

On Threat

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Abstract: A threat is a strange thing—for it is neither simply a deed done, nor undone. But if we think the threat in terms of the presence or absence of an actual or potential threat—as the history of philosophy (from the Greeks, through Hegel, to us) has done, then we miss what is threatening. For the threat—whether to life and limb, freedom or identity, or to an individual or group, family and friends, civil society or a state or the world as a whole—is the suspension of action. Then the threat is prior to possibility and impossibility, necessity and contingency, presence and absence. But this too, is a threat—and one that implicates us—at least insofar as the implied threat implies the threat of implication.

Keywords: aspect, being, implication, problematic, suspension, threat, time, unity.

And take the present horror from the time,
Which now suits with it. Whiles I threat, he lives:
Words to the heat of deeds too cold breath gives.¹

Horror and time, words and deeds—these are the themes that surround the question of the threat. And perhaps more today, in the present age, it seems to be on the basis of an actual or possible threat—whether of punishment or violence, exposure or death, terrorism or war, the other or difference, truth or joy—that action is taken, words spoken and deeds done. But if this is the guiding question of (ethico-political) philosophy from the Greeks to us, then it is Hegel who (as Heidegger reminds us) provides ‘the clearest and greatest example of the unity’ of the history of threat.² And it is to this history that we must turn in order to even begin responding to the threat.

So, *what* is a threat? Or what does it mean to threaten? And *how* does the threat threaten? And is the threat not itself somehow threatened by that which cannot be an actual threat, or even a possible one—and then, if ‘the present horror’ cannot be taken ‘from the time’, what are the implications for words and deeds, the ethics and politics of speaking and acting and thinking?

¹ Shakespeare 2005, *Macbeth*, II.1.

² Heidegger 1977, *GA65*, p. 76.

The Threat to the World

In fact, at first, the threat appears *in abstracto*. I am a person with individual personality, alive and free (not merely a subject, nor a featherless biped or rational animal, nor just a thinking thing or transcendental apperception). For I have the possibility or power (*δύναμις*, *potentia*, *Möglichkeit*) of self-determination. Being the law for myself, I am autonomous (*αὐτό-νομος*). On the one hand, I have a right to my body as my material-concrete possession, as my *finitude*. On the other hand, my thinking and imagining, desiring and willing, is unlimited, *infinite*, universal. And I am not only conscious as this person, present to myself, I am also self-conscious of being the one who is conscious, and conscious of this self-presence—which is how I am different from others, and the same as them (insofar as other persons are alive and free). In other words, I am a contradiction: finite and infinite, a finite infinity or infinite finitude. And tolerating my contradictory being—this is the ‘supreme-achievement of the person.’³

But my freedom can be taken from me: slavery threatens. Another can treat me as if I was a thing, unfree, impersonal, without rights. Or I can appropriate another, steal their body or body parts (or that which they possess, objects they created, work or works into which they put themselves, or the value thereof); take their substance as something to be used or abused, possessed and exploited, consumed and enjoyed, as well as thrown away and destroyed. I can treat the other, not as an end in itself, or a being in and for itself, so not as an essentially free personality (with inalienable rights)—but rather, as a being for me, as ‘a beast of burden’, a mere *Naturwesen*.⁴ However contrary to right, I can determine myself as master and the other as slave.⁵

And my life can be taken from me: death threatens. Not only can

3 Hegel 1986, VII, §35n. Hegel's concept of contradiction is neither a category (neither Aristotelian nor Kantian, which both seek to resolve contradiction) nor an abstract idea (like some Platonic other-worldly εἶδος)—for it is just as real and concrete; it both resolves and maintains itself by grasping the truth of contradiction contradictorily, by ‘sublating’ (that is, tolerating) contradiction. And Hegel uses this word, sublation, *Aufhebung*, because it has the advantage of ‘not just different meanings, but opposite ones’ (Hegel 1832, p. xvii); it translates a Latin two-fold original: *tollo*, *tollere*, *sustuli*, *sublatus* comes from *tolero*, *tolerare*, *toleravi*, *toleratus* (bear, endure, tolerate) and *fero*, *ferre*, *tulis*, *latus* (bring, bear; tell speak of; consider; carry off, win, receive, produce; get). Thus, one word, *aufheben* (like *aufgeben*) is two, essentially ambiguous, double, Janus-headed (and so perfectly suited to both phenomenology and logic, that is, to phenomenologic)—for it means both destroying or dissolving, *elevare*, and preserving or keeping, *conservare* (Hegel 1986, p. 574). And as I have argued (Haas 2000, pp. 58-62), if the history of Western philosophy (as metaphysics) is biased towards a thinking of truth as essentially unambiguous, Hegel's sublating concept is perhaps the first to grasp truth as contradictory, ambiguous, *doppelsinnig* and *zweischneidig*—and the ambiguity of truth, that which Heidegger (1977, GA24, §18) thinks as ἀ-λήθεια, revealing and concealing, uncovering and covering, unveiling and veiling.

4 Hegel 1986, VII, §48n, §57n.

5 Hegel 1986, III, pp. 145ff [§178ff].

I commit suicide (even if it is wrong, because I am free), but I will die (because I am a finite being, an organic body, both one with nature and separated therefrom). And I can kill and be killed, *von fremder Hand*, at the hand of another⁶—as the lord and servant each seek, not only mutual recognition, but threaten the death of each other. So the threat of violence is essentially a mutual death threat.

