

# Emotions Make History

## Interview with Luc Ciompi

### On Affect-Logics, Logic of War and Logic of Peace



*Luciano “Luc” Ciompi was born in 1929 in Florence, Italy and grew up in Switzerland. He was a professor of social psychiatry in Bern, and was best known for his research on schizophrenia and for founding the Soteria Bern residential community for people in acute psychotic crises. From the interviewer’s perspective, his most important contribution—one that extends far beyond psychiatry—is the concept of affect-logics.*

*In his book „Emotions Make History“ (2011), co-written with German sociologist Elke Endert, Ciompi examines how feelings or emotions not only shape our personal lives but also influence history. Feelings or emotions affect how people act and why wars break out or peace becomes possible. The book made him well-known far beyond academic circles. In 2025, he received the WinWinno Prize of the International Federation for Mediation for his life’s work.*

*For the interviewer, it is a crucial matter that knowledge of his work be spread, particularly in the context of war and peace.*

This is the first interview of a series of interviews on understanding war and thinking about peace, initiated by Elena Serova -Brüderlin and Thomas Brüderlin (asel, Switzerland). For more information on the project ,see <https://understandwarthinkpeace.substack.com/about>

### ***Part 1: What is affect-logics***

*Elena SB: I wanted to sincerely thank you for finding time for this conversation. Your books deeply impressed me and helped me to better understand the world and I would like to extend my gratitude for this as well. Your concept of affect-logics, I believe, carries enormous communicative power and offers great insights in the context of war and peace. Could you begin by explaining the term “affect-logics”?*

Luc Ciompi: It is my pleasure, and thank you for your interest. Affect-logics is the doctrine of the constant interplay of emotions and cognitions. It results from my long-term endeavour to unify scattered findings across psychoanalysis, psychology, sociology, and neurobiology into a coherent, comprehensible conceptual framework with both practical and theoretical utility. Over time, this integrated viewpoint proved to be a quite effective tool for understanding psychological and social processes—from individual psychology to family and small group dynamics, up to the prevailing affect-cognitive patterns of entire nations.

*Elena SB: What are the roots of affect-logics?*

Luc Ciompi: I am very old, and over the course of such a long life, almost 60 years of professional activity, all sorts of different ideas accumulate. As a practical psychiatrist and researcher, I initially spent many years studying psychoanalysis and thus also the dynamics of emotions. Over time, however, this perspective seemed too one-sided to me, which is why I also trained in systemic group and family therapy. I was also fascinated by the research of the great Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget, which focused not on emotions but on the gradual development of thinking in children.

Finally, in connection with the developmental dynamics of psychosis, I also studied chaos theory and synergetics intensively.<sup>3</sup>

It is also very important that, after my retirement, I was able to work for over a year and a half as a visiting professor at the Konrad Lorenz Institute in Altenberg near Vienna, where I focused on the evolutionary roots of human feelings and thinking.

*Elena SB: There are very diverse roots. Wasn't it incredibly difficult to reconcile all these approaches?*

Luc Ciompi: Indeed, it all caused considerable confusion in my head at first, but this cleared up over time and eventually crystallised into this concept of affect-logics. This was probably mainly because I had a habit from a young age of writing down things that weren't clear to me, which allowed me to examine my thoughts.

*Elena SB: In your books, you memorably refer to this process as “putting into words”.*

Luc Ciompi: Indeed, “putting into words” is a very good expression. When you try to put into words what you initially only vaguely sense, you are forced to clarify your thoughts.

In fact, I wrote all my books with the aim of sharpening my ideas. And that is exactly how the concept of affect-logics came about: from all the ingredients mentioned above, the quintessential insight emerged that affective and cognitive components constantly interact according to certain rules in all our thinking. That is exactly what is meant by the term affect-logics.

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### **The basic concepts**

Elena SB: *Can you explain what you mean by the ambiguous terms ‘affect’ and ‘logics’?*

Luc Ciompi: Both the concept of affect and that of logic serve as typical umbrella terms in affect-logics. “Affect” comes from the Latin *afficere* = to attune, to touch. In the context of affect-logics, I use it as a generic term for a whole range of variably defined and sometimes hardly distinguishable concepts such as emotion, affect, feeling, mood, and emotional state. What all these phenomena have in common is that they are comprehensive physical and mental states of mind, albeit of quite different duration, intensity and level of consciousness. An affect is always something very physical. It therefore encompasses not only overt emotions such as fear, anger, joy or other emotional outbursts, for example in the sense of a so-called affective act in jurisprudence, but also longer-lasting, semi-conscious or completely unconscious emotional states such as constant underlying depression, irritability or anger, for example in the sense of a so-called angry citizen.

