

Press release

Philosopher Warns Against “Drifting into State Terrorism”

Philosopher Michael Quante calls for social debate on ethically justifiable warfare – “New technological possibilities such as drones blur the boundaries between state warfare and state terrorism” – No linguistic concealment of the cruelty of war – Philosophy can enable social discussion – “Just war” as an important category for ethical evaluation

Münster, 11 June 2018 (exc) In the face of international conflicts, the philosopher and ethicist Prof. Dr Michael Quante warns against state warfare drifting into “state terrorism”. “In view of modern weapon systems, we need a social debate on the ethically and legally justifiable options of warfare that states have. State warfare can no longer always be distinguished from acts of terrorism, for example in Afghanistan, Yemen or Lebanon,” said the scholar from the University of Münster’s Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics”. He will talk about the ambiguity of the concept of peace at the Federal Conference of the German branch of the “Mayors for Peace” organisation in Münster on Friday. In no war does the end justify the means, not even for the defence of human rights. Using US drones in the Middle East, threatening to use nuclear weapons, foregoing declarations of war as in Iraq or Syria and circumventing the United Nations threatens to undermine the clear rules of warfare such as the Geneva Convention. “We see violations of our rules every day, and not just by dictators.”

The philosopher insists on honesty in the choice of words when it comes to war and peace. With a view to German arms exports, debates on the amount of German defence spending and international interference in conflicts such as those in Syria, Yemen or Afghanistan, “we should not trivialise by speaking of ‘crisis operations’, ‘armed conflicts’ or even ‘humanitarian interventions’, but of war. War means that people suffer and die and that societies are destroyed for decades to come.” The interests pursued by warfare must be clearly named. “Members of democratic societies can and should form their own opinion and take a critical stand on missions of war.” The philosopher considers it indispensable to remember the “just war” doctrine, which has often been ethically discredited. “The popular pacifist rejection of any use of violence and military means loses its ethical purity at the very latest when it comes to the question of emergency relief.”

According to the scholar, philosophy can help “to stop the rapid decline of a differentiated and differentiating political culture of debate and conflict in Western societies”. Philosophy’s task is to shed light on fundamental problems and provide conceptual distinctions for a rational discussion, thus facilitating the formation of democratic will. According to Quante, this also applies to the term of peace. “Peace has different meanings and requires much more than the absence of war. For example, structural violence or the institutional exclusion of minorities or certain social groups that have no way of articulating their points of view are not compatible with a peaceful state. “This applies even if there are no armed conflicts. In the end, if peace is to stand for an open and stable democracy, it also needs a willingness for pluralism and tolerance. As we all know, this cannot be achieved without putting up with opposites.” According to

Quante, peace is not about abolishing conflicts, but about developing structures, procedures and attitudes in which conflicts can be carried out without violence and on the basis of rational arguments.

“A world without war is unrealistic”

With an eye to the future, the philosopher says that a world without war is “a lovely, but not a realistic idea. In the face of scarce resources, great power fantasies and the fact that past wars are often sources of new hatred, wars to defend and restore human rights could probably never completely be avoided. “The best crisis intervention is to promote international justice, education and prosperity for all.”

Michael Quante explains that the concept of a “just war” is the only way to answer the question regarding the ethical and legal legitimacy of acts of war and to distinguish between an illegitimate, permitted or even necessary use of weapons. “A war is only just if it is ethically justified to undertake it,” according to Quante. The philosopher is co-editor of the book “Gerechter Krieg. Ideengeschichtliche, rechtsphilosophische und ethische Beiträge” (Just War. Contributions from the History of Ideas, Legal Philosophy and Ethics), which was published in an extended second edition last year.

On Friday, 15 June at 10 am, at the Federal Conference of the German “Mayors for Peace” in the Historical City Hall of Münster, Prof. Dr Michael Quante will speak on the topic of “Peace is just another way ... – The ambiguity of the concept of peace”. The previous evening from 8 pm onwards, security and disarmament experts will discuss “New ways to a world free of nuclear weapons”. The organisation “Mayors for Peace” was founded by Araki Takeshi, then Mayor of Hiroshima, in 1982. The organisation tries to prevent the worldwide spread of nuclear weapons and achieve their abolition through actions and campaigns. More than 7,500 cities and municipalities from 163 countries belong to the network, with Germany having around 550 members. On 14 and 15 June, the Federal Conference of the German “Mayors for Peace” will be held in Münster. 75 years after the destruction of the city of Hiroshima by an atom bomb, Prof. Quante is planning a commemorative year in Münster in 2020. The University of Münster has maintained close contacts with the University of Hiroshima for more than 20 years and underlined the cooperations in a Memorandum of Understanding in 2017. (sca/vvm)

Image: Prof. Dr Michael Quante (photograph: University of Münster/Peter Wattendorff)

Please note: Prof. Dr Michael Quante in a brief video on ethical questions about war and peace

Contact: Simon Camp, Centre for Research Communication
of the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics”
Johannisstraße 1, 48143 Münster
Tel: 0251/83-23376, religionundpolitik@uni-muenster.de
www.religion-und-politik.de

Should you wish to unsubscribe to the press releases of the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics”, please send an e-mail to religionundpolitik@uni-muenster.de.

The Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” of the University of Münster

Some 200 academics from more than 20 disciplines of the humanities and social sciences and from 14 countries do research in the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” of the University of Münster. They deal with the complex relationship of religion and politics

across epochs and cultures: from the ancient pantheon and Judaism, Christianity and Islam in the Middle Ages and the early modern period to the current situation in Europe, America, Asia and Africa. It is nationally the largest research association of its kind and of the 43 clusters of excellence in Germany, it is the only one to deal with religions. The federal government and the state governments support the project in the second phase of the Excellence Initiative with 40.1 million euros from 2012 until 2018.