But the threat is not just mine, or yours, my own or the other's, and not only to me or you; it is ours—and the counter-threat threatens. For when personal interest and particular desire is raised above the universal—so that *my* right is taken to be *the* right—we are both threatened by error, lying, deception, coercion. Our relationship (agreement, contract, promise, honesty, trust, etc.) is under threat of individual vanity. Recognition and respect of each other is threatened by the will of one, and the power to force or coerce. In this way, intentionally or not, the relative threatens the absolute. And the individual's willingness to place their subjective interest over and above mine (and everyone else's), a willingness to claim that the universal (as the transcendental ground or condition of the possibility of any relation whatsoever) is particular (in its very being and essence)—this is the threat of wrong-doing and criminality (hence the role of punishment, not as revenge; but as righting of the wrong, sublation of injury, restoration of right, which is a kind of ‘justice’, *Gerechtigkeit*).⁷

And yet, the threat does not stop there—for even within myself, in my relation of myself to myself, the silent soliloquy of inner monologue (or dialogue), my loneliest of lonelies: discord, disharmony, difference threatens. Indeed, insofar as I relate to myself, I am not merely identical with myself, so that my will (my thoughts and dreams, words and deeds) belongs to me; I am also different from myself, in opposition to myself, insofar as I am another, ‘*je est un autre*’.⁸ For although my freedom is mine, although I am free, it is always possible that my will does not correspond to my concept, that my acts do not correlate with me, but to the other. In other words, my purpose and intention, my consciousness (conscience or judgment, as well as beliefs and feelings) of good and evil—which I take to be purely mine, subjective—these are threatened by others, by those whose identity is identical with mine (whereby what

6 Hegel 1986, VII, §70n.

7 Hegel 1986, VII, §99n. Against Feuerbach 1801, pp. 13-18 (and Hobbes 1909, Part II, Chapt. 31), Hegel thinks punishment—neither as revenge, nor as coercion or social control—as a way of honoring and respecting the criminal as a rational human being, as a person who freely places their individual will over and above the victim. Perpetrators know and recognize what is right, but determine that their subjective interest and desire is better served by doing wrong.

8 Rimbaud 1972, ‘*La lettre du voyant*’ to Paul Demeny, 15 May 1871, p. 250. Hegel 1986, VII, §109.

I take to be mine might be another's) and different from mine (whereby mine might just be determined in opposition to theirs, and so not mine, but simply not theirs).

Then first, difference threatens responsibility. For if I am not myself, if I am different from myself, I cannot claim to be the cause and ground of my (praise-worthy or blame-worthy) actions, and so responsible therefore (innocent or guilty). In this way, difference in the will poses a threat to autonomy, and to the entire economy of accountability. If I am not myself, or not simply myself—in anyway whatsoever—if there is a trace of otherness, self-difference, that contaminates my will; then my freedom is threatened as well. Oedipus, for example, is not just ignorant of the fact that the man he kills is his father; rather, in addition, his act is his fate, the will of the gods (if not determined by some other difference, such as instinct, God or the devil, the struggle for survival of the species, will to power, the means of production, the unconscious, etc.), and so not his, which threatens his ownership of the parricide. Autonomy shows itself to be far more heteronomy, and responsibility lies just as much with the other.⁹

But second, difference threatens intention (and intent), perhaps even the intentional act. For if I am divided from myself, if my thoughts and concepts, judgments and determinations (even my welfare and happiness and good will), are not my own; then I am not the one who intends the action, whether I know it or not. And if guilt or innocence are ascribed on the basis of knowledge (and knowledge of knowledge, or self-knowledge)—so that the murderer must have known, or hoped, that the act would kill—then any difference between knowledge and ignorance, or between what is now the case and what is to come in the future (conditionally), threatens my very ability to intend, the act's motive (as well as responsibility). This is why, normally, anyone who is not themselves, not self-identical, not self-present, so incapable of self-determination, that is, freedom, autonomy—but who are self-absent in anyway whatsoever (such as 'children, imbeciles, lunatics, etc.' whose actions are either totally absent or diminished)—are not held responsible.¹⁰

Then third, difference threatens the good (throughout the history of philosophy as metaphysics from the ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας to the *gute Wille*). For if the good remains an idea or ideal, an infinite goal towards which we strive or that which directs action, and so 'without-content', unrealized and perhaps unrealizable, a form (or form of forms) and

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9 Hegel 1986, VII, §117.

10 Hegel 1986, VII, §120n.

merely formal, abstract and lacking particular articulation—then its essential difference from reality means it is no good at all.¹¹ The truth of difference threatens to reveal the distance between that which is potentially good and actually good; just as the really good threatens to unmask the ideally good for what it is, merely ideal, a good idea, but just an idea. And then all the good laws and principles, all the good intentions and good wills—and all the good of rights and duties, good habits and values, good words and deeds, as well as all the good governance (of democracy or a democracy to come, or some other form of government)—all this (along with its opposite) threatens to evaporate. Indeed, the idea of freedom does not make us free, although it can be used to enslave. And the difference between *is* and *ought* is not just unbreachable—it threatens an inverted world in which the universal is relative, the objective subjective, in which the 'rule of law' is the 'rule of men', philosophy is sophistry, and the very idea of the good is evil.

But the threat does not stop there—for what was previously merely abstract, becomes concrete. And what seemed simply ideal is real. Thus, the potential threat becomes actual: a threat to me and my family, friends and colleagues, fellow citizens, to one country and another, and finally to the world as a whole.

First, the family is threatened by civil society. As a circle of love, *Kreis der Liebe*—based on love, not just physical lust or biology (survival of the species, genetics), nor merely the mutual satisfaction of needs, nor a contract for the acquisition of money and power¹²—the family

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11 Hegel 1986, VII, §135.

12 With regards to men and women, sex and gender, love and learning, the *Philosophy of Right* seems (at first glance) deeply traditional: 'Women may well be educated, but they are not made for the higher sciences, for philosophy and certain artistic productions which require a universal element. Women may have insights, taste, and delicacy, but they do not possess the ideal. The difference between man and woman is the difference between animal and plant; the animal is closer in character to man, the plant to woman, for the latter is a more peaceful [process of] unfolding whose principle is the more indeterminate unity of feeling. When women are in charge of government, the state is in danger, for their actions are based not on the demands of universality but on contingent inclination and opinion. The education of women takes place imperceptibly, as if through the atmosphere of representational thought, more through living than through the acquisition of knowledge, whereas man attains his position only through the attainment of thought and numerous technical exertions' (§166n). Indeed, traditionally (in a sexist patriarchal context) men are powerful and active; women passive and subjective—or, the difference between the sexes is like that between animal and plant. And yet, this (prejudicial) understanding of male and female belongs not to Hegel, but to his students—the quote is from Hotho and Griesheim. Hegel however, is quite clear: gender relations are merely external, *nach außen*, the traditional ways in which—at this point in world-history (as the history of world-spirit)—sexual difference is expressed. But *nach innen*, internally (spiritually) things are otherwise; there is another truth, and this historical moment, dominated by traditional roles, is to be sublated, along with the ways in which men and women present themselves to one another, and to themselves (§166). In other words, although the family needs to direct itself both inwards and outwards, there is nothing that says such roles must *a priori* be filled by one sex or the other. Nevertheless, Hegel still does seem burdened by the historical prejudice that the gender known as outward-directed, as powerful and active, is masculine (regardless of sex difference), while the gender of the partner that is inward-directed is known as feminine. Today,

