

HOW TO ANALYSE PHILOSOPHY IN TIMES OF WAR? METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR INTERPRETING PHILOSOPHICAL PRACTICES UNDER CONDITIONS OF CRISIS

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Abstract. The article proposes a methodological framework for analysing philosophical practices under conditions of crisis shaped by war. Building on the premises that war structures the cultural and political dynamics of both societies, and that philosophy functions as a “rational element” of meaning-making and legitimation, it argues for the need for Meta-Analytic Approaches as a set of new methodological orientations – namely, for Mapping the Landscape of Philosophical Practice, understood as a cartography not so much of contents as of the conditions of their conceptual formation. The methodological framework, or model, is constructed around two pairs of criteria: (1) The conditions of the emergence and the enactment of philosophy – its historical demarcation from poetics and sophistry, and its agonistic yet non-violent mode of practice, which serves as a test of autonomy from ideological instrumentalisation. (2) Reflexive distance and vulnerable engagement as hermeneutic and existential imperatives, supplemented by the corrective of the “moral third”. The proposed model of diagnostic analytics makes it possible to assess texts, institutional activities, and the discourse as a whole in terms of their critical and ethical capacities. It reveals their roles in forming, reproducing, or overcoming ideological configurations and outlines the contribution of philosophy as a structural factor of cultural-political self-understanding in times of crisis such as war.

Keywords: Philosophical practices, Meta-analytic approach, War and crisis, Agonistic principle of philosophy, Reflexive distance, Vulnerable engagement.

INTRODUCTION

War, as a form of radical interaction, once again emerges as one of the defining realities of the present. The reality of contemporary military conflicts clearly demonstrates the depth of transformations in cultural, political, and intellectual processes. In this context, war appears not only as an object of military or political

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analysis, but also as a powerful impulse for rethinking a wide range of phenomena of various kinds. Among these, particular prominence is given to the need to reconsider the very notion of “mapping the landscape” and the ways in which we delineate and interpret the intellectual landscape of these processes in times of profound crisis transformations.

In such conditions, the fundamental level of reflection acquires particular relevance, yet remains insufficiently conceptualised. What is at stake is the necessity of turning to intellectual practices oriented toward essential existential questions, which take shape in the form of philosophical and worldview concepts and visions. It is precisely within these practices that the deep semantic structures of thought are revealed, as well as the objectification of their relation to ideological demands/requirements, which become especially intensified under conditions of such crises as military conflicts. This problematisation can be traced in studies of intellectual responses to war. Thus, in *Die geistige Mobilmachung*, Kurt Flasch shows that the texts of intellectuals in the situation of the First World War oscillate between the reproduction of mass schemes and attempts at individual conceptualisation. This reveals a methodological indeterminacy: whether the “philosophy of war” is a product of the situation itself or its reflection. Therefore, the analysis of philosophical practices under such conditions emerges as a methodological necessity.¹ This reveals a methodological indeterminacy: whether the “philosophy of war” is a product of the situation itself or its reflection. Therefore, the analysis of philosophical practices under such conditions emerges as a methodological necessity.

In this perspective, the question arises: in what way should philosophical practices be analysed as carriers of these semantic structures in situations of crisis transformations? It is evident that answering this question requires the development of meta-analytic approaches, or at least conceptual foundations that make such an inquiry possible. In this context, let us turn to the view of Raymond Aron, who, in his book *Paix et guerre entre les nations*, identifies two approaches to their analysis: “rational schematics” and “sociological analysis”². By “rational schematics” he refers to those “rational elements” by means of which one can “[...] sketch or paint a portrait in accord with the models”³ that is, something that makes its presence known yet appears at first sight as that “[...] the naked eye cannot see.”⁴ Within the framework of this study, it is precisely this approach that serves as a methodological orientation. Since we do not rely on “sociological analysis”, that is, we do not use empirical data as primary arguments, but instead construct an interpretative line of reasoning, philosophical practices may be considered as such “rational elements”,

¹ Kurt Flasch, *Die geistige Mobilmachung: Die deutschen Intellektuellen und der Erste Weltkrieg*, Berlin, A. Fest Verlag, 2000.

² Raymond Aron, *Peace and war: a theory of international relations*, with a new introduction by Daniel J. Mahoney and Brian C. Anderson, Transaction Publishers, New York, 2003, pp. 3–4.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 3.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

through which the conceptual delineation of semantic configurations actualised under conditions of crisis becomes possible.

Philosophical practices as a “rational element” in the social dimension appear, at the formal-scientific level, as the activity of individual researchers or entire institutions, while at the existential level they manifest themselves in particular forms of intellectual reflection – *in the capacity for conceptual and critical thinking, and in ethical self-commitment*⁵. For this reason, within the broader framework of “rational schematics”, they may be objectified as those “elements” that are responsible for processes of meaning-formation and legitimation. What is at stake are condensates of semantic orientations, the value-structure of thinking, normativities, and ethical imperatives that together form the general worldview horizon of a community. At the same time, they reveal the limiting conditions of the legitimation of knowledge, the types of involvement in historical reality, and the forms of responsibility for it. Hence, *criticality* and *ethicality* emerge as conceptual foundations for the development of the above-mentioned Meta-Analytic Approaches⁶. Orienting oneself toward these foundations in the analysis of philosophical practices as a “rational element” makes it possible to construct an image, or – to use Aron’s formulation cited above – to “sketch the map” of the semantic configurations of thought that are actualised under conditions of crisis.