And by “logic” in a similarly broad sense, I mean not only strict Aristotelian and mathematical logic, but also all so-called everyday logic, i.e. the way in which we assemble elements of perception or memory that we happen to notice in our everyday lives into a larger “thought structure”.

### **Switching and filtering effects of emotions**

Elena SB: *How do emotions and logic interact in your view?*

Luc Ciompi: A central element of affect-logics is the fact, which can be observed every day and has been proven thousands of times by empirical neurobiological and psychological research, that emotions and cognition in the broad sense mentioned above constantly influence each other: A certain thought or perception, for example a danger, triggers a certain feeling, for example fear, and this in turn influences what I continue to perceive and think. Emotion usually comes first, followed by thinking and reasoning. All emotional states summarised under the term “affect” constantly influence all so-called cognitive functions such as the focus of perception and attention, the storage and mobilisation of information in

memory, combinatorial thinking and decision-making, and thus also the entire logic in the above-mentioned sense. When I am relaxed or happy, I see the beauty of a landscape or the beauty of a person or a face. When I am afraid or angry, perhaps not just momentarily, but perhaps constantly, in the sense of the mentioned angry citizen, then I see none of that, only ugliness or frightening things. And that is exactly what I generally understand by affect-logics, or in particular by a specific logic of anger, fear, love, grief or, in the present context, by a typical “logic of war” or a “logic of peace”.

*Elena SB: Aren't we sometimes completely neutral and emotionless?*

Luc Ciompi: No, a precise analysis shows that thinking and feeling still interact subtly even when we think we are completely emotionless and neutral. Because we are always in some kind of mood, and even relaxation, serenity or indifference are comprehensive psycho-physical states in the sense of the above definition of an affect, with specific switching and filtering effects on all cognitive functions.

It should also be borne in mind that, according to modern trauma research, past emotional experiences, especially traumas, can also profoundly influence our entire thinking and behaviour in the form of so-called “reminiscences” or “resentments”. And contrary to popular belief, emotions themselves play an important dynamic role in science and mathematics. This is because unresolved problems generate feelings of tension and displeasure, while solutions generate feelings of relaxation and pleasure. Such feelings of pleasure are also known as eureka feelings, because the ancient mathematician Archimedes is said to have rushed naked through the streets of Syracuse shouting “eureka” (= I’ve found it!) after discovering the law of buoyancy in a bathtub. Such eureka moments pave the way for new insights and continue to accompany them consciously for some time afterwards, until this repeatedly travelled path gradually becomes a kind of automatic motorway, where the originally intense feelings of pleasure continue, however, to have an unconscious effect.

### **Integrated feel-think-behaviour programmes and the emergence of personal and group-specific affective-cognitive world images**

*Elena SB: Can you explain in more detail how emotions or feelings and logic interact in everyday life?*

Luc Ciompi: Feelings such as joy, fear or anger that we experience in a certain situation, at a certain place or with a certain person are stored in our memory as a functional whole and then function as a kind of integrated feel-think-behaviour programme, in which experiences are stored in a meaningful way for future behaviour in similar situations. Such feel-think-behaviour programmes form, in a sense, the “building blocks of the psyche”. At the same time, they sharpen our perception of future feelings, thoughts and actions of the same kind and weaken it for those of a different kind. Emotions act like glue that connects experiences with similar emotional colouring and suppresses dissimilar ones. The result is emotionally coloured generalisations such as “a wonderful person”, “a horrible country” or “a stupid guy”. This is exactly what is meant by the switching and filtering effect of emotions.

Another important element of affect-logics is the fact that the aforementioned switching and filtering effects of affects on thinking lead over time, along affectively coloured tracks or guard rails, to the emergence of person-specific, but also group- and culture-specific, so-called affective-cognitive world representations (or “Eiigen-worlds”), from which all further events are then judged and categorised. Or, to put it another way: these individual or, as we shall see, collective affective-cognitive world representations act like colored magnifying glasses or filters through which the whole world appears to us in a certain light. This mechanism naturally plays a particularly important role in conflict situations.

**Emotions are energies. Sudden changes in all feelings and thoughts under the influence of critically increasing emotional tensions.**

*Elena SB: You often talk about energies in connection with emotions. What do you mean by that?*

Luc Ciompi: Quite right, and this is also a central, but often strangely overlooked, element of the interactions between feeling and thinking. Emotions or feelings are energies, or more precisely, they correspond to evolutionarily developed patterns of directed energy consumption, roughly in the sense of “towards” or “away from,” which guide and regulate our feelings, thoughts and behaviour in advance in vital situations: we feel fear and flee in dangerous situations, or move joyfully towards a source of pleasure and enjoyment. We fight an intruder in anger, explore a strange environment with curiosity, or mourn a loss. Accordingly, both our cognitive and physical functions adapt to the situation: the heart beats faster or slower, the pupils constrict or dilate, certain muscles tense and others relax, certain areas of the brain are activated and others are deactivated. So-called basic emotions, such as fear, anger and joy, among others, are therefore highly meaningful and, as a result, genetically integrated adaptive responses that have evolved over time. More differentiated emotions are variations, combinations or even culturally overlaid modifications of such basic emotions.

