

Carl von Clausewitz and Foucault on War and Power

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Abstract : Carl von Clausewitz's political theory of war was criticized in the 20th century in several ways. It was also the source of many disagreements over readings of its most popular theses. Among them, the reflections of thinkers categorized as part of the broader postmodern current stand out, such as Michael Foucault and his successors, who presented a nuanced and critical approach to strategy theory. Foucault viewed it as part of a broader political-legal discourse of sovereignty rooted in the Middle Ages, which underlies modern biopower. Clausewitz's theory of strategy underpinned a new humanist discourse rationalizing the phenomenon of war while, in a methodological sense, becoming an epistemic model of how Foucault conceived power strategy. Foucault's contemporary commentators try to develop his position by arguing the analogy between the discourse prevailing in Clausewitz's time and the contemporary neoliberal discourse and technological revolution on the battlefield, which create a new order of power. Meanwhile, they recognize that the modern development of strategy was to make Clausewitz's understanding of war obsolete. However, postmodernists focusing on showy stylistics in their assessments rely on a mythologized narrative about Clausewitz, reducing his theories to a discourse of war as a way for nation-states to conduct foreign policy. In this article, Clausewitz shows that his theory goes much deeper and provides a critical perspective on the relationship between war and politics. The dialectical structure makes it possible to understand war as a historically variable but constantly policy-dependent phenomenon.

Keywords : Clausewitz, Foucault, Virilio, postmodernism, war and politics, power

Conference Title : ICPTP 2024 : International Conference on Political Theory and Philosophy

Conference Location : Copenhagen, Denmark

Conference Dates : June 13-14, 2024