The study of philosophical practices can, of course, be carried out through discourse analysis. However, despite its widespread use and its capacity to reveal levels of criticality and ethicality in statements, narrative patterns, or discursive structures, it often remains at a descriptive level without clear analytical criteria. In this sense, the example of the above-mentioned Kurt Flasch is indicative: should texts be understood as the mass reproduction of established schemes, or as individual attempts at conceptual reflection, and is “philosophy of war” a product of the situation itself or its reflection?⁷ This example demonstrates that without clear criteria, analysis easily reduces itself to descriptiveness. Accordingly, the task lies not in the interpretation of positions as such, but in the precise articulation of analytical

⁵ The methodological grounding of criticality and ethicality as the initial analytical position for the study of philosophical practices has been developed in our previous work (Vitalii Mudrakov, Svitlana Kozachenko, Olena Hapchenko, “Philosophy in the war mode: towards the problem of meta-analytical approaches to the study of philosophical practices”, *The Journal of V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University, Series Philosophy. Philosophical Peripeteias*, nr. 73, 2025, pp. 62–69). We develop this position through the philosophy of *Immanuel Kant*: the idea of the “tribunal” of reason in *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* establishes the dimension of criticality as a self-reflexive limitation and examination (Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Leipzig, F. Meiner, 1919, p. 15), while ethicality is connected with the autonomy of practical reason in *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (“the starry heaven above me and the moral law within me”) (Kant, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, Leipzig, F. Meiner, 1922, p. 205) and is further specified in the formula of humanity in *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* (“[...] act in such a way that you treat humanity [...] always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means”) (Kant, *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, Berlin, L. Heimann, 1870, pp. 53–54).

⁶ V. Mudrakov, S. Kozachenko, O. Hapchenko, “Philosophy in the war mode”, pp. 62–69.

⁷ K. Flasch, *Die geistige Mobilmachung*.

foundations and instruments. For this reason, the aim of this study is the methodological delineation of approaches that make it possible to analyse philosophical practices as a “rational element” – in their social and existential dimensions – through the prism of their correspondence to criticality and ethicality. This, in turn, opens up the possibility for Mapping the Landscape of Philosophical Practice. In other words, what is at stake is the construction of an analytical model that makes it possible to consider philosophy, under conditions of social upheaval, not as an abstraction but as a structural factor of meaning-formation.

Thus, the aim of this article is the methodological delineation of an analytical model that makes it possible to investigate philosophical practices as a “rational element” within a dynamic shaped by conditions of crisis. What is at stake, above all, is the development of foundations and criteria that allow for the interpretation of both individual texts and entire discursive fields at the structural-semantic level. The framework for these criteria is constituted by *criticality* and *ethicality*, which form the basis of a methodological proposal within which philosophical practices may be described and assessed as carriers or symptoms of corresponding semantic configurations. In this sense, the model is intended not only to outline philosophical reflection as a response to crisis, but also to reveal its participation in the formation, reproduction, or transformation of ideological structures.

The implementation of this aim unfolds in two parts of the article, each devoted to a separate pair of criteria. At the same time, *these parts function only as interrelated dimensions of a single analytical project*: the conditions of the emergence and the enactment of philosophy outline the possibility and form of philosophical practices (Ihor Omelchuk, Mykhailo Hotych), whereas reflexive distance and vulnerable engagement determine the mode of their functioning (Vitalii Mudrakov, Svitlana Kozachenko) under conditions of crisis. Their necessary integration makes it possible to avoid the reduction of analysis to either a purely historical or a purely normative level, thereby ensuring a coherent methodological framework of a unified research project.

1. WHAT ARE THE CONDITIONS OF THE EMERGENCE AND THE ENACTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY OR, ON THE MODE OF DESCRIPTION AS A CRITERION FOR THE ANALYSIS OF PHILOSOPHICAL PRACTICES

The first step in achieving the stated aim is to consider the conditions of the *emergence and enactment of philosophy* under which it becomes possible as a practice at all. These conditions do not merely describe a historical context but also establish the methodological framework within which the critical and ethical potential of philosophy is realised. Our thesis is that these conditions function as criteria for the analysis of philosophical practices: they demonstrate how philosophy distinguishes itself from other forms of thinking and constitutes a specific type of

knowledge. It is important to identify the factors that have shaped the essence of philosophy as a distinct practice of forming cognitive and value orientations.

a. Methodological demarcation: the search for truth versus its appropriation.

The initial criterion for the analysis of philosophy is the conditions of its emergence, grounded in the methodological demarcation of philosophical knowledge from other forms of intellectual activity. The investigation of this problem presupposes a return to its ancient origins, which is fully consistent with the established paradigm of philosophical analysis.⁸

Tradition, originating with Pythagoras, defines philosophy not as the possession of absolute wisdom, but as a continual search and an awareness of the impossibility of its complete attainment.⁹ This tension between striving and the impossibility of full comprehension is transformed into the principle of an ongoing search for truth, which determines the methodological character of philosophy.

The discussion concerning the status of the “true sage” testifies to a competition between different intellectual traditions. If the comic poet Kratinos counted poets (Homer and Hesiod) among the wise, then Plato, in the dialogue *Ion*, decisively opposed poetic art to philosophical knowledge. In his view, poets create not by means of reason, but under the influence of “divine inspiration” or “possession”, acting merely as transmitters of the divine will.¹⁰ In the figure of Socrates, Plato proposes a different model: the philosopher speaks sincerely, as a human being,

