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War in the Name of Peace.

Boštjan Marko Turk

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Revisiting the legacy of 1968

In *War in the Name of Peace: The '68 Revolution and the Disintegration of the West*, Boštjan Marko Turk delivers a wide-ranging cultural and philosophical examination of the post-1968 Western world. The title's apparent paradox -waging "war in the name of peace"- encapsulates his argument that the utopian, pacifist rhetoric of the 1968 student revolutions ultimately unleashed destructive forces that eroded the moral, cultural, and institutional cohesion of Western civilization. He contends that the utopian ideals of the student movements, grounded in notions of liberation and peace, inadvertently contributed to the moral and institutional fragmentation of the West (Turk, 2025, p. 38). The book belongs to a long lineage of European self-reflection that stretches from Alexis de Tocqueville to Oswald Spengler and Allan Bloom. Yet Turk's intervention is neither nostalgic lamentation nor partisan polemic. It is, rather, a deeply learned, often provocative meditation on the long-term cultural consequences of what he calls "the spiritual mutation of the West." The author's blend of philological insight, literary reference, and political analysis makes the book both intellectually ambitious and stylistically rich, though at times, densely argued.

Historical context and intellectual ambition

Turk situates the upheavals of 1968 not as isolated student protests, but as a culmination of trends rooted in Enlightenment rationalism, Marxist utopianism, and psychoanalytic liberationism. He traces how movements originally devoted to freedom from authority evolved into a sustained assault on the very moral and epistemological foundations of the West.

This reading situates Turk's work alongside conservative European thinkers though he retains an independent voice, informed by his Central European humanist tradition. His analysis recalls Roger Scruton's critique of the New Left in *Fools, Frauds and Firebrands* (2015) but diverges through its Central European humanism (Brague, 2019). His critical perspective is shaped not by ideological dogma but by a literary scholar's sensitivity to the language and symbolism through which historical transformations occur.

The book's intellectual ambition is impressive: Turk draws on an array of sources — from Rousseau, Freud, and Marcuse to Camus, Kundera, and Kołakowski — to illustrate how the pursuit of limitless emancipation gradually displaced the older European synthesis of faith, reason, and civic virtue.

The argument: from liberation to disintegration

At the heart of Turk's argument lies a paradox: the "revolution of freedom" became an ideology of negation. By claiming

to free the individual from all forms of external constraint - moral, religious, national, or familial - the 1968 generation, in his view, replaced responsibility with desire and virtue with self-expression. In rejecting all external forms of authority -religious, moral, or national- post-1968 thought undermined the very conditions of shared meaning (Turk, 2025, p.28, 58, 74, 116, 145).

Turk interprets this trajectory as an "inner war" waged within Western consciousness: a struggle between the inherited moral order and a new anthropology founded on self-creation. In this sense, the title's "war in the name of peace" refers to the cultural conflicts that arise when peace is defined as the absence of limits rather than the presence of harmony.

His analysis extends to the fields of education, art, and sexuality. The universities of the late twentieth century, he argues, abandoned their formative vocation and became laboratories of permanent critique. The arts, once concerned with beauty and transcendence, embraced subversion as an end in itself. Even the language of rights and tolerance, he contends, became detached from any metaphysical or ethical grounding, leading to what he calls "moral entropy."

Literary and philosophical dimensions

One of the book's most distinctive features is its literary range. Turk reads novels and philosophical texts as parallel witness to the Western condition. His interpretation of Albert Camus's *The Rebel* serves as a key point of reference: Camus had already warned that revolutions founded on absolute innocence risk creating new tyrannies. Turk extends this warning to 1968, suggesting that the "innocence of liberation" paved the way for new conformities - ideological rather than political.

