

nuke 90 miles away in Cuba. How do we think the Russians feel about Ukraine joining NATO and all the aid that the U.S. and other NATO nations are shipping into Ukraine? Putin's approach is total war, destroying cities and terrorizing civilians.

Again, I wish to express my thanks to Juhani Ihanus for his fine work that has deepened my knowledge and prompted this essay.

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## Tragedy Without Catharsis

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When Karl Kraus, an Austrian writer, journalist, and critic, began his impassioned satire on National Socialist ideology, *The Third Walpurgis Night* (1933), with the sentence "Hitler brings nothing to my mind," he may have meant that the brutal seizure of power by the Nazis made one devoid of every creative insight and that their leader was not worthy of any association. By reading David R. Beisel's comment on my paper, I became convinced that the current atrocities must not be bypassed in silence. On the contrary, Beisel's questions and considerations bring forth the necessity of psychohistorical reflection on Putin's conceptions, fantasies, and projections as a mixture of rationality and irrationality.

The usual associations to war are often attached to military issues, such as the classification of weapons as well as the number of soldiers and civilians injured or killed. These associations relate to the scales of destruction. Talk of peace is hardly whispered amid the ruins where bitterness and hate prevail. Peace negotiations are at a dead end when the guns talk. Even then, as Beisel, Volkan, Stein, and others have reminded us, "deep listening" to the other—

not only to a colleague but to an enemy—is necessary for constructive dialogue and conflict resolution. Otherwise, sacrificial and self-destructive wars are one-sidedly accepted as purifying experiences.

Peace and attachment education for children, young adults, parents, and politicians are also rarely mentioned as ways to raise empathic global consciousness. Lloyd deMause (2013) urged us to ask the simple question: What if a country had instead of a President or a Secretary of War a Peace Officer, whose job it was to talk to other countries about peace. Might wars become less frequent? As Paul Elovitz remarks in his commentary, wars tend to increase “atrocious-producing” situations on both sides. Traumatic experiences and violence are already inherent within us as well as the history of human cultures and their systems. They almost automatically direct and regulate our behaviors, unless we remember the past and develop our attachment and consciousness skills to prepare for the future.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, Putin’s experience in the German Democratic Republic as an officer stationed at the K.G.B. headquarters in Dresden was for him a precursor to the even more traumatic collapse of the U.S.S.R. When demonstrators approached the K.G.B. building on December 5, 1989, Putin threatened that the defenders of the building would shoot them. He had asked for advice from Moscow, but the Kremlin never answered. Later, Putin’s disappointment with Western values, though briefly and barely applied in Russia, led him to struggle against the idea of the U.S. as the only great power in the world. The idea of a unipolar U.S.-dominated world strongly offends him. Putin’s dream seems to consist of abandoning the West and its democratic freedoms, not conquering the West, embracing new partners in China, India, and Brazil, or above all else, expanding the realm of Rus’ through utter destruction.

Putin acknowledged on April 12, 2022, that the war is “tragic,” adding that Russia had “no choice” other than to launch its special and “noble” military operation that it will “rhythmically and calmly” continue until the victory has been achieved. However, as the “rational terminator” and director of the sacred, cleansing, and redemptive war, Putin cannot reach any cathartic end to the tragedy. Instead, the horrendous cycle of chasing the enemies and revenging their crimes is not interrupted by any *deus ex machina* (the godlike savior to solve the human problems and bring the plot to a happy ending). The killing machinery is staged and re-enacted by

the leader and justified by the purification drives that permeate the Russian institutions, above all sanctified by the Russian Orthodox Church.

As Paul Elovitz, in his personally touching and condensed analysis, concludes: “Casualties of war include subtlety, complexity, and often truth.” Putin has learned the habits of post-factual talk, hiding behind masks, deceptive symbols, and Potemkin political maneuvers. He seems to have clung to the false notion that truth can be conquered, mastered, and possessed. It is too much for such delusional thinking to admit that truth can only be mutually negotiated, revised, and re-visioned according to the ever-changing horizons of understanding and the transnational values of the younger psychoclasses, inevitably discarding the old guards on both sides.

Paul Elovitz also stresses the importance of considering ambivalence in President Zelensky’s position between defending his nation and confronting Ukraine’s ultranationalist tradition. For example, the anti-Semitic and anti-Russian ingredients of the Azov Regiment, a paramilitary militia formerly known as the “men in black,” incorporated into Ukraine’s National Guard in 2014, have been supported by U.S. funding. However, Western promises have also been disappointing to Kyiv’s aspirations. The extremes meet on the battlefield: While Russia recruited mercenary fighters from Syria, Libya, and Chechnya to wage war in Ukraine, the remnants of the Azov Regiment (reduced to a brigade), located in the vast domain of the Azovstal metallurgical site in Mariupol, were that region’s last fighters against Russian forces.

Patriotism, honor, glory, fame, and victory—empty words and values to fight for. Moscow calling? Silence. Also, silence about the “democratic” United States and its vote (with only Ukraine) against a U.N. Assembly draft resolution “Combating glorification of Nazism, neo-Nazism and other practices that contribute to fueling contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance” (December 16, 2021). These two countries have voted against this resolution every single year since 2014.

The fear of ambivalence and complexity—of “not knowing” (Ogden, 1988)—if not explored and reflected upon, can unleash intolerance, violence, and destruction. If encounters between the leaders and between the nations take place in the ranks of order, mastery, control, and encoded diagnoses, they will fail to face the

diversity, contingency, and ambivalence in human joy and sorrow.

*Juhani Ihanus*' biography can be found on page 279.

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## The Emotions of Facing Death, Dying, and Life in the Era of COVID

### Life and Death in Personal and Cultural Retrospect

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*Abstract:* The author describes her personal experiences of life and death during a year of the COVID-19 pandemic from personal perspectives anchored in German and South African existentialist perspectives.

*Keywords:* Albert Camus, COVID-19, death-anxiety, existentialist-perspectives, German, pandemic, prayer, South African

#### Facing Life and Death in Two Cultures

Throughout our lives, we have to deal with living in the face of death and dying. All are inevitably human topics that connect human beings across cultures. As Albert Camus said, "The reason for my death is my life." However, life and death are defined and explored differently from different cultural and philosophical perspectives.

In the German culture that I come from, death is feared, sometimes tabooed, and often neglected, until it is so much in your face that you cannot deny it anymore. Even then, I have had to witness more than once that people even neglect death when they are about to die. In Germany, death and dying are often avoided as far as possible in the mainstream culture. People raised in Germany, in