⁸ Heidegger notes that the question of the nature of philosophy can be posed by contemporaries only on the condition of a prior interpretation of the Hellenic tradition (Martin Heidegger, *Was ist das die Philosophie*, Verlag Günther Neske Pfullingen, 1956, pp. 10–11). His student Gadamer expands on this approach: a deep understanding of the humanities requires more than just philological analysis (Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hermeneutik I. Wahrheit und methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen hermeneutik*, Mohr Siebeck, 2010, p. 343), but also presupposes the active “formation” (Bildung) (*ibidem*, p. 15), “following” (Nachfolge), and “application” (Applikation) of the foundational ideas of Greek philosophy in the contemporary context (*ibidem*, p. 29). At the same time, the methodological appeal to antiquity is also characteristic of the classical tradition. Thus, Kant saw in Socrates a model of self-reflection (Immanuel Kant, *Logik: Ein Handbuch zu Vorlesungen*, Königsberg, Friedrich Nicolovius, 1800, p. 231) and a precursor of the critical method (*ibidem*, pp. 34, 60; I. Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, p. 37). Hegel regarded ancient Greek thought as a key stage in the self-development of the Absolute Spirit (Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie I*, vol. 18, Suhrkamp, 1986, pp. 121, 173–177). Husserl connected the crisis of European rationality precisely with a deviation from the original Greek ideals (Husserl, Edmund; Biemel, Walter (ed.), *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie: eine Einleitung in die phänomenologische Philosophie*, Springer Netherlands, 2011, pp. 10, 72). Thus, ancient philosophy appears not merely as a historical precondition, but as a meaningful source of conceptual thinking. A return to it constitutes a methodologically necessary step for rethinking the very essence of philosophy.

⁹ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the eminent philosophers*, edited by James Miller, translated by Pamela Mensch, Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 7.

¹⁰ Plato, *Ion*, 533d–536b.

relying on reason and argumentation.¹¹ Thus, the boundary of philosophy is delineated through a rejection of “divine prophecy”¹² in favour of rational comprehension.

Competition between philosophers and sophists emerged as a fundamental factor in the process of crystallising the foundational orientations of philosophical practice. Despite their considerable social influence, the sophists provoked criticism due to their orientation toward practical gain and their use of manipulative methods. Plato reproached them for operating with superficial, relative truths and for employing rhetoric in order to attain power.¹³ On the contrary, he maintained that philosophers are oriented toward the cognition of justice, virtue, and objective truth.¹⁴

The critique of the sophists is further developed by Aristotle, who reproaches them for creating an “illusion of knowledge” through the manipulation of arguments.¹⁵ In *Topics*, he notes that the sophists employ forms of reasoning that merely imitate correctness, while their relativism and denial of the principle of non-contradiction undermine the very possibility of knowledge.¹⁶ According to Aristotle – as he states in the *Metaphysics* – philosophy is directed toward the search for truth,¹⁷ whereas sophistry is nothing more than a pretence of wisdom.¹⁸

The self-awareness of philosophy, articulated through its demarcation from sophistry and mystical experience, established it as an intellectual practice focused on the search for truth rather than on techniques of persuasion. This gave rise to a new quality of knowledge, in which the philosopher, according to Plato, occupies an intermediate position “between the wise and the ignorant”¹⁹. This idea is also reflected as a key one in contemporary studies of antiquity: Marcel Detienne emphasises that philosophers positioned themselves as bearers of a new form of knowledge that did not coincide either with traditional poetic wisdom or with sophistic rhetoric.²⁰

In this sense, a return to the origins of philosophy makes it possible to distinguish two key methodological lines. First, philosophy emerges as a practice that recognises its difference from poetic inspiration, mystical wisdom, and the pragmatism of sophistry. Second, this difference establishes its fundamental function – not as the possession of truth, but as a continual search, critical reflection, and distancing from

¹¹ *Ibidem*, 532d–e.

¹² Marcel Detienne describes the truth of poets as “a performative truth” – one grounded not in argumentation but in the authority of divine inspiration: “If the poet was truly inspired, if what he had to say was based on his gift of second sight, then his speech tended to be identified with ‘truth’.” (Marcel Detienne, *The masters of truth in Archaic Greece*, New York, Zone Books, 1996, p. 52).

¹³ Plato, *Republic*, 492a–b, 537e; *Protagoras*, 313c–d; *Gorgias*, 458e–459d.

¹⁴ Plato, *Republic*, 484a–486b, 500a–d; *Greater Hippias*, 304a–e; *Phaedo*, 64e–66a.

¹⁵ Aristotle, *Soph. El.*, I, Ch. 2, 165b.

¹⁶ Aristotle, *Top.*, I, Ch. 2, 100b–101a.

¹⁷ Aristotle, *Metaphysica*, II, Ch. 1, 993b20–30.

¹⁸ Aristotle, *Metaphysica*, IV, Ch. 2, 1004b15–25.

¹⁹ Plato, *Symposium*, 204b–c.

²⁰ M. Detienne, *The masters of truth in Archaic Greece*, especially “A Choice between Aletheia and Apate”, pp. 107–134.

illusions of knowledge. Thus, the condition of the *emergence* of philosophy appears as a historically conditioned yet methodologically universal demarcation. It is precisely this that may serve as a criterion of analysis: in studying philosophical texts, we must determine how they demarcate the *philosophical* from the *non-philosophical* and how, through *this*, they articulate their enactments (in philosophical questions).

b. Agonistic mode of enactment: the co-being of equals. Philosophy, as a product of the culture of the ancient Greek *polis*, is determined by the specificity of the relations among those who strive for wisdom. In this context, the question arises concerning the conditions of philosophical communication that ensure not only its preservation but also the possibility of its enactment.

Deleuze and Guattari note that within the *polis* there emerged communities of equals whose communication was encouraged through rivalry “of free men, a generalized athleticism: the agon.”²¹ Such an agonistic order, the French thinkers emphasise, is intrinsic to philosophy: each philosopher appears as a “claimant” to wisdom, which inevitably generates competition. Thus, philosophical practice combines the striving for wisdom with contestation.²²

It is particularly important that the *agon* among the Greeks had a non-violent character. Deleuze emphasises that the agonistic order, characteristic of Greek courts, romantic relations, or sport, differs fundamentally from war.²³ In his view, the non-

²¹ Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *What is philosophy?*, translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell, Columbia University Press, 1994, p. 4.