is supposed to be the original unit of which the person is a part. Like everyone, I am born into a family; and my family is the ground of my essence, and condition of the possibility of my being. And family is not a (two-fold) relation between adults, which is marriage; rather, it is between adults and children—for there is no child without parent, and no parent without child, just as there is no marriage without two.¹³ But the family unit is not a self-sufficient totality; rather, it is grounded on (in relation to, mediated by) the larger unit, the family of families, of which it is a part. Each family is an end-in-itself, but cannot accomplish its task, cannot provide for the welfare of its individual parts (needs and desires, security and opportunity, education and work)—it is thereby, threatened by others (outside the family, other persons and families) who can do so. For individual freedom can only be exercised and enjoyed, right can only be actually possible, justice can only be concrete and real (not just an idea and ideal), if it is embodied in the ‘law of the land’—not just the ‘law of the father’—if it is actualized and preserved by legal institutions (police and inspectors, courts and juries, legislative bodies and procedures). In this way, groups—such as the farmers of food and the manufacturers of clothing, builders of shelter and creators of art, as well as the thinkers of thought, philosophers—threaten the unity of the family unit, insofar as they demonstrate that it is not the ground of its own unity. And as a greater unity, a more whole whole, a more fundamental fundament, or more universal universal, civil society is not just responsible for the unity of the (nuclear) family; but this ‘second family’ also threatens the ‘first family’ with disunity.¹⁴

Second, civil society is threatened by the state. For the original ground, that which allows society to exist, is the constant presence of the state, the substance of its being; it is already there, *schon vor*, embodied in constitutional (constituted-constitutive) law, even before me. Each citizen is free thanks to the state; I can exercise my freedom because the state gives (or has always already given, albeit in a concealed way, *eingehüllt*) me the right to do so.¹⁵ And it was ‘from the state that freedom of thought and science first emerged (whereas it was a

at least in some parts of the world, the cunning of reason in history appears to have begun to call this determination into question.

13 Again, there is nothing in Hegel to preclude the possibility of same-sex marriage, although he does seem to maintain that both gender-roles (one directed towards itself, inward to the family, for its own sake; the other directed towards the other, outward to friends and civil society, for the sake of the relation to others) must be fulfilled (although not necessarily by the same person at the same time, nor all the time).

14 Hegel 1986, VII, §252.

15 Hegel 1986, VII, §260n.

church which burned *Giordano Bruno* and forced *Galileo* to recant on his knees for *presenting* the *Copernican* theory of the solar-system, etc.)’.¹⁶ In this way, the power of society to serve as the condition of the possibility of the family is threatened by the state’s power to produce and preserve society—and the state itself. Indeed, each circle of circles, each universal of universals or whole of wholes (however self-differentiated), law of laws and ground of grounds, foundation of foundations and cause of causes—each one threatens the very existence, the being and essence, of those it encircles, universalizes, totalizes, legitimizes, grounds, founds, causes. And if the state ‘*permeates all relations within it*’, all laws and customs, it is because—in the name of peace and internal security—the sovereignty of the state threatens the sovereignty of all therein.¹⁷

But third, the state (and everything therein) does not only threaten—it is threatened. For each state, and its relation to all others, other-to-other, is under threat from the outside. And the threat to the being and essence, existence and freedom, of the state—this is ‘the ethical *moment of war*’.¹⁸ Then the self-defense of the state is (supposedly) justified, perhaps even to the point of neutralizing the attacker (military conquest, slavery or death), if sovereignty is threatened. But if there is no state of states, no meta-state or supra-national sovereign that has power over independent, mutually-recognizing states—although states are free to make peace, fulfill

16 Hegel 1986, VII, §270.

17 Hegel 1986, VII, §274.

18 Hegel 1986, VII, §324. In fact, for Hegel, war is not just unnecessary and evil and destructive—it can just as well be cathartic and purifying and productive (and not only for those in the military estate, or those exhibiting valour, or valuing *θράσος* over justice, like *Thrasymachus*): ‘War is that condition in which the vanity of temporal things and temporal goods—which tends at other times to be merely a pious phrase—takes on a serious significance, and it is accordingly the moment in which the ideality of the particular attains its right and becomes actuality. The higher significance of war is that, through its agency (as I have put it on another occasion), “the ethical health of nations is preserved in their indifference towards the permanence of finite determinacies, just as the movement of the winds preserves the sea from that stagnation which a lasting calm would produce—a stagnation which a lasting, not to say perpetual, peace would also produce among nations”’ (1986, VII, §324; II, p. 481). For Hegel’s student Gans, war is both necessary and beneficial: ‘But the state is an individual, and negation is an essential component of individuality. Thus, even if a number of states join together as a family, this league, in its individuality, must generate opposition and create an enemy. Not only do peoples emerge from wars with added strength, but nations troubled by civil dissension gain internal peace as a result of wars with their external enemies. Admittedly, war makes property insecure, but this real insecurity is no more than a necessary movement. We hear numerous sermons on the insecurity, vanity, and instability of temporal things, but all who hear them, however moved they may be, believe that they will none the less retain what is theirs. But if this insecurity should then actually become a serious proposition in the shape of hussars with sabres drawn, the edifying sentiments which predicted all this turn into imprecations against the conquerors. But wars will nevertheless occur whenever they lie in the nature of the thing; the seeds germinate once more, and talk falls silent in the face of the solemn recurrences of history’ (1986, VII, §324n). Nietzsche’s view of war is similar (1967, *Fünf Vorreden zu fünf ungeschriebenen Büchern*, §3).