Equally compelling is his engagement with Central European literature, notably the works of Milan Kundera, Czesław Miłosz, and Václav Havel. His readings of Albert Camus's *The Rebel* (1951) and Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1984) illuminate how modern literature registers the existential consequences of moral relativism (Camus 1951; Kundera 1984). For Turk, these authors articulate a specifically European consciousness of moral finitude - a consciousness suppressed, he argues, by the Western cult of self-creation. Their testimony lends his book an existential depth that distinguishes it from more narrowly political analyses of cultural decline.

The Western crisis and its contemporary resonance

While *War in the Name of Peace* is steeped in intellectual history, its implications are sharply contemporary. Turk traces a direct line from the revolutionary ethos of 1968 to current debates on identity politics, relativism, and the erosion of Western self-confidence. He suggests that the "cancel culture" of the twenty-first century represents not a break but a continuation of the '68 mentality: the replacement of dialogue with moral accusation, and of reasoned disagreement with ideological orthodoxy. The contemporary loss of confidence in Western civilization, he suggests, continues the same cycle of self-denial and Metaphysical nihilism that began in the late twentieth century (Turk, 2025, p. 103).

Yet Turk is not a fatalist. He does not predict the inevitable demise of the West but calls for a reawakening of its “spiritual grammar.” He sees in the European humanist tradition -from Homer to Erasmus to Goethe- the resources for renewal. This gives the book a constructive, even hopeful, dimension: the recognition that the very critique of decline is itself an act of cultural fidelity.

Style and structure

The prose of *War in the Name of Peace* reflects Turk’s background as both philologist and essayist. It combines scholarly rigour with aphoristic insight, moving easily from conceptual argument to literary reflection. The structure, divided into thematic rather than chronological chapters, encourages associative reading: each section stands as a self-contained essay on a particular aspect of Western disintegration - be it education, art, politics, or morality. Turk’s prose blends philological rigour with aphoristic intensity. His method recalls the moral essays of Leszek Kołakowski in *Modernity on Endless Trial* (1990).

At times, the density of references and the breadth of historical scope may challenge readers unfamiliar with European intellectual history. However, this erudition is integral to Turk’s method: he writes as a custodian of a tradition whose survival depends on remembering its language and sources.

Critical reflections

From a critical perspective, some readers may find Turk’s portrayal of 1968 overly monolithic. The protests and intellectual movements of that era were diverse and often internally contradictory. To reduce them to a single anti-Western impulse risk overlooking their democratic and human-rights dimensions. Similarly, while Turk convincingly analyses cultural fragmentation, his account of socio-economic forces -technology, globalisation, capitalism- remains secondary.

Nonetheless, these are less flaws than deliberate choices. Turk writes not as a sociologist but as a moral philosopher in the classical sense. His focus is not on material causation but on the spiritual meaning of Western decline. Even when one disagrees with his interpretation, the seriousness of his moral concern commands respect. As Scruton (2015, p. 88) observed, societies cannot survive on critique alone; they must also believe in what is worth conserving. Turk’s book reaffirms that conviction.

The contribution: a central European humanist voice

Perhaps the most valuable contribution of *War in the Name of Peace* lies in its Central European perspective. Coming from a region that experienced both totalitarian oppression and post-Communist disillusionment, Turk offers an intellectual bridge between Western liberal democracies and the deeper moral traditions of Europe. He reminds his readers that the defence of freedom requires not perpetual rebellion but cultivation - the slow, deliberate preservation of civilisation’s moral core.

In doing so, Turk adds his voice to a growing conversation about the future of the West. His work dialogues not only with conservative thought but also with the broader European humanist canon. In its best passages, the book reads as a call to recover

the dignity of thought in an age of noise. His call for a renewed European conscience recalls Václav Havel’s insistence that politics must again become “the expression of the human spirit” (Havel, 1985).

Conclusion: a civilization’s self-examination

Boštjan Marko Turk’s *War in the Name of Peace* is a demanding, erudite, and morally serious work. It invites readers to reconsider one of the defining myths of modern Europe - that liberation automatically produces enlightenment. Turk’s answer is unsettling but timely: freedom without truth becomes self-destructive; peace pursued without justice becomes another form of war.