²² Deleuze and Guattari appeal to the Platonic principle of “amphibetesis” (ἀμφιβήτησις), which designates the dialectic of rivals or claimants. For more on this principle, see Gilles Deleuze, “Plato and the simulacrum”, translated by Rosalind Krauss, *The MIT Press*, vol. 27, 1983, pp. 45–56. But Platonic dialectic is not a dialectic of contradiction or opposition. Deleuze notes: “Division’s essence appears not in breadth – in the determination of the species of a genus – but in depth – in the selection of the lineage: the sorting out of claims, the distinguishing of true claimant from false.” (*Ibidem*, p. 46).

²³ The distinction between “polemics” and “agonistic relations” is essential for understanding the nature of conflict and contest. The two Greek words “πόλεμος” (polemos) and “ἀγών” (agon) denote different aspects of these relations. Πόλεμος directly means “battle, war” (James Diggle *et al.* (eds.), *The Cambridge Greek lexicon*, Cambridge University Press, 2021, p. 1152; Robert Stephen Paul Beekes, Lucien van Beek (eds.), *Etymological dictionary of Greek*, Brill, 2010, p. 1218; Henry Stuart Jones, Roderick McKenzie, *A Greek-English lexicon*, edited by Henry George Liddell *et al.*, Clarendon Press, 1996, p. 1432; Sidney Chawner Woodhouse, *English-Greek dictionary: A vocabulary of the attic language*, Taylor & Francis Group, 2020, p. 932). This word denotes conflict in its most destructive form, often involving violence and hostility (R. S. P. Beekes, L. v. Beek (eds.), *Etymological dictionary of Greek*, pp. 1218–1219). The word “πόλεμος” is used in compounds such as “πολεμ-ἄρχος” (“war leader”) (Evangelinus Apostolides Sophocles, *Greek lexicon of the Roman and Byzantine periods*, Olms, 2005, p. 902) or “πόλεμο-φθόρος” (“destruction resulting from war”) (J. Diggle *et al.* (eds.), *The Cambridge Greek lexicon*, p. 1152), which underscores its connection with military conflict and devastation. Actions associated with πόλεμος include “πολεμ-έω” (“to fight”) (George Abbott-Smith, *Manual Greek lexicon of the New Testament*, Bloomsbury Publishing, 1999, p. 370), “πολεμ-ίζω” (“to engage in combat”) (Richard John Cunliffe, *A lexicon of the Homeric dialect: Expanded edition*, University of Oklahoma Press, 2012, p. 335), as well as “πολεμ-όμοι” (“to become enemies”) (R. S. P. Beekes, L. v. Beek (eds.), *Etymological dictionary of Greek*, p. 1219). In this way, the word “πόλεμος” characterises sharp clashes between states, peoples, or groups involving the use of armed force to resolve disputes.

violent mode of conflict resolution among the ancient Greeks emerged from their perception of the world: they imagined both cosmic and social space in the form of a circle. The figure of the circle replaces another image – the pyramid, whose steps symbolised vertical development and the succession of generations. The centre of the circle becomes the site of a shared encounter, where all elements are equidistant and symmetrical. Deleuze notes that it is precisely in the image of the centre of the circle that one can grasp the essence of Greece. As the French philosopher writes: “It is that whatever the question is, rivals come forward saying: it’s me! it’s me! it’s me! That’s not war, it’s rivalry.”²⁴

In this way, not only a historical feature of ancient thought is revealed, but also a methodological criterion of the enactment of philosophy: it appears as a form of non-violent contestation, in which conflict is transformed into the co-being of equal claimants to truth.²⁵ As Deleuze notes, philosophers are – “It is no longer the sages, who correspond to the image of the pyramid, it is the friends of wisdom, who correspond to the image of the circle.”²⁶ Thus, the condition of the enactment of

By contrast, “ἀγών” (agon) is not directly associated with war. Its primary meaning is “assembly, gathering (especially for viewing games)” (Beekes & Beek, 2010, p. 18; G. Abbott-Smith, *Manual Greek lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 8; William J. Slater (ed.), *Lexicon to Pindar*, De Gruyter, 1969, p. 8). The word derives from the verb “ἄγω” (agō), meaning “to lead, guide, bring, carry, conduct” (R. J. Cunliffe, *A lexicon of the Homeric dialect*, p. 5; J. Diggle et al. (eds.), *The Cambridge Greek lexicon*, p. 14; H. S. Jones, R. McKenzie, *A Greek-English lexicon*, p. 74). Although ἀγών implies competition and confrontation, it requires regulated conditions, for example: competing for a prize in athletic games (Slater, 1969, p. 9); rivalry on the stage (for an actor or poet) (J. Diggle et al. (eds.), *The Cambridge Greek lexicon*, p. 16); public speeches and debates (H. S. Jones, R. McKenzie, *A Greek-English lexicon*, p. 18); legal proceedings (Harvey Paul, *The Oxford companion to classical literature*, Creative Media Partners, LLC, 2018, p. 13), and so forth.