their obligation to honor international laws and norms, universal rights—the threat to the state’s life and liberty remains. In this way, conflicts between states can (supposedly) ‘only be decided by war’.¹⁹ And not merely actual threats, but potential ones—for a state cannot wait to respond where-and-when an injury happens; it must estimate the probability of a greater or lesser danger, make conjectures as to the intentions of other states (friend or foe), which can itself be a cause of conflict or *controversia*, dispute or *discordia*, disunity or difference, πόλεμος, breaches or breaks in the twists or *Zwisten* of the fabric of international relations.²⁰

And finally, neither simply individuals or families, or families of families, nor merely societies or states—the world is under threat. And this is the true subject and substance of (ethico-political) philosophy (from Plato’s *Republic*, which begins with a threat, ‘But you see how many we are?’, to Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*, which does not end with the state, but with the world), indeed, any philosophy whatsoever.²¹ For the threat to freedom (as ideal as it is real, and so actualized as right) *in* the world—or more precisely, the freedom of the world—is a threat to the whole world, the history of the world, the universal reason or spirit of the world, and so to everyone and everything within and without. And not just the freedom of the world, but the truth of this freedom, the knowledge or self-knowledge that freedom is the ‘being and principle’ of the world, and so the act of actually becoming ‘what it is’,

19 Hegel 1986, VII, §334. Furthermore, insofar as the state’s freedom is its being, how it is and is one, an unfree state would be no state at all—thus war is the way in which the state presents itself when its existence is threatened, when it is threatened with non-existence, with absence. This is why war is essentially contradictory: absolutely hostile to the aggressive individuals of other states, but simultaneously benevolent towards them as individuals in themselves; it is the state’s utmost presence of spirit, *Gegenwart des Geistes*, and at the same time, its utmost absence, *Abwesenheit*—for war is a temporal determination of freedom, the way in which the state is (and states are) one in wartime, whether (aspectually) completely or not (Hegel 1986, VII, §328).

20 Hegel 1986, VII, §335; Hölderlin, 1944ff, Vol. II, p. 17; Nietzsche 1967, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, §208. Heraclitus: Πόλεμος πάντων μὲν πατήρ ἐστι, πάντων δὲ βασιλεύς (Kirk and Raven 1957, Fr. 53; Heidegger 1977, *GA39*, pp. 124–25). As Heidegger insists: ‘Ambiguity threatens and mere *Zwist*’ (1977, *GA9*, p. 363).

21 More precisely, the *Republic* begins with an implied threat. Returning from the festivals, Polemarchus stops and ‘arrests’ Socrates and Glaucon, and says: ‘But you see how many we are?’ [ὅρας οὖν ἡμᾶς, ἔφη, ὅσοι ἐσμέν] (Plato 1903, *Republic* 327c). And this is no question—or at least it is a question that is also not a question—for it is command, and implies a necessary demand: prove yourselves better, stronger than Polemarchus and his mates, or submit to the greater force and come peacefully. Fight or be kidnapped—and *tertium non datur*: either/or, either warrior or prisoner-of-war. And Socrates’ proposed alternative, a third that is neither/nor (namely, argument, possibly persuading Polemarchus to let them go) is excluded—for Polemarchus refuses to listen, so there is nothing to be done: εἰ δοκεῖ, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, οὕτω χρὴ ποιεῖν (Plato 1903, *Republic* 328b). Goethe thinks this in literary terms: ‘National literature is no longer of importance: it is the time for world literature, and all must aid in bringing it about’ (Eckerman 1981, 31 January 1827, Chapt. 80).

free *qua* world—this too is under threat.²² On the one hand, the world is threatened by individuals and individual nation-states, each with its own particular subjectivity and subjective interests, desires and wills, its own sphere of influence and activity, its own (relative) claim to (imperfect) justice, each unable or unwilling to see the whole of world history (and the universality of right) as their own.²³ On the other hand, the world is threatened by nature, by natural objects and objectivity, ‘geographical and anthropological’ forces (e.g., global warming and the environment, famine and population, poverty and abundance, disease and epidemics, the life of the Sun and the movements of the stars), and their (evidently unequal) distribution among states.²⁴ And it is this double-threat to the world as a whole, the barbarism veiling the true threat and truth of the threat—as subjective as it is objective—that Hegel thinks as ‘still *unthought*’.²⁵ Or, to paraphrase Heidegger: the greatest threat to the world in our most threatened (and perhaps threatening) time is that ‘we are still not thinking’—neither what the threat is, nor how so.²⁶

The Horror of the Threat

So what is the threat, or threatening in all these threats? What is the essence or concept of the threat? Is it the abstractness of the abstract, or is it concrete, even the concreteness of the concrete? Is it something particular (slavery or death, subjective or objective, me or another, and so the difference between us) or is it the non-particularity of the threat that threatens? Is the mere idea of a potential or possible threat threatening, or is it only threatening insofar as it is real, an actual threat to me and my family, our friends and colleagues, our society and state, or the world as a whole? In other words, how does the threat threaten?