For scholars of modern European thought, cultural studies, or intellectual history, this book offers a powerful synthesis of literature and philosophy. For the general reader, it serves as an eloquent reminder that ideas have consequences, and that the health of civilisation depends as much on moral imagination as on political institutions.

Despite occasional overstatement, *War in the Name of Peace* succeeds as both diagnosis and warning. Turk’s erudition, his literary sensibility, and his moral urgency make the book a significant contribution to the continuing debate on the fate of Western culture.

For students of European thought, it stands alongside Allan Bloom’s *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987) as a major reflection on cultural decay and renewal.

Classical reflections on peace and human nature

Turk’s meditation on the paradox of peace through conflict finds profound antecedents in the Greek intellectual tradition. From Homer’s *Iliad*, where war becomes a theatre of both human folly and divine justice, to Aeschylus’ *Eumenides*, which transforms vengeance into civic justice, the Greeks confronted the moral dialectic between strife and order that underlies all civilizations. Thucydides’ sober realism -that “war is a violent teacher” (*History of the Peloponnesian War*, III.82)- resonates with Turk’s insight that utopian revolutions often unleash new forms of domination.

Plato, in the *Republic*, warned that peace cannot endure without harmony in the soul and justice in the polis. Likewise, Aristophanes’ comedy *Lysistrata* framed peace as a domestic and moral act, a restoration of measure (*sōphrosynē*) against hubris. These classical voices anticipated Turk’s conviction that true peace is never merely the cessation of conflict but the re-establishment of moral proportion.

In recalling this lineage, *War in the Name of Peace* situates modern cultural crisis within an ancient continuum - a reminder that the fate of civilization depends, as it did for the Greeks, on the reconciliation of freedom with order, eros with logos, and power with justice.

War in the name of peace and the human response to fanatical power

From antiquity to the present, wars have repeatedly been justified in the name of peace, order, or civilization. The Athen-

ian destruction of Melos, recorded by Thucydides, already exposed the cynical logic of power when the Athenians declared that “the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must” (*History of the Peloponnesian War*, V. 89). Similar patterns recur through history: the European conquest of the Americas under the banner of Christianisation, the Ottoman subjugation of Byzantium in the name of divine destiny, and today’s nationalist or religious ventures that cloak ambition in moral language. Beneath such rhetoric lies what Immanuel Kant later called the “crooked timber of humanity” — the tendency of reason to serve self-interest unless restrained by moral law (*Idea for a Universal History*, 1784).

The question is therefore perennial: how can humanity resist leaders who invoke transcendent ideals to pursue vanity and domination? The answer must begin not in power but in conscience. Hannah Arendt’s analysis of totalitarianism reminds us that evil often arises from the “banality” of unthinking obedience (Arendt, in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 1963) The first act of resistance is thus the recovery of thought - the courage to judge rather than conform. When individuals refuse the enchantment of collective myths, fanaticism loses its psychological soil.

Yet reflection alone is insufficient. History also demands institutions that convert moral insight into durable peace. Kant’s *Perpetual Peace* (1795) proposed that republics bound by law, commerce, and open communication could replace the state of nature among nations. The creation of international law and organizations -from the League of Nations to the United Nations- represents imperfect but necessary attempts to realize that vision. Their weakness lies not in the ideals themselves but in the reluctance of states to subordinate pride to justice.

A rational humanity must therefore seek what Martin Luther King Jr. called “peace not merely the absence of war but the presence of justice.” Progress requires *peaceful rivalry* — the competition of minds, not armies, of excellence, not annihilation. To rise against atrocities is to affirm that dignity is universal, and that no empire, ideology, or faith may claim monopoly on truth. Only when peoples learn to contest each other through dialogue and creativity rather than through conquest will “war in the name of peace” finally give way to peace in the name of humanity.