Thus, in ancient Greek thought there is a clear distinction between the concept of “πόλεμος” as war and “ἀγών” as contest – a form of confrontation that may span a wide range of activities but is characterised by a formalised, non-destructive nature. This distinction is decisive for Deleuze’s thesis on the difference between polemics and agonistic relations.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

²⁵ Friendship emerges as a key condition of such co-being. In the well-known interview “Gilles Deleuze, *From A to Z*”, recorded by Claire Parnet, the thinker elaborates the category of “Fidelity” in the context of friendship (“F as Fidelity” in “Gilles Deleuze, *From A to Z*, Part-1, 15 December 1988”, translated by Charles J. Stivale, edited by Claire Parnet; Charles J. Stivale; Daniel W. Smith, *Purdue University Research Repository*, <https://purr.purdue.edu/publications/4589/1>, accessed: 16 November 2025). For Deleuze, friendship is not a matter of psychological sympathy. The category of “Friendship” signifies fidelity to the common cause of thinking, rather than personal loyalty. Friends are “claimants” united around discourse, not around dogma or authority. Fidelity here is fidelity to a shared concept or to an event of thought. Particularly illustrative in this respect is the moment in the interview when Parnet formulates a fundamental thesis of the agonistic understanding of philosophy: “First of all, you are not promised wisdom... you only lay claim to wisdom.” (*Ibidem*). This emphasis is crucial, as it clearly fixes the status of the philosopher, who does not receive wisdom as a ready promise or possession, but only lays claim to it, remaining in a constant movement of contestation. This means that philosophical communication is not a search for compromise, but a shared “guard” at the centre of the circle. Friends unite not in order to agree, but to sustain an agonistic space in which the birth of a concept becomes possible.

²⁶ Gilles Deleuze, “Foucault: Lecture 22, 6 May 1986. (Version 2.0)”, translated by Melissa McMahon, edited by Daniel W. Smith; Charles J. Stivale, *The Deleuze Seminars, Purdue University Research Repository*, <https://deleuze.cla.purdue.edu/lecture/lecture-22/>, accessed: 16 November 2025.

philosophy may be formulated as its agonistic mode: philosophy is *realised* not as a monopoly on truth, but as a shared contest for it, which creates a space for the criticality and ethicality of thinking.

Thus, first, the analysis of conditions whose origins reach back to antiquity makes it possible to see how philosophy is formed in opposition to other forms of thinking, such as inspired poetry or sophistic rhetoric. This difference establishes its function not as the possession of truth, but as a continual search, critique, and distancing from illusions. Second, the agonistic mode of the enactment of philosophy, as shown by Deleuze and Guattari, is characterised as a non-violent contestation among equal claimants to wisdom within a circle of symmetrical relations, rather than within a hierarchical structure or in radical forms of polemics or even conflict. These criteria make it possible to determine whether philosophical practices preserve their autonomy both in the structure of their own knowledge and in the dynamics of its production.

2. WHAT ARE THE HERMENEUTIC AND EXISTENTIAL IMPERATIVES OR, ON REFLEXIVE DISTANCE AND VULNERABLE ENGAGEMENT AS CRITERIA FOR THE ANALYSIS OF PHILOSOPHICAL PRACTICES

In wartime conditions marked by *extreme existential tension*, philosophical practices call for the interpretation of two interrelated dimensions of thought: the capacity to maintain *reflexive distance* and to sustain *vulnerable engagement*. These dimensions constitute the core theses of this section.

The situation in question – one of extreme existential tension – requires special attention precisely in the light of recorded experience, particularly in the writings of those who lived through it not as an external fact but as an inner rupture of the orientations of thought. Significant here is the assessment offered by the well-known psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud in his text *Zeitgemäßes über Krieg und Tod*. His overall diagnosis is marked by disillusionment: it is war, he argues, that reveals the collapse of the external civilisation of states. He maintains that war is capable of demonstrating the mass disintegration of the morality of individuals themselves, the bearers of culture;²⁷ war can destroy the very conditions of the mind's orientation and thus creates a highly specific state of confusion and tension in which "we ourselves lose the direction of meaning in our impressions." He writes:

Being seized by the whirl of this time of war, informed only one-sidedly, without any distance from the great transformations that have already taken place or are beginning to unfold, and without any sense of the future that is

²⁷ Sigmund Freud, *Zeitgemäßes über Krieg und Tod*, Leipzig, Wien, Zürich, Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag, 1924, p. 10.

taking shape, we ourselves become unsure of the meaning of the impressions that force themselves upon us and of the value of the judgments we form. It seems to us as though no previous event had ever destroyed so much of humanity's precious common heritage, confused so many of its clearest minds, or so thoroughly degraded what is noble. Even science has lost its dispassionate impartiality; its most deeply embittered servants seek to extract weapons from it in order to contribute to the struggle against the enemy.²⁸

The state identified by Freud points to the war-induced disruption of meaning-making – a condition in which the intellectual, “without any distance from the great transformations,” loses the capacity for critical reflection, while thinking itself, seized by the situation, becomes “unsure of the meaning of the impressions that force themselves upon us and of the value of the judgments we form.” At the same time, Freud's remark that even science loses its “dispassionate impartiality” indicates that, under conditions of existential tension, even domains grounded in *objectivity* may become instrumentalised. This is particularly relevant for those spheres in which the proposed criteria are to be applied, including philosophical practices and educational activity.

Thus, in the state described by Freud – a state of extreme existential tension – what becomes evident is the loss of a “healthy” horizon of thought, whose problematic nature is expressed through *distance* and *engagement*. These two dimensions, reflecting the essence of the problem, illuminate the framework of methodological instrumentation; that is, they confirm the thesis concerning the need to conceptualise two dimensions of thinking as criteria for analysing philosophical practices. But in order to establish *distance* and *engagement* precisely as criteria, they must be understood normatively – as conceptual imperatives. This, in turn, enables a normative analysis, or, put differently, equips the analytic framework with categorical force: the demand to preserve the distance of critical reflection – *the hermeneutic imperative*; and the demand to accept the vulnerability of thought in the face of reality and experience – *the existential imperative*. However, these categorical demands require interpretation, argumentation, and clarification:

a. Reflexive distance is the capacity of philosophical thinking to consciously recognise its own *situatedness*, acknowledging its potential to alter both the general trajectory and the very quality of thinking itself, without allowing this situatedness to turn into uncritical involvement. In the context of military events and the daily intensification of wartime dynamics, intellectual practices are continually exposed to the pressure of affect, ideology, or emphatic self-assertion. Therefore, such distance becomes a form of intellectual responsibility – one that makes it possible to think *against* circumstances rather than merely *along with* them.