As Macbeth says: ‘I threat’. I do it. The threat is threatened. It is an act that refers to another. So that the threat is always the ‘threat of’ some word or deed, kindness or cruelty. Threatening is an activity, which is why it is spoken as a verb, an action word—although this is perhaps an indication of how we are ‘still far from considering the essence of acting decisively enough’.²⁷

22 Hegel 1986, VII, §343.

23 Hegel 1986, VII, §345.

24 Hegel 1986, VII, §346.

25 Hegel 1986, VII, §359.

26 Heidegger 1977, *GA8*, p. 7; Haas 2007, p. 122.

27 Heidegger 1977, *GA9*, p. 313; Haas 2007, Chapt. 4.

The act of threatening, however, is two-fold. On the one hand, as a verb, tense indicates time, when it is done, past or present or future: I threatened or threaten or will threaten—so that the threat is now (present) or then (whether past or future). On the other hand, the verb has aspect, how it is done, at any time whatsoever: either I threaten (complete aspect) or I am threatening (incomplete), either I threatened or I was threatening, either I will threaten or I will be threatening (simply, continuously, repeatedly). And the two ways of threatening cannot be conflated (even if the history of philosophy, from the Greeks to us, seeks to reduce aspect to tense, and aspectuality to temporality). Rather the threat is threatening—if it is one—insofar as it is both temporal and aspectual.²⁸

But even further—not only time and aspect—for if the threat ‘is’ and ‘is one’, then it has some kind of being and unity (which is what an onto-henology of the threat might seek to illuminate, at least to the extent possible). So, a threat threatens, insofar as being and unity are the same, and are one thing, and ‘are implied by one another...[and] there must be exactly as many species of being as of unity’.²⁹ Thus, threats are and are one, temporally and aspectually—which is how they can be accidental, true, potential and actual, and categorical.

First, the threat may be accidental: even if I do not intend to threaten, merely being there, my presence or absence can be a threat. But being does not necessarily imply threatening; it just happens to be the case, *quid facti*. There is no necessary connection between the abstract act of showing myself to another, of presenting my presence to the other, and threatening.³⁰ Nor is there any threat necessarily implied by words like ‘five plus seven’—so that if they are threats, it is not because of the ‘twelve’ to which they *must* refer; but rather because of that to which they *may* refer (months in a year, Schönberg’s music, Kant’s first *Critique*, days until an execution, etc.). For the ‘pure’ coming face-to-face with the other—not just their words and deeds, but their being here or there, in and for themselves or for me, or for another—is prior to the threat. And the relation of self-to-other, or self-consciousness to self-consciousness (like that of self-to-self, or other-to-other), could just as well be devoid of threat, whether it is a relation of friends or lovers, citizens or Earthlings. So too, a state *may* threaten another with invasion and be rich in oil and totalitarian—but it is not thereby a threat simply because of oil, nor merely because it is

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28 Haas 2015a; Haas 2017. On linguistic aspect, see Comrie 1976.

29 Aristotle 1957, 1003b22-34; Brentano 1862, p. 6; Owens 1951, pp. 118-123, 259-275.

30 Hegel 1807, pp. 118-119, §187.

totalitarian, at least insofar as they are separable from each other and not necessarily implied by one another.

Second, the threat can be true, a true threat: not merely my subjective judgment or assertion (objectively valid and logically consistent, or not), nor simply corresponding to my concept of what is threatening, nor just correlating to my beliefs (legitimate or paranoid, real or fake, as in my fear of needles or ghosts); nor merely an object with which I can threaten or be threatened (a knife or gun, a word or deed, a thought or idea, a god or evil demon). Rather the threat can be truly threatening, if my fear and that of which I am fearful, if my experience of fear and my experience of what I fear—if these are one (so, a lived-threat); which is how they can be separated from each other, and then joined or rejoined (adequately or not).

In other words, what is truly threatening may be found in the *intantum*, in what I take to be threatening, *adaequatio rei et intellectus*, that is, in what I identify to be identical to a threat, to a state of affairs as continuously or repeatedly threatening, a self-same or real threat, a true threat *as such*. Or, the true threat may be found in the *intentio*, that is, not what is threatened, but in taking an act to be threatening, so that the threat only threatens insofar as I (or we as a group, now or at some other time) know and identify, assert and judge, that an action is truly threatening, whether it is done or not. But prior to both, prior to an object that truly threatens and the judgment that it is a true threat, the truth is that the threat is an action (whether of speaking or doing, imagining or thinking, moving or not—in fact, any act whatsoever).³¹ Indeed, before a threat is real or fake (unreal, or merely ideal) it is (the act of) threatening. And this action is the threat’s truth, which is how it can come to presence as *intantum* and *intentio*. So, even before a determination of a threat’s essence (real or fake) and existence (that it is there, present, or not, absent), it is an act (which can be true or false, a threat or not). And this threat, the double-possibility of a threat’s *essentia* and *existentia*, that which opens our eyes to potential threats, and asks both what the threat is (true or not) and whether there is a threat at all—this is the truth of the action (that comes to presence as a threat, that presents the threat, and itself as threatening, or not). So before Macbeth is a true or false threat, he is Macbeth, potentially both; before his threat is real and true, before his threat is or is not a threat, he is present as what can be both—so Macbeth’s threat is only true on the basis of being Macbeth, on the ground his presence, the givenness of his act of being there as one of those things (people) that can threaten

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31 As I have argued elsewhere, the origin of an action (such as a threat) is improvisation—understood not as free-play, but as self-schematization (Haas 2015b).

or not; and the threat is only truly threatening, if it is an action that may not be a threat at all.³²

Threatening then, is made possible by acting—but what does this mean for the threat? In fact, ironically or not, it means that the truth of the act of threatening lies precisely in not acting—for if the act were carried out, it would no longer be a threat. Or more precisely: the truth of the threat neither acts nor does not act. For the threat, if it is threatening, suspends action (like the bloody dagger before Macbeth's eyes); it does not bring the threatened act to presence, although neither does it simply leave it in absence. Rather, the threat truly threatens only if it is a third thing, *tertium datur*. So that suspension is the truth of the threat, which is presumably why it is so suspenseful. And whiles Macbeth threatens death, Duncan (and Banquo) lives—for the truth of the threat lies not in the act of threatening, but in the continually-not-yet-murdering (present time, incomplete aspect). So not death, but the threat of death; not the event in which 'each seeks the death of the other', but that which is (always and still) to come—and the threat is not a threat if it is carried out, which is how it is possible (in an 'economy' or 'ethics' or 'politics' of the threat) for Macbeth to 'make good' on his threat.³³ Thus, the true threat threatens to act, and the truth of the threat lies not in the act of threatening, but in the suspension of the threatened act.