As recent scholarships remind us, cultural understanding itself can become an instrument of peace. Liritzis (2024), in his article “Peace through Archaeology and Cultural Heritage” (HERANÇA, Vol. 2), argues that the preservation and interpretation of the human past foster mutual respect among peoples and counters the narratives of exclusion that fuel conflict. His insight complements Turk’s thesis: that only by recovering the moral and historical depth of civilization can humanity overcome the cycle of violence perpetuated in the name of peace.

Epilogue

Can peace be institutionalized? Beyond words to transformation

A global movement or an Institute of Peace is necessary, but not sufficient. Institutions are vessels; their value depends on the spirit that animates them. Without moral conviction, empathy, and the will to self-limitation, even the noblest peace organization risks becoming a monument to good intentions — a rhetoric of virtue masking the inertia of power.

Peace cannot be enforced; it must be *educated, cultivated, and interiorized*. The ancient Greeks already understood this. For Plato, justice in the *polis* begins with harmony in the soul. For Aristotle, peace arises not from laws alone but from the habituation of virtue. In modern times, Kant’s *Perpetual Peace* and Martin Luther King Jr.’s “presence of justice” reminds us that treaties and resolutions are only scaffolds. The true architecture of peace is moral.

A practical difference begins when peace is treated not as an ideology, but as a *discipline of empathy*. This means:

- **Education for consciousness**, not propaganda - cultivating critical thought and moral imagination from childhood.
- **Accountability in leadership**, where the ethics of responsibility outweigh national ego or profit.
- **Cultural memory and shared heritage**, used not as prideful identity but as a bridge of recognition - archaeology, art, and science as instruments of mutual respect.
- **Economic conversion**, reimagining progress not as accumulation but as human flourishing.

War in the name of peace will only end when peace itself ceases to be a *name*. It must become a practice, enacted daily in how societies honour truth, dignity, and restraint. Institutions can guide and support this, but the transformation is ultimately interior: a civilizational psychoanalysis leading to collective catharsis.

In the end, peace will not come from systems alone, but from a new anthropology; a redefinition of what it means to be human, and this is integrated into a new Educational system a re-renaissance of future education.

In the contemporary quest for peace, stability, and human flourishing, it is increasingly clear that systemic solutions -policies, governments, technologies- alone are insufficient. True transformation requires a deeper change: a **rethinking of what it means to be human**, a profound shift in our anthropology. At the core of this shift lies **education**, not as a transactional process of imparting skills or knowledge, but as a holistic cultivation of the human being in all dimensions—intellectual, moral, aesthetic, and civic.

This vision calls for a **new renaissance of education**, one that draws inspiration from the classical education systems of **ancient Greece** yet reinterpreted for the contemporary world. In classical Greece, education was **paideia**: a formation of the whole person, a holistic journey that aimed to cultivate virtue, wisdom, and the capacity for critical thought. Education was not only about learning facts; it was about learning **how to live well**, how to participate meaningfully in civic life, and how to develop the human spirit.

The philosophical foundation of classical education

Ancient Greek philosophers such as **Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle** emphasized that knowledge alone is insufficient if it is not integrated with ethical and moral discernment. Socratic dialogue encouraged self-examination, critical questioning, and ethical reasoning. Plato’s Academy and Aristotle’s Lyceum were spaces not just for intellectual learning but for shaping the character of the learner, cultivating virtues such as justice, courage, temperance, and wisdom.

Education, in this broad spectrum, is **rounded**:

1. **Intellectual development**: Logic, rhetoric, mathematics, sciences, philosophy—training the mind to think critically and creatively.

2. **Moral and ethical formation:** Cultivating virtues that guide actions, choices, and relationships with others.
3. **Aesthetic sensibility:** Engagement with arts, music, and literature to cultivate empathy, imagination, and emotional intelligence.
4. **Physical and civic education:** Strengthening the body, understanding civic responsibility, and learning to participate meaningfully in community life.

This holistic approach recognizes that **human beings are more than their productivity or knowledge: they are moral, social, and creative agents.** By embedding such principles into modern educational systems, we can create a **re-renaissance of learning:** a revival that honours both human dignity and the pursuit of wisdom, integrating classical insights with contemporary knowledge.