The twentieth century offers more than enough striking examples of how philosophers, finding themselves amid wartime upheavals, armed conflicts, or post-

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 3.

war recoveries from totalitarian pressure, manifested very different states of reflexive distance. Thus, in 1933, Heidegger delivered his rectoral address, *Selbstbehauptung der deutschen Universität*, in which one clearly sees an attempt at the national legitimisation of science through a critique of the modern scientific project, and consequently an attempt to realise this through a new university-educational strategy. Heidegger skillfully integrates into this scheme what is characteristic of his philosophical vision of being: culture, thinking, the tradition of a people – that is, *Dasein*. Emphasising the need for leaders endowed with a special kind of knowledge and with responsibility for the destiny of the German people, he points to the need for “a new understanding of science”, which such leaders must acquire by returning to Greek philosophy as “the great beginning”, to fundamental questioning, for “all science is philosophy – whether it knows this”²⁹ as the realisation of its true essence. He writes as follows: “The will toward the essence of the German university is the will to science as the will to the historical spiritual mission of the German people as a people that knows itself in its state. Science and German destiny must, above all, come into their essential-will (*Wesenswillen*) to power.”³⁰

This step, in effect, amounted to an abandonment of public self-reflection and a loss of philosophical distance, for Heidegger expresses admiration for the course that Germany had taken in the 1930s, thereby creating a new – radically national – dimension of its spiritual greatness:

And the spiritual world of a people is not the superstructure of a culture, nor is it an armoury of usable knowledge and values. Rather, it is the power of the deepest preservation of its earth-born and blood-bound forces, as the power of the innermost stirring and the widest shaking of its *Dasein*. Only a spiritual world guarantees a people its greatness. For it compels the constant decision between the will to greatness and the letting-be of decline to become the law governing the march that our people has undertaken into its future history.³¹

Although Heidegger would later often attempt to distance thinking from politics, this represents a reflection *post factum*. As a counterposition – both in the moment of crisis and also *post factum* – one may recall Karl Jaspers. Their divergence becomes evident not only in their later polemics in correspondence but also, and especially, in their understanding of the tasks of the university and of science – which, for our purposes, serves as an indicator of reflexive distance (and of vulnerable engagement). Thus, in his 1923 text *Die Idee der Universität*, Jaspers begins with a reflection on the notions of “spirit (*Geist*),” “education,” and “science”. Jaspers emphasises that general rationality – that is, this *Geist* – must always move toward clarity (*Klarheit*) and strive for wholeness (*Ganzheit*).³² He cautions that “the spirit is

²⁹ Martin Heidegger, *Die Selbstbehauptung der deutschen Universität*, Breisgau, 1933, p. 8.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 7.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

³² Karl Jaspers, *Die Idee der Universität [1923]*, in *Schriften zur Universitätsidee*, edited by Oliver Immel, KJG I/21, Schwabe Verlag, 2016, pp. 7–8.

never a state or a possession, but is always movement. It exists only in the mode of becoming,³³ and that it seeks “objective clarity” (*gegenständliche Klarheit*).³⁴ Most importantly, in outlining the strategic achievements of the university, he states that “The spirit does not exist in the isolated human being who relies only on himself, nor does it exist within the closedness of a community, a social estate, or a nation.”³⁵ In such isolation – that is, in attempts to confine the spirit and express it exclusively within a closed condition, such as the nation – reflexive distance is lost; this constitutes a withdrawal from becoming, and a mark of entanglement.

And already in the post-war period, in the text of the same name, *Die Idee der Universität* (1946), Jaspers emphasises that the university is a place of truth free from ideology – that these are absolutely incompatible things: “The university is the place where society and the state allow the clearest consciousness of the age to unfold. [...] For that unconditional research into truth should take place somewhere is a claim of the human being as a human being.”³⁶ And further: “The national, like everything else, is an object of research, but not the goal and meaning of university life,”³⁷ and if it nevertheless happens – as the history of German universities amply shows – then:

To the extent that the university, or its members, during the past twelve years allowed themselves to be forced – whether in their intellectual work or in their actions – into adaptations and distortions, or even, out of an unfathomable conviction, actively collaborated with the forces of the regime, they are to be condemned unconditionally, above all because of the betrayal thereby committed against the idea of the university.³⁸

Finally, in 1961, Jaspers, now writing in a memoiristic mode, reflects on this idea:

Thus, the supra-political and, in this respect, apolitical university is “political” in only one respect: as a search for truth, it is incompatible with totalitarian rule, in which politics itself has come to an end [...]. For this reason, the university was impossible in the state of German National Socialism and has disappeared in all other totalitarian states. [...] For the political state that is incompatible with truth is also incompatible with the university.³⁹

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 8.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 9.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 10.

³⁶ Karl Jaspers, *Die Idee der Universität [1946]*, in *Schriften zur Universitätsidee*, edited by Oliver Immel, KJG I/21, Schwabe Verlag, 2016, p. 109.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 195.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 196.