Third, the threat is potential or actual—possible or necessary, or (by privation or negation) impossible and unnecessary—and apparently, once again, *tertium non datur*, there is no third. So a potential threat is one that has not come to presence or disclosed itself—or more precisely, one that comes to presence as not yet present, not yet threatening. Then on the one hand (with respect to the object), Macbeth's dagger (which may be illusory, not necessarily an instrument for killing, rather than cooking or carving) is not yet a threat, but must rather first be a possibility, and disclosed as a dagger (or some other tool which would be necessary for doing the deed), if it is to threaten murder—especially insofar as death is separable from the dagger, or their unity is only potential. And on the other hand (with regards to the

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32 As Heidegger insists: 'being is understood in the same sense as in the ancients, namely, as *continual presence*'—which is the meaning of οὐσία (Heidegger 2001; see Allison 2005, pp. 89-99). On givenness, see Heidegger 1977, GA2, p. 37. And Kant is not only the first and only one, *der Erste und Einzige*, to have grasped the relation between being and time—he is also a thinker of givenness: 'In whatever way and by whatever means knowledge may relate to objects, *intuition* is that through which it is in immediate relation to them, and to which all thought as a means is directed. But this only happens insofar as the object is *given* [*gegeben*] to us...' (Kant 1900, IV A19/III B33, my emphasis; Heidegger 1977, GA2, p. 23).

33 Hegel 1807, pp. 118-119, §187. As Heidegger writes (of the hint, which has a similar economy to that of the threat): 'Hints only remain hints when thinking does not twist them into definitive statements and thereby come to a standstill. Hints are only hints as long as thinking follows their implications while meditating on them' (1977, GA10, p. 188).

subject), Macbeth-the-man is not actually a threat—for the end, τέλος (threatening, in this case, murder), is not yet present, but is rather absent in, ἐν, his presence.³⁴

But an actual threat is one in which the end is inseparable from the object or subject, so that the deed is done in the doing, ἐντελέχεια. Then, on the one hand, the deed is necessarily implied, when it is continuously present in the object: Macbeth's dagger is already a threat insofar as it has the form and matter, μορφή and ὕλη, of what is actually capable of doing the deed, of being the origin and cause, ἀρχή and αἰτία, of murder, and coming to presence, ἐν-έργεια, in the work of killing. And on the other hand, in threatening, Macbeth has threatened—which is an event, if it is one, that comes to presence in the same time, but with a difference in aspect.

The question then, becomes neither just whether the actual threat is prior to the potential one or the potential is prior to the actual, nor merely whether the necessity of an actual threat is greater—and so in need of more caution, fear, action—or less, lower or higher, than a potential or possible threat; rather, it is a question of the origin of both.³⁵ For how can a threat be both potential and actual? How can it come to presence as one of those things that possibly threatens or necessarily does so? Or cannot do so—and thus, remains unthreatening, or an impossible threat?

Kant provides a clue: 'we first judge something problematically, then take its truth assertorically, and finally claim it as inseparably united with understanding, that is, as necessary and apodictic'.³⁶ In other words, before a threat is possible or necessary, it is problematic. Or, prior to the potential or actual threat lies the problem of the threat. Then being a threat, one of those things that threatens, that presents itself as threatening, whether continuously or not—all this is suspended by the problematic threat (which is always also the threat of the problem). And if Macbeth's threat is a problem, it is because we cannot yet determine that it *must* be one, necessarily an actual threat (or unnecessarily), nor even that it *may* be one, possibly a potential threat (or privatively, that it cannot be one, or that it is impossible for it to threaten)—we can only say that it *might* be one, which is problematic. Thus, the way in which the horror follows, ἀκολουθεῖν, from the threat, 'which now suits with it', problematizes what is neither apodiction nor assertion, or what cannot yet be apodicted or asserted.

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34 Aristotle 1957, 1048b18-36.

35 Aristotle 1957, 1049b4-10; Heidegger 1977, GA2, p. 38.

36 Kant 1900, IV:A76/III:B101; Haas 2015c.

Fourth, the threat is categorical. In other words, if there is a threat, it is particular, not just a general or generalizable one. And if it is determined to be really threatening, it is only insofar as it submits (or has always already submitted) to real categories—not just imaginary or ideal forms of thought. Macbeth's threat, if it is one of those things that threatens (and so has being and unity, time and aspect), has its specific quality and quantity, etc.—as well as its way of being problematic, how it (intentionally or not) suspends any determination of its truth or falsity, reality or unreality—which is presumably why it is so suspenseful.

But this is the problem—or more precisely, the problem is that which suspends the categories of the threat; just as the suspension problematizes any attempt to determine it categorically (*a priori* or not), to identify it as a threat, differentiate it from other actions, delimit its quality and quantity, define its essence, demarcate its place, even describe the experience of such an event. For it would be difficult to categorize something (like a threat) that does not come to presence, that—if it is truly threatening—resists presenting itself as being one. In other words, if the categorization of the threat depends on the presentation of the threat—or alternatively, if the threat only comes to presence, if it submits to the category of the threatening, if it may be determined as constituting a threat—and if the threat is only threatening if it refuses to come to presence *qua* threat (while refusing to simply remain absent, the absence of the threat or a non-threat), then the task of categorizing the threat might have to be suspended as well. And so the problem might be how to categorize that which is neither an actual threat, nor a potential one, neither necessarily threatening, nor open to a determination of that and how, *da und wie*, it could possibly threaten—or how to think a threat that cannot even be one. Or, if threat must come to presence as subject to categorization, that is, have a quality and quantity, essence and place, etc.—the problem of the threat is precisely that it resists the present. And so, it suspends itself before us as not yet necessarily threatening, nor even possibly—which means it cannot be categorized. Or, if it submits to categorical presentation, it is no longer threatening; just as, if it presents itself as a potentially or actually, possibly or necessarily, solvable problem (or one that cannot be solved, an impossible or insoluble one), then its threat is no longer a problem; just as, if it breaks the suspense, no longer takes 'the present horror from the time'—from the non-present, not now, but then, a future (or past) to come—then it is no longer a threat.