Towards a new renaissance in education that fosters peace

A modern re-renaissance in education would:

- **Redefine success** beyond grades and economic outcomes, emphasizing character, empathy, and wisdom.
- **Encourage interdisciplinary learning**, blending humanities, sciences, arts, and civic engagement to foster rounded citizens.
- **Promote dialogue and reflection** over rote memorization, echoing the Socratic method of questioning and critical thinking.
- **Emphasize respect for human life**, diversity, and the interdependence of communities, creating citizens capable of contributing to a just and peaceful world.

A modern re-renaissance in education must go beyond grades, careers, and economic success. It must **cultivate character, wisdom, empathy, and civic virtue**, blending humanities, sciences, arts, and ethical reflection to form truly rounded human beings. Education should promote dialogue over memorization, reason over propaganda, and respect for life, diversity, and community interdependence.

History shows that the mere invocation of peace cannot guarantee its reality. Wars have been waged in its name, and empires have imposed arbitrary authority over peoples with millennia of cultivated culture and civic life. In regions such as the Ionian coast of Anatolia, home to Greek civilization for thousands of years, **historical identity and heritage cannot be erased by coercion.** Respect for international law and human rights demands, for example, that those who occupy these lands **withdraw their claims and, moreover, invite the Greek people to enjoy and preserve their ancestral heritage, honouring centuries of human achievement.** Instead of claiming these lands as the inheritance of their forebears, they should **acknowledge and apologize for the atrocities and imperialistic ambitions of their ancestors**, which went far beyond the bounds of education, culture, and human dignity, having sought to destroy a great and enduring civilization. **Such repentance would serve as a pragmatic affirmation of cultural education, a restoration of international law, and a concrete step toward lasting and practical peace. The opposite is a war or casus belli in the name of peace.**

The wisdom of classical Greek philosophy illuminates the path forward. Aristotle taught that ethical virtue is cultivated through education and habituation; Plato insisted that education must prepare individuals to live lives of reason, virtue, and civic responsibility. Without such formation, no political or

legal system can prevent injustice or the perversion of ideals.

Peace in practice is not simply the absence of conflict. It is justice in action, mutual respect, and shared responsibility. It thrives in communities where dialogue, understanding, and recognition of cultural and historical achievements shape relationships among individuals, nations, and ecosystems. Education is the bridge to this peace, cultivating individuals who can discern justice from domination, empathy from coercion, and knowledge from manipulation.

By embracing the holistic vision of *classical paideia*, grounded in respect for human dignity and cultural inheritance, the new educational renaissance becomes **a safeguard against the misuse of power, a promoter of true harmony, and a catalyst for societies where life, creativity, and wisdom flourish across generations.**

Human perspective: toward a therapeutic civilization

From a human perspective, the persistence of racism, the subordination of human life to economic gain, and the intoxication of imperial ambition reveal not merely political or structural failures, but spiritual and psychological disorders of civilization. These are not problems of policy alone but symptoms of a deeper alienation — the loss of empathy, proportion, and moral imagination.

Racism thrives where fear replaces understanding; economic exploitation endures where human worth is reduced to utility; and **imperialism** repeats itself when the will to dominate **masks insecurity and collective narcissism.** In this sense, modern humanity suffers from what might be called a **pathology of power.**

If so, the remedy cannot be purely institutional. It demands a kind of **psychoanalysis of civilization**, an honest confrontation with the fears and desires that drive domination. As in the Greek notion of katharsis, societies must pass through recognition and purification, not repression, of their moral failings. Leadership itself requires therapy: not in the clinical sense, but in the recovery of conscience, humility, and empathy as the foundations of decision-making.

Only when the inner world of humanity is healed can outer peace become authentic. Civilization will recover when its leaders (and peoples) learn that power without compassion is madness, and that peace without justice is only the silence before another storm.

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