³⁹ Karl Jaspers, *Die Idee der Universität. Für die gegenwärtige Situation entworfen [1961]*, in *Schriften zur Universitätsidee*, edited by Oliver Immel, KJG I/21, Schwabe Verlag, 2016, p. 287.

b. Vulnerable engagement. At the same time, we must also speak of what it means *to be engaged* in the affective and ethical dimension of reality and experience. This concerns, above all, a readiness not to withdraw from pain, suffering, and responsibility, and therefore also a willingness to speak clearly about such vulnerable engagement. Such engagement, in the context of war, marks that specific condition in which philosophical practices reflect a mode of thinking that does not retreat into neutralities or escape into schematisms, but instead preserves a sensitivity to pain and responsibility – factors that become not obstacles to philosophical unfolding, but conditions of depth. Philosophical practices thus thematise these affects, illuminating them through the lens of the present context.

The experience of the Nazi occupation of Paris, lived through by Simone de Beauvoir, leads us both to an understanding of the existential tension brought about by war and to a set of orientations for grasping affectivity and responsibility. Under such conditions,

[...], the questions of evil and the other took on new urgency. Beauvoir speaks of the war as creating an existential rupture in time. She speaks of herself as having undergone a conversion. She can no longer afford the luxury of focusing on her own happiness and pleasure. The question of evil becomes a pressing concern. One cannot refuse to take a stand. One is either a collaborator or not.⁴⁰

Thus, her case can be regarded as an example of vulnerable engagement, a stance also expressed in her philosophical views. In *The Ethics of Ambiguity* we find conceptually formulated theses that, to a certain extent, characterise our criterion of vulnerable engagement.

First of all, she criticises the position that maintains that the only possible relation to the world is one of detached, pure contemplation. She calls this the “aesthetic attitude,” reproaching it for leveling all situations, for devaluing their differences, and emphasising that such an “attitude” excludes affectivity – which ought to generate existentiality, that is, genuine lived involvement. She writes:

We may call this attitude aesthetic because the one who adopts it claims to have no other relation with the world than that of detached contemplation; outside of time, and far from men, he faces history, which he thinks he does not belong to, like a pure beholding; this impersonal version equalizes all situations; it apprehends them only in the indifference of their differences; it excludes any preference.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Debra Bergoffen; Megan Burke, “Simone de Beauvoir”, *The Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy*, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2024/entries/beauvoir/>, accessed: 16 November 2025.

⁴¹ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, translated by Bernard Frechtman, Kensington Pub. Corp, 1976, pp. 74–75.

Beauvoir further specifies her critique by pointing to a mode of historical vision – if not a kind of visionary stance toward the present. She reproaches those who transpose this mode onto contemporary events, thereby “cooling the sharpness of the problems”; she appeals to the French experience during the war:

Many Frenchmen also sought relief in this thought in 1940 and the years which followed. “Let’s try to take the point of view of history,” they said upon learning that the Germans had entered Paris. And during the whole occupation certain intellectuals sought to keep “aloof from the fray” and to consider impartially contingent facts which did not concern them.⁴²

And although Beauvoir makes it clear that such a situation is intensified by the complexity of war – that is, by those features that constitute the extreme existential tension enveloping human beings in fear and feeding despair – she emphasises that we are engaged in a mode of existence, in *living* from *inside*, and that a refusal to remain engaged in this mode of experience and affectivity serves only the advantage of evil and undermines existential adequacy. Her theses are:

But we note at once that such an attitude appears in moments of discouragement and confusion; in fact, it is a position of withdrawal, a way of fleeing the truth of the present. [...] But the present is not a potential past; it is the moment of choice and action; we can not avoid living it through a project; and there is no project which is purely contemplative since one always projects himself toward something, toward the future; to put oneself “outside” is still a way of living the inescapable fact that one is inside; those French intellectuals who, in the name of history, poetry, or art, sought to rise above the drama of the age, were willy-nilly its actors more or less explicitly, they were playing the occupier’s game.⁴³

According to Beauvoir, to take a position means to exercise one’s freedom, to manifest its concrete content, for “man’s project toward freedom is embodied for him in definite acts of behavior.”⁴⁴ Freedom: “For a freedom will itself genuinely only by willing itself as an indefinite movement through the freedom of others; as soon as it withdraws into itself, it denies itself on behalf of some object which it prefers to itself.”⁴⁵ Therefore, taking a position is the enactment of the human – the enactment of human existence through its capacity to attune itself to the state of existential tension and affect experienced and felt by another. Moreover, to take a position as an act of freedom is also an act of protest against various “modes of enslavement” by ideology, neutrality, or different forms of extra-ethical schematisms. From this it follows that responsibility emerges as an inescapable fact of the existential dimension

⁴² *Ibidem*, pp. 75–76.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 76.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 78.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 90.

of the human being, for attunement to affect – as a way of making sense of existential tension – and the “aesthetic attitude” as a form of detachment or avoidance through “perfectly pure” theories and schemes, amount to complicity.