So the time of the threat comes to presence in relation to absence, and in terms of past, present and future. On the one hand, the threat comes from the future, from somewhere, anywhere, that is not here,

some event or end that has not yet come to be; and so remaining in non-being is not, not present, absent—but being absent is a way of being, just as $\mu\eta\ \delta\upsilon\nu$ is a mode of $\tau\omicron\ \delta\upsilon\nu$, or 'non-being *is* non-being', just as what *is not yet* present *is* not yet present, or what is not here is *qua* not here, or just as what is absent is present as absent; or being what threatens to come is threatening, and *not threatening* to come also *threatens* not to come.³⁷ For

[the] being present of something[—]absence is constitutive for this presence, absence in the sense of deficiency, lack. This being-there in the sense of lack is completely its own and positive. If I say of someone: "I miss him very much, [he has not yet come]", I precisely do not mean to say that he is not there, but express a *quite particular way that he is there for me*.³⁸

On the other hand, the threat comes from the past, from what has happened, insofar as it can come again, repeat itself (whether a sudden event like 9/11 or Hiroshima, or an extended one like an ice age or war or the rise of Fascism). Thus the time of the threat, insofar as it remains not-now, comes to presence as not present, which is how it can come to be, and take the present horror from the time, which now suits with it, while I threat (whether in the same way or not).

But the threat does not only have time—like any act, any deed or word, thought or thing, anything that is and is one, in anyway whatsoever—it also has aspect, that is, the way the threat threatens, whether completely or incompletely, simply or repeatedly or continuously (which precisely cannot be reduced to a matter of time). Then if Macbeth's threat continues to takes the horror from the time, it is because he gives it to aspect, to the heat of deeds. And the time of the threat illuminates itself in language and discourse: 'to threaten', like any verb, *Zeitwort*, even the verb 'to be' and 'to be one' (from whence the substantive is derived, being or unity), is tensed. But threatening has tenses, *Zeitstufen*, and aspects, *Aktionsarten*.³⁹ And aspect is the other How of the threat, the other way in which it is and is one; it is neither a view, nor perspective on the threat, neither our position relative to a threat, nor the side or face it shows us—on the contrary,

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37 Aristotle 1957, 1003b10; 1019b6.

38 Heidegger 1977, *GA18*, p. 311; *GA14*, pp. 17-18.

39 Heidegger 1977, *GA2*, §68; Herbig 1896, 164-9; Comrie 1976, pp. 1-10. Additionally, not only is aspect irreducible to time, it cannot be confused with voice (active, passive, middle) or mood (indicative, subjunctive, optative): mood or 'modality differs from tense and aspect in that it does not refer directly to any characteristic of the event, but simply to the status of the proposition' (Palmer 2001, p. 1).

the aspect of threat is its way of being, whether at this time or that, now or then, always or never. So irreducible to tense, at one and the same time, I threaten (or threat) and I am threatening; I threatened and I was threatening, I shall threaten and I shall have threatened. And the difference between these ways of threatening (or being a threat, one of those things that threatens or is threatened) is not just temporal—it is an aspectual difference.

If the threat then, takes its horror from time (past-present-future, or present/non-present, or some combination or permutation thereof), it also takes it from aspect (simple-repeated-continuous, or complete/incomplete). So the horror of the threat shows itself to be not just temporal, but also aspectual, at least if it is one, that is, has its being and unity. Thus, the horror of the threat is a metaphysical horror (perhaps even somehow illuminating the horror of metaphysics itself), one which takes its horror from the time and aspect, from the being and unity, of the threat.

And yet, if the threat is not just accidental, but true, and if its truth lies in the very suspension of the act of threatening, which problematizes the possibility of actual and potential threats, as much as the necessity of determine the presence of a threat—what is so horrifying?

The Threat of Implication

In fact, the horror of the threat is that there is no threat, and so no horror. Or more precisely, insofar as the threat is not present, it horrifies (not just us, but the history of thought, the history of philosophy as metaphysics from the Greeks to us). The horror of the threat is the horror of metaphysics, which is the horror of what resists coming to presence, which is not to say that it merely remains in absence—rather, the horror is a horror of what is neither present nor absent, but (*tertium datur*) has always only been implied, an implication, ἀκολουθεῖν.⁴⁰

And what is that—implication? It is how the threat is and is one. For the threat neither comes to presence as threatening, nor remains in absence. In this way, the threat is neither here nor there; it is not present anywhere, which is not simply to say that it is absent—rather, it is implied.

Just one example (from Heraclitus): ἥθος ἀνθρώπων δαίμων.⁴¹ That is: 'a person's character *is* his divinity'.⁴² Or 'the (familiar) abode for humans

40 Plato 1903, *Republic*, 332d, 398d, 400c, 400e, 451d, 455a, 474c, 490c, 533a, etc.

41 Diels 1960, B119; see, Kahn 2003, p. XII n11.

42 McKirahn 1996, p. 40; my emphasis. Kahn 1979, p. 81.

is the opening for the presencing of the (un-familiar) god'.⁴³ But the word 'is' is not in the original—being is not present, or absent; it is implied, an implication, that which neither comes to presence, nor simply remains in absence. And what is implied can be neither determined as appearing in accordance with the categories, nor asserted to be what does not appear; it is neither an action nor inaction, neither event nor a non-event, neither something nor nothing, neither here nor there, now nor then, never nor always; it is neither a threat nor a non-threat—at least insofar as it is implied. For implication suspends presence and absence, which is why Heraclitus simply states the problem: 'human character divine'. And if 'to be' does not mean 'to be present,' but 'to be implied'—insofar as being is implying, an implication—it is perhaps no wonder that 'to threaten' does not mean 'to come to presence as a possible or necessary threat' or 'to present the threat' (nor to keep the threat hidden, secret, absent, and so 'to present the absence of a threat' or 'to assert the impossibility of presenting the threat'); rather, it means 'to be an implied threat' or 'to imply that the threat suspends the very problem of the threat'.⁴⁴

And that is the horror. Suspension of presence and absence. Suspension of action, and of the act of threatening. A problem prior to possibility and impossibility, necessity and contingency. One that implies being and unity, time and aspect, in the threat; and one that implicates them in the horror. So that the implied threat implies the threat of implication—and that is what is truly horrifying.

