war, ethics of warfare

INTRODUCTION

In the midst of the large-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, which began on 24 February 2022, the search for its meaning has engulfed not only Ukrainians. It is of interest to many people who are concerned about this armed phenomenon. Separate forums (Dijkstra et al. 2022), round tables (Bily et al. 2017; Yermolenko 2022) and articles (Kordan 2022; Vorbrugg, Bluwstein 2022; Briedis, Navarro 2024) are devoted to attempts to understand the meaning of this war. In this context, an article by the Ukrainian philosopher Stepan Baley (1885–1952)¹,

¹ Stefan Baley is a Ukrainian philosopher, psychologist, physician and educator. Baley's work belongs to two cultures – Ukrainian and Polish. Baley was born in 1885 in the village of Velyki Birky (Ternopil County, Kingdom of Galicia and Volhynia, Austro-Hungarian Empire; now Ternopil Oblast, Ukraine) and died in Warsaw in 1952 (Republic of Poland). In 1904–1907, Baley studied at the Faculty of Philosophy of the Jan Kazimierz University of Lviv (now Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, Ukraine). In 1921–1923, he taught at the Ukrainian Secret University (Lviv). From 1928 until the end of his life, he worked as the head of the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Warsaw.

‘The Meaning of War’(1916)², is also worthy of attention. He was interested in the meaning of the First World War in particular and war in general. Baley used the word ‘meaning’ in the sense of the German ‘sinn’ and explained it as a ‘reasonable goal’. For Baley, the search for the meaning of war meant the search for the intentional content of war. The philosopher understood that war can be given different meanings. He was concerned about whether Ukrainians would be able to give a new meaning to the First World War and whether they would be able to learn a lesson from it for the future. From this perspective, the relevance of Baley’s intentionalist approach to the war is unquestionable. In this context, one can attempt to find the meaning of the Russian-Ukrainian war and also to determine its lessons for the future. This has implications for the philosophy of war and especially the ethics of warfare. Therefore, the purpose of the article is (1) to make a philosophical analysis of Baley’s views on the meaning of the war, (2) to attempt to find, by method of analogy, the meaning of the Russian-Ukrainian war, and (3) to draw several inductive conclusions about the lessons from this war for the future. This article is a continuation of the research into Baley’s philosophical views on war by my colleagues – Viktor Maletsky (Maletsky 2020: 100–103) and Stepan Ivanyk (Ivanyk 2014: 83).

BALEY ON THE MEANING OF WAR

Baley wrote about the distortion of morality during the First World War. He drew attention to the hypocrisy of the warring parties. The philosopher defined hypocrisy as a mere pretense of truthfulness, but in reality a concern for one’s own interest. Baley’s hypocrisy was not so much about the lies of the warring parties as it was about the self-deception that arose from their inability to see the difference between selfish and moral good. To justify their selfishness, they appealed to universal values. This was because the egoism of the nation had assimilated the universal ethics of the individual to its needs for so long that it gave him the right to seek the realisation of national selfish goals under the guise of universal morality. Under such circumstances, each of the belligerents sought in the war a meaning with which it could agree (Baley 1916).

‘Morality’ of this type, called *cant*, was also criticised during World War I by Max Scheler and Bernard Shaw. Scheler criticised the British for their sickness with *cant*. He wrote that the British justified their participation in the war by the need to protect weak countries and the achievements of world culture from barbarians, i.e. the Germans, but in reality they had their own self-interest at heart (Scheler 1915: 388). Shaw believed that the British were rightly criticised for hypocrisy because, in his view, they had lost all intellectual awareness of what they were doing and, at the same time, all the power of objective self-criticism. Instead, they accumulated pious praise for themselves, which satisfied their spoiled and semi-atrophied conscience (Shaw 1915).

During the Nazi occupation of Poland, the scientist worked at the Warsaw Underground University. Baley left Ukraine with a thorough research on the psychoanalysis of literary creativity and textbooks on logic and psychology. In Poland, he began research in the field of educational psychology and social psychology.

² Baley’s article ‘The Meaning of War’ was first published in 1916 in the leading Ukrainian socio-political journal *Dilo* as an abstract of an educational lecture on the philosophy of war. For the second time, Ukrainian society was able to read this article at the beginning of the war for its independence when in 2014, Russia began its covert armed invasion of Ukraine. It should be noted that Baley continued his reflections on the meaning of war in his article ‘Cant’ (1917). Therefore, in this article I will refer to these two works of the philosopher.