It is evident that vulnerable engagement enriches our understanding; it opens up the *human* and points toward it. At the same time, engagement appears not only as a means of deeper understanding, but also as a mode of coming closer to and uniting with the other. As Emmanuel Levinas emphasises, in the encounter with the face of the Other we find ourselves confronted with an infinite demand for responsibility: “It is as though I were responsible for his mortality, and guilty for surviving.”⁴⁶ It is precisely in this demand that our human obligation is revealed – to be turned toward the other, to hear their pain and to respond to it. Therefore, the *ethics of vulnerable engagement* requires of thinking (of philosophical practices) not to avoid, for example, suffering, but to accept it responsibly as a philosophical challenge for thought. At the same time, a methodological caution is essential: Levinas’s idea concerning the “I-Other” conceptuality points to the possibility of an ethics of engagement; however, this principle, within the ethics of vulnerable engagement, must not become *excessive* as a criterion for analysing philosophical practices. It must retain its limits: excessive immersion in affect may lead to a loss of critical orientation in thinking. This is precisely why a methodological safeguard is needed – one that enables going beyond such engagement without negating its significance. In this sense, it is useful to orient oneself toward contemporary discourse on vulnerability, where it is emphasised that vulnerability cannot be understood solely as a positive resource.⁴⁷ Thus, Hille Haker’s conception of the “*moral third*”⁴⁸ designates this, among other things, as an ethical function of a distanced position⁴⁹: a moral space formed in witnessing, advocacy, diplomacy, justice, and public responsibility. In our methodological dimension, this space can be understood as a mode of balancing the criteria of reflexive distance and vulnerable engagement, allowing one to avoid their possible distortions. In this regard, the “*moral third*” may be conceptualised as a methodological *position of witnessing* – a point of analytical work at which indifferent observation becomes responsible seeing. It is precisely this position – one that unites sensitivity to suffering with the normative demand for justice – that enables the

⁴⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, translated by Alphonso Lingis, Dordrecht, Martinus Nijhoff, 1974, p. 91.

⁴⁷ Hille Haker, “Vulnerability in Times of War: The Necessity of the Moral Third”, *De Ethica*, vol. 7, nr. 3, 2023, pp. 7–29; Mikaela Heikkilä, Maija Mustaniemi-Laakso, “Introduction: Approaches to Vulnerability in Times of Crisis” *Human Rights Review*, vol. 24, nr. 1, 2023, pp. 151–170.

⁴⁸ H. Haker, “Vulnerability in Times of War”, pp. 7–29.

⁴⁹ In this research, an institutional dimension becomes apparent – it is described as a moral space that emerges through the aforementioned public and political actions. The author writes that during war, the role of the outsider is to become a witness as the moral Third. That is, an appeal to the individual level is also evident, though not to “moral authorities” in the narrow sense, but to the single person who refuses to remain an indifferent observer. In essence, this concerns the transformation of the “bystander” into a “witness”: “During war, the role of the bystander is to become a witness who, through the process of witnessing, advocacy, diplomacy, and justice, allows for the moral Third to reemerge” (*ibidem*, p. 7).

researcher to sustain the analysis (of philosophical practices) within a space where neither distance collapses into neutrality, nor engagement into uncritical affect.

Thus, philosophical thinking under conditions of existential tension requires a particular mode of functioning grounded in two interrelated imperatives – reflexive distance and vulnerable engagement. Reflexive distance, illustrated by the contrast between its loss in Martin Heidegger and its preservation in Karl Jaspers, demands a critical withdrawal from affect and ideology, preventing the instrumentalisation of thought by the conditions and consequences of war. Vulnerable engagement, articulated through the ideas of Simone de Beauvoir and Emmanuel Levinas, emphasises ethical sensitivity to suffering and responsibility, with a methodological safeguard against excessive affectivity, as in Hille Haker’s conception of the “*moral third*”, that is, analytical witnessing. These imperatives ensure a balance between analytical objectivity and existential authenticity.

CONCLUSIONS

The proposed set of criteria for analysing philosophical practices yields an analytical model of particular significance for understanding philosophical activity under conditions of crisis. It enables both the refinement of methodological approaches and the development of an applied framework for examining argumentation, mobilisation, and the legitimisation of value structures. In this sense, philosophical practices appear as a “rational element” of such dynamics: they reveal the extent to which thought corresponds to the demands of criticality and ethicality or, conversely, reproduces ideologically conditioned patterns. The value of the model lies in its capacity to function not merely descriptively, but diagnostically – as a *Meta-Analytic Approach* enabling a *Mapping of the Landscape of Philosophical Practice*.

- (1) In the first part of the study – the criteria of the emergence and consolidation of philosophy – we demonstrate that philosophical reflection unfolds through its differentiation from non-philosophical forms of knowledge and domination, which constitutes a criterion of criticality. Its consolidation as an agonistic mode presupposes non-violent contestation, equality of voices, and transparency of argumentation. Under conditions of crisis, these features may be deformed: the pursuit of truth is replaced by dogmatic schemes, and agonistic exchange by forms of polemic that reproduce logics of antagonistic opposition. In such cases, philosophy loses its critical function.

These criteria make it possible to assess whether philosophical practices preserve autonomy, sustain spaces of open debate, and maintain procedural standards of argumentation, or whether they become subsumed under ideological frameworks. In this respect, they function as instruments for diagnosing institutional and discursive regimes of thought.

(2) In the second part – the criteria of reflexive distance and vulnerable engagement – we delineate their role as complementary imperatives of thought under conditions of existential tension. Reflexive distance protects philosophy from being reduced to an instrument of ideological mobilisation, while vulnerable engagement ensures responsiveness to suffering and responsibility for the Other. The disruption of their balance results either in detached neutrality or in the loss of critical orientation. Their conjunction, by contrast, sustains the possibility of thought that remains both critical and ethical.

This dimension enables the analysis of philosophical interpretations of crisis phenomena by distinguishing methodological reflection from mobilisation, and by identifying the presence or absence of responsibility, sensitivity, and conceptual clarity. At the meta-analytic level, it also allows for the mapping not only of articulated meanings but also of zones of silence as structural elements of philosophical practice.

Thus, the model functions as an analytical framework for assessing philosophical practices in their critical and ethical dimensions, as well as for identifying their transformation into instruments of ideological legitimisation. It makes it possible to understand philosophy not only as a response to crisis, but also as a factor in the formation of semantic and normative structures that shape the horizons of social experience.