But then, the horror is not just a metaphysical one—for implication threatens me and my family, friends and colleagues, fellow citizens and states, even the world. It threatens my claim to self-presence, my power to be present to myself, and so suspends my right to be my own law, to my body and mind, my mastery over thoughts and things. But implication not only threatens the possibility or necessity of being free; it also problematizes my relation to others. For even if I do not present myself as the enslaver of slaves, the appropriator of their words and works, the thief of their bodies and minds, the doer of the deed (whether good or bad, the slaughterer of the slaughtered or lover of the beloved), I cannot simply claim that I was absent, at least insofar as I am implicated thereby.

And so death too, is threatened—for it might no longer be possible to reduce the dead to what is gone, or to what remains present,

43 Heidegger 1977, *GA9*, p. 356; my emphasis.

44 It is easy enough to multiply the examples (Haas 2017): "'Beauty is truth, truth [?] beauty'" (Keats 1814-1891, 3.2). Or, Я человек больной... Я злой человек (Dostoyevski 1864, p. 1); that is, 'I sick man...I wicked man'.

constantly or not, like a spirit or ghostly presence. It rather seems that the dead (perhaps like the living) are merely implied, which is how they can be implicated in our lives, even how they survive historically. Then like life, death is a way of being one, temporally and aspectually—neither just present or absent, here or there—but implied. And death would not simply be implicated in how we are and are one, in our deaths and dying (as well as lives and living, births and birthings), but just as much in our killing and being killed.

But if the very subjectivity of the subject, the presence and absence of the self to the self, is threatened—this would also seem to threaten the threat, our ability to make threats and counter-threats. The problem then, might be not only in our desire and need to assign praise and blame, to determine innocence or guilt, responsibility and irresponsibility; but just as much in how universal right and reason is assumed to be present in particular interest and will, in my actions and inactions, intentionally or not. In other words, if the presence of universal right cannot be assumed (for example, honesty)—not because it is not right, but because it is not present. But then the age-old problem of universality in general, as well as the threat of subjectivism and relativism (and the correspondence or correlation of universal and particular, transcendental and empirical), would seem to be suspended by the way in which they implied one another, and so are implicated in how each is one, which may far more be what we mean by justice.

And so, the relation of self and other, both the selfness of the self and the otherness of the other—this too might be under threat. For not only am I not present to myself, or absent from myself, I am not myself or another; nor are others other, or present to themselves, or to me, or some combination or permutation thereof. Rather, implicated by one another, we imply each other, which is perhaps what is so suspenseful about others, and ourselves.

But then, responsibility would be threatened as well—for implication suspends the presence and absence of the ground of autonomy and heteronomy, accountability and unaccountability. And even if we take responsibility for what we take to be our actions, or assign responsibility to those who do (or do not do) deeds, or determine co-responsibility (for a response or non-response), we may not be able to exclude (or simply include) those who are implicated thereby. Then the threat to suspend responsibility might be horrifying, but it could also be the beginning of thinking it as a problem.

And so, also intention, intent, even intentionality as a whole—this too would be threatened by implication, by the suspension of presence (and absence) of self from itself, and so of knowledge and

self-knowledge as well. Or rather, if consciousness is consciousness of something, an intended object; then we are not conscious of what is present in consciousness, but only of what (and how) it is implied therein. In this way, knowing and doing, speaking and acting, whether threatening or not—these are problematic, insofar as action itself (intentional or not) presupposes the presence or absence of an actor, or some combination thereof. And the problem lies not only in how I am implicated in my act, and it in me, but in the way I cannot be simply present therefore. Then knowledge is not given or present in me, so I cannot give or present it to another, and take responsibility for the success or failure of my actions—although this is not to say that I remain (more or less) ignorant or irresponsible.

And not just responsibility and intention—the good itself becomes a problem, when it can no longer simply be found present in good acts, when it no longer merely comes to presence in a good will. For then the possibility of the good itself, any good (and bad or evil)—much less any necessary good—would seem problematic. And the suspension of goodness might threaten the very idea of good laws and principles, rights and duties, habits and values, words and deeds, governing and being governed. But suspending the necessity of the *is*, and the possibility of the *ought*—this does not threaten to end of any good beyond being; rather, it marks the beginning of a good that is irreducible to presence and absence, to this real good here and that ideal one there. For it is the beginning of thinking of how the idea of the good is implicated in good acts, how the particular good deed implies the problem of the universality of the good.

But not only for me—that is, the good, intentionality, responsibility, subjectivity and otherness, death and horror—all this threatens the potentiality and actuality of those nearest to me, my family and friends, colleagues and fellow citizens. And the problem lies in how friends are implicated in the family, or the family in friends, or colleagues and fellow citizens in both, and vice versa. For the family is supposed to be present to (possibly or necessarily) provide for the child's welfare, but its power is compromised by the presence of another—which not only threatens the family's identity, but implicates others in its actions, as well as in the (necessary or possible) unification of the unit. In other words, if the family is one, if friends are friends, and enemies enemies, if fellow citizens are fellows, and colleagues in league (being civil in civil society); then not only are being and unity, time and aspect, implicated thereby—but so too, those who are not family or friends or enemies or fellow citizens. Then the family unit becomes—not simply disunified—but a problem, and friendship and citizenship become problematic,

perhaps as much as the need or desire to determine the identity of the enemy, or detect the presence of the foreign.

And if all this—individuals and families, friends and citizens—is supposed to be possible thanks to the state, and the relations of state-to-state, war and peace, nature and culture, which is itself made possible by the world, then this too is under threat. For the world is not just present in us, in our families and friends and enemies, citizens and states—nor merely absent therefrom—rather, it is implied (as is the being of its unity and unity of its being, its historical time and its aspect of survival). In this way, the world is implicated in the suspension of the possibility or necessity of thinking the problem of how so, and the horror thereof. And it is the implications of this world, of this world of implications, that threatens to remain 'still *unthought*'.⁴⁵

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⁴⁵ Hegel 1986, VII, §359.