Baley believed that hypocrisy is characteristic not only of the British. Hypocrisy has been a typical, common phenomenon in the life of European peoples since ancient times, and in the 'ethical' debate of the First World War it became an orgy (Baley 2002: 256). The philosopher demonstrated this on the example of Russian hypocrisy. The average Russian did not suppress the Ukrainian national liberation movement for the sake of the Russian national egoism, but because this movement posed a threat to the unity of his state. For a Russian, suppressing the Ukrainian national liberation movement meant securing the universal achievements of the revolution in the name of the greater good. The Russian did not do this hypocritically; he was sincerely convinced that he was standing up for the common good (Baley 2002: 257).

Baley noticed similarities in the ways in which the warring parties 'moralised' their selfishness. Those included the abuse of history and the neglect of morality in war.

Baley pointed out that during World War I, nations resorted to moral justification of their expansion by past cultural influences. They sincerely believed that they were doing so in the interest of protecting their culture. In fact, in this way they sought to expand their culture. The philosopher wrote: "There is no "annexation" anywhere now. There is only "disannexation" (Baley 2002: 258). As an example, he cited the French, who during the First World War were convinced that they were not annexing Alsace and Lorraine, but only disannexing them, because they were regaining control over previously lost territories that culturally belonged to France. Baley noted that the Poles also used the argument of 'protecting culture' when they wanted to morally justify their expansion into Ukrainian lands.

The philosopher did not believe that the meaning of the First World War was the opposition of cultures. In his opinion, these oppositions exacerbated the war and also led to a clear definition of cultural values that the warring parties tried to oppose each other: 'Through war, cultural tendencies that have been developing very slowly in peacetime are realized and consolidated' (Baley 1916). However, the question of who is responsible for the armed conflict in this explanation of war, according to Baley, fades into the background. For example, so did Henri Bergson, who explained the cause of the First World War by the disproportion between the development of technology and the development of the ethical culture of mankind.

Another way of hypocrisy during the First World War, Baley considered pretending to be the aggressor's victim. He wrote that each of the warring parties considers war a necessary defense of its existence, which is threatened by the other party: 'In this sense, each of the warring parties blames the war on the enemy, and considers itself the victim' (Baley 1916). By this, the philosopher wanted to show that the warring parties denied the initial aggressive component. In this, Baley saw a cunning substitution of the norms of general ethics, which does not allow attacking anyone, but allows killing another 'for one's own defense'. This looked like a paradox to him. The most terrible of all wars is the one that is only defensive for all the belligerents, because this war has the most destroyed values (Baley 2002: 258).

According to Baley, the meaning of war becomes clear only during the war itself. Before the war, it is not always possible to predict it. Only history can draw conclusions about the meaning of warfare.

Baley was convinced that it would be much better for humanity if peoples avoided hypocrisy in their relations. First, outright brutality would cause far less harm than distorted morality. National contradictions could not be maintained at the same level of tension for long and would not have time to consume people's minds so much if they did not have to change their ethical principles so often. Second, outright brutality would be more in line

with human dignity than self-deception. The resolution of national contradictions by military means would be in accordance with ethical norms, not contrary to them.

Baley was not a supporter of the idea of war as a source of renewal. He saw war only as a last resort when an ethical resolution of the conflict is no longer possible. Baley considered it the duty of humanity to strive to eliminate war. He understood that this was not an easy thing, but he insisted on finding a solution to conflicts in order to avoid violence. In this context, the philosopher shared Immanuel Kant's idea of eternal peace as a moral ideal that is not something unattainable, but only something that will eventually come.

In his discussion of hypocrisy, Baley assumed that people tend to pass off selfish interests as those of the common good. Especially if they rely on the opinion of the majority rather than their own reasoning. In such cases, it is difficult for them to avoid self-deception. The philosopher defined the task of science as exposing falsifications in international life and discrediting hypocrisy in it. If science is able to identify hypocrisy in international life and show its pretense of being for the common good, and prove that oppression of one nation by another is not heroic, then all of humanity will overcome the ethical flaw of hypocrisy.

Baley realised that Ukrainians were also concerned with finding the meaning of the First World War. He believed that every nation, like the Ukrainians, should be prepared for the fact that the meanings of war are unstable. The course of military events can expose their substitution of facts. Therefore, the philosopher urged Ukrainians not to be disappointed, but to give a new meaning to events in accordance with real circumstances and thus gain experience for the future.

History shows that in World War I, Ukrainians fought and died for empires that not only ignored their national interests but also tried to destroy their national movement. The worst part was that Ukrainians, as combatants on both sides, were forced to kill each other. The only positive aspect of this war for them was that they saw an opportunity for their own liberation in the exhaustion of the warring empires. It was probably about this opportunity for Ukrainians that Baley wrote. He emphasised that Ukrainians should identify the empires' pretended concern for their interests and mobilise all their forces for independence from them. Although the Ukrainian Revolution (1917–1921) did not achieve its goal, it initiated the process of forming a modern political nation and revived the tradition of Ukrainian statehood on a democratic basis.

THE MEANING OF THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR

Russia's political culture has historically been characterised by a levelling of the value of proportion. According to Volodymyr Yermolenko, that had the most far-reaching consequences for the sphere of morality and law:

'For the Russian political culture, proportion and measure were not the basis of society, but only an imperfect form of the finite human mind [...] if this is the case, then the ability to think more or less clearly, to draw boundaries, to at least roughly define good and evil, justice and injustice, guilt and innocence is lost. [...] Every crime, in its depths, becomes not quite a crime, (or not a crime at all); every innocence is filled with guilt; every punishment becomes inadequate to the violation, separates from it, loses its logical connection with it – the connection of proportion, and therefore can be imposed on anything else; and then crimes are unpunished, and punishment falls on the innocent' (Yermolenko 2018: 410).

The Russian philosopher Ivan Ilin (1883–1954) had a tendency to pass off selfish interests as the interest of the common good. According to Timothy Snyder, he was self-blinded about Russia and Russians. For Ilin, Russia is pure and objective, and Russians are virtuous. Their virtue was more important than what they actually did (Snyder 2019: 23). Ilin considered Ukraine's secession to be a threat to Russia. He talked about Ukrainians in quotation marks. For him, Ukrainians are part of Russians. Therefore, he saw no reason for Ukrainians to secede into a separate state. If it happened, Ukrainians would give themselves up to foreigners for conquest and plunder. To prevent this, Russians had to fight for their unity to the end.

But the idea of Ukrainians as part of Russians is a product of myth-making. Ukrainians and Russians have created different histories. The Kyiv state is a product of the Ukrainian nation, and the Moscow state is a product of the Russian nation. The Moscow state should not be seen as a successor to the Kyiv state. Despite the discontinuity of Ukrainian statehood, the history of the Ukrainian people is continuous (Hrushevsky 1898: 2–4).

Russian politicians have adapted Ilyin's ideas to the world of modern media. 'A Russian nation, bathed in the untruth of its own innocence, could learn total self-love' (Snyder 2019: 159). Political technologies played a crucial role in this process. They created an illusion of public opinion that actually suppresses a person's ability to make moral judgements. Russia fabricated a justification for its war against Ukraine. If verification proved them to be false, the Russians would still accept them after a while. According to Peter Pomerantsev, this is because what is repeated enough times can become contagious: 'Nothing is true and everything is possible' (Pomerantsev 2014).

Russia morally justifies its armed invasion of Ukraine by its common history. Here we record one of the ways in which Baley wrote about the 'moral' justification of war. According to Russia's 'civilisational' theory, the real actors in world politics are not states but 'civilisations'. If the real borders are not between states but between 'civilisations', then state borders can be violated in the name of uniting the territories of one 'civilisation'. Russia views Ukraine as an element of Russian civilisation because it considers Ukrainians to be another Russian group (Yermolenko 2018: 434). Russians sincerely believe that they are violating borders in the interests of protecting Russian culture. In reality, it is about expanding the borders of Russian culture. For Russians, this expansion is the liberation of Ukraine from foreign influences, not the occupation of an independent state.

Those who disagree that Ukraine is Russia pose a threat to Russian unity. In this sense, Russia pretends to be a victim and justifies its attack on Ukraine as a necessary defence of its own values. In this way, it cynically destroys any morality. Russia's selfish interest becomes the reason for 'defending itself'. This implies the total militarisation of the Russian society.³

Russia's substitution of domestic policy for foreign policy leads to the pretence of victimisation. According to Serhii Plokyh, Ukrainian democracy poses a threat to the Russian political regime because it is an example of a political system with a strong parliament that encourages and strengthens Russian opposition to the increasingly authoritarian regime in Moscow (Plokyh 2023: 36). If the Russian government cannot abandon authoritarianism, then Ukraine must also become an authoritarian country. 'Russia cannot become stronger, so

³ According to Gali Ackerman, the militarisation of Russian society has two main goals: creating a patriotic impulse to unite the nation in support of Putin's rule and protecting Russian geopolitical interests and expanding the country's sphere of influence (Ackerman 2019: 147). Ackerman considers the recruitment of children into militant organisations to be the most serious crime of the Putin regime against the people (Ackerman 2019: 209).

it must make others weaker. The simplest way to make others weaker is to make them more like Russia. Rather than addressing its problems, Russia exports them' (Snyder 2020: 252). Here we see Russia denying the original aggressive component. By speculating on the topic of defence against external threats, the Russian authorities are shaping and supporting the traits that Baley identified as the aggressor's pretence of victimhood.

Russia has defined demilitarisation as the goal of the war in Ukraine. For the Russians, this means depriving all Ukrainians of the ability to defend themselves in a war with them. But in fact, it means the end of Ukraine's existence. Anatolii Akhutin's thoughts are valuable in this context.⁴ He considers Russia's war against Ukraine to be existential not only because it is about Ukraine's very existence, but because 'Russia is encroaching on something more fundamental: the dignity of a person and a country' (Akhutin 2023: 111). And this is a consequence of the initial disrespect of man by man in Russia:

'The cynical and dismissive attitude of the authorities towards citizens, repressive legislation and a lawlessly repressive judicial system, the "blatant" style of diplomats, the president's vile jokes, deliberately false, scandalous propaganda – methodically, daily, corrupts people, deprives them of their sense of self-esteem, replacing it with hatred, complacency and boasting. This is nihilism, established as an anti-ethos and style of relations in the state system' (Akhutin 2023: 112–113).

Ukrainians know about the disrespect for human dignity in Russia from the history of being part of Soviet Russia. Rafal Lemkin called its policy the longest and widest experiment of Russification – the extermination of the Ukrainian nation:

'For the Ukrainian is not and has never been, a Russian. His culture, his temperament, his language, his religion – all are different. At the side door to Moscow, he has refused to be collectivized, accepting deportation, even death. And so it is peculiarly important that the Ukrainian be fitted into the procrustean pattern of the ideal Soviet man' (Lemkin 2009: 32).

Lemkin emphasised that the plan used by the Soviet authorities in Ukraine was repeated in relation to other nations. In this way, the Soviet authorities created unity not by uniting cultures and nations, but by completely destroying them, except for the Soviet one (Lemkin 2009: 36).

Thus, Russia's goal of denazifying Ukraine becomes clear during the war. Russia's war against Ukraine is a continuation of Soviet Russia's policy. For the Russians, denazification in this war means the physical destruction of all those who support Ukraine's independence and do not agree that Ukrainians and Russians are one fraternal people. The goal of this denazification is to deprive Ukrainians of their identity and turn them into Russian property: 'The deliberately false ethic of "denazification" conceals the real goal: dehumanization' (Akhutin 2023: 54).

It would be much better for Russians if the Russian government did not resort to self-deception in its policy. Political technologies simulate a reality in the minds of Russians in which they see themselves as defenders of peace. They prefer to repeat the imposed lies instead of trying to find out the truth in order to recognize evil. But in this war, it is clear from the very beginning 'who was the aggressor and who was the victim, who was the villain and who was

⁴ Anatoly Akhutin (b. 1940) is a Russian philosopher who has lived in Russia all his life. In 2014, after Russia's covert armed invasion of Ukraine, he moved to Ukraine.

the hero, and whose side one wanted to be on' (Plokyh 2023: 294). If the Russians want to pretend to be a victim, it is only the victim of their 'Kremlin's spin doctors with their ability to create virtual and TV hyper-reality that has hidden reality from the masses' (Donskis 2016).⁵

LESSONS FROM THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR

In the context of political manipulation, hypocrisy is impossible without self-deception. It is worth remembering Hannah Arendt's concern that political lies become so large that they require a complete remaking of the entire factual structure – that is, the production of a different reality without wrinkles, folds, or cracks. This lie is impossible without not lying to oneself: the more successful a liar is, the more likely he is to fall into his own trap (Arendt 1967). Today, political technologies are aimed at deceiving the majority. Factories of bots, trolls, and fake news impose on people a reality in which they tend to pass off political lies as their own judgements and beliefs. This gives rise to the illusion that political lies are reality. In this reality, the ability to make rational judgments is lost. War is peace, and peace is war.

Hypocrisy leads to moral relativism. This is especially dangerous for history. One nation can use history to legitimise its political ideas. In this context, Leonidas Donskis's opinion is correct:

'History can never be left solely to politicians, no matter whether democratic or authoritarian. It is not the property of a political doctrine or of regime it serves. History, if properly understood, is the symbolic design of our existence and moral choices we make every day. Like human privacy, our right to study and critically question history is a corner stone of freedom' (Donskis 2011: 118).

The purpose of history is to critically reassess certain events so that some of them will never happen again. We need constant reflection on our history. When a society dreams of a better way of life and is determined to realise it, it is capable of violence and murder. And it can happen anywhere and to anyone.

An undeclared war destroys the laws and customs of war. Such a war is not against an individual nation, it is against humanity, because humanity is trying to live in peace. Such a war has no boundaries in evil. It can only be resisted together. Michael Walzer emphasises that aggression is a crime against society as a whole, so the victim of aggression defends not only himself, he fights in the name of society. States can rightfully join the victim's resistance against the aggressor. They have the right not only to repel the aggressor's attack, but also to punish it: 'Someone must be responsible, for someone decided to break the peace of the society of states. No war [...] can be just on both sides' (Walzer 1977: 59).

The penetration of irrationalism and relativism into society can be countered by philosophy. Worthy of note here is Kazimierz Twardowski's assertion that philosophy awakens in us a critical spirit that protects us from blind obedience to authority and excessive faith in our human, too limited reason (Twardowski 1997: 16). The disturbing disregard in society for the value of objective truth in life should lead to a rethinking of the role of philosophy in it.

⁵ The Nazi regime resorted to similar practices during World War II. Hannah Arendt wrote that during the war, the most effective lie for all Germans was the slogan 'the battle of destiny for the German people' (*der Schicksalskampf des deutschen Volkes*), coined either by Hitler or by Goebbels, which made self-deception easier on three counts: it suggested, first, that the war was no war; second, that it was started by destiny and not by Germany; and, third, that it was a matter of life and death for the Germans, who must annihilate their enemies or be annihilated (Arendt 1964: 53).

Logic can play a special role in this process. A logical culture unites society not by means of external coercion, but by offering ways to avoid conflicts and contradictions:

'A logical culture raises people above the opposites that divide them and unites them by ties of universal solidarity, outlining the path to the attainment of the eternal ideals of truth and the goodness and beauty inseparably linked to it' (Czeżowski 1958: 278).

Hopefully, history will draw conclusions about the meaning of Russia's military actions in Ukraine. But today it is already clear that Russians have been absorbed by imperial and Soviet myths. They are trying to export these myths to Ukraine. But their exports are met with resistance from Ukrainians:

'Instead of arresting the development of the Ukrainian nation and destroying its commitment to sovereignty, the Russian invasion in general and the assault on Kyiv in particular strengthened the Ukrainian people's sense of identity and unity, endowing it with a new *raison d'être*, new narratives, and new heroes, and martyrs' (Plokhly 2023: 198).

It is not clear, however, whether the course of Russia's military actions in Ukraine will be instructive for Russia. Can the Russians make sense of the real circumstances of their war in Ukraine and will they be able to learn from it for the future?

CONCLUSIONS

Of course, Baley's article 'The Meaning of War' cannot be the only reference point in the search for the meaning of the Russian-Ukrainian war. But from the perspective of Baley's intentionalism, it becomes clear that the Russians' justification of their armed invasion of Ukraine on the basis of common history and the need for self-defense is hypocritical and self-deceiving. In this sense, the Russians demonstrate a loss of any awareness of what they are doing and any criticality about their own reasoning and actions. This kind of 'morality' requires vigilance on the part of the global community, so that everyone in the world does not mistake good for evil. This encourages us to work hard to expose falsifications in international life and discredit hypocrisy.

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OLHA HONCHARENKO

Rusijos ir Ukrainos karo prasmė Stefano Baley intencionalizmo požiūriu

Santrauka

Straipsnis skirtas Rusijos ir Ukrainos karo prasmės paieškoms ukrainiečių filosofo Stefano Baley intencionalizmo požiūriu. Šiame straipsnyje bandoma aktualizuoti intencionalistinį S. Baley požiūrį karo filosofijos, ypač karybos etikos, aspektu. Straipsnyje filosofškai analizuojamas S. Baley požiūris į karo prasmę, analogijos metodu bandoma rasti Rusijos ir Ukrainos karo prasmę, formuluojamos kelios indukcinės išvados apie šio karo pamokas ateičiai. Apibendrinant teigiama, kad rusų ginkluoto įsiveržimo į Ukrainą pateisinimas bendra istorija ir savigynos poreikiu yra veidmainiškas ir saviapgaulingas. Straipsnyje taip pat teigiama, kad tokia rusų „morale“ reikalauja tarptautinės bendruomenės dėmesio, kad nebūtų painiojamas gėris su blogiu.

Raktažodžiai: intencionalizmas, Stefanas Baley, karo prasmė, Rusijos ir Ukrainos karas, karo filosofija, karybos etika