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Another genetically anchored energy-based adaptation is the fact that, just like in other complex systems, rising emotional tensions can completely change how the psychosocial system works when they reach a critical point. Examples of such tipping phenomena, known in chaos theory as bifurcations, range from the sudden reversal of love into hate, from diffuse fear into panic, from normal everyday logic into psychosis or, in the present context, from a logic of peace into a logic of war.

Spectacular bifurcations under the influence of collectively bundled and amplified emotional energies can also be observed in the outbreak of social unrest and revolutions, including the sudden fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989 and the subsequent unstoppable collapse of the entire vast Soviet Empire. Furthermore, the so-called “Arab Spring” of 2009 and, of course, the storming of the Capitol in Washington on 6 January 2021 by Trump supporters. It should be added that emotional energy is by no means merely a metaphor. Rather, it is about very ordinary and also very easily measurable biological energies. For example, as so-called sympathetic and parasympathetic tonus.<sup>4</sup> The function of emotional energies in psychological and social systems can be compared to that of fuel in a car, with the pipes and rods of the engine corresponding to thinking or the formative cognitive functions: both work wonderfully together, but without “fuel” nothing works!

*Elena S.B.: So are emotions, in a way, the causes of psychological and social dynamics?*

Luc Ciompi: No, I wouldn't call them causes, but rather a kind of fuel in a complex structure of affective-cognitive relationships. After all, emotions are themselves consequences, reactions to losses suffered, to aggression, to traumatic or beautiful and pleasurable events. These are not linear causalities, but complex affective-cognitive interactions.

### **Self-similar interactions between emotions and cognition at various individual and collective levels**

*Elena SB: Another term I came across while reading your books is the so-called self-similarity of affective-cognitive interactions at different levels. What do you mean by that?*

Luc Ciompi: What is meant by this is the fact that the described switching and filtering effects of emotions on all cognitive functions, including the effect of critically increasing emotional tensions, can be observed in a very similar way at various individual, micro-social and macro-social levels: in a small marital dispute or a local conflict, as well as in a long family conflict or a major conflict between entire nations. Everywhere, the dominant emotions focus and distort all perception and thinking in fundamentally similar ways, and everywhere, at a critical point of emotional tension, there can be a sudden shift to a completely different way of feeling, thinking and behaving. This is due to the fact that the same algorithms are at work everywhere.

In chaos theory, this phenomenon is called dimension-independent self-similarity or fractality. The patterns are similar on many levels in relationship conflicts between couples, within families or between nations. This principle of structural self-similarity makes it clear that the emotional driving forces behind wars between states are essentially the same as those that lead to escalations between two people.

### **Part 2: What is collective affect-logics?**

*Elena SB: Now we have learned the basic concepts of individual affect-logics through a series of good examples. But aren't there also collective feelings and collective affect-logics?*

Luc Ciompi: For the forefathers of sociology, such as Dürkheim and Simmel, it was self-evident that collective feelings exist, such as collective sympathies and antipathies between certain subgroups of society, and that such collective feelings typically divide and structure social space – for example, into friends and enemies, or into ‘us’ and ‘them’.

Other sociologists, however, including Niklas Luhmann in particular, dispute the existence of collective feelings on the grounds that only individuals, not collectives, can feel anything. I myself, however, take the view (as set out in a detailed analysis of Luhmann’s positions)<sup>5</sup>, that such a view only obscures the view of a whole range of highly important social dynamics. In reality, collective feelings can be easily understood and defined as feelings that spread communicatively and are then shared by a majority or minority of people in a collective of any size. This also makes it clear that the phenomenon of affect-logics is not only found at the individual level, but also, and even with greater clarity, in the social context. The switching and filtering effects of emotions on thinking are the same. The crucial difference is that emotions of the same kind in a social group can be bundled like polarised light in a laser beam and combined into powerful social energies. This is where the danger of amplification and uncontrolled momentum lies. The result can be the emergence of very one-sided and rigid collective affective-cognitive world images, including, for example, racist or extremist “prejudices” in large parts of a particular society or culture.

*Elena SB: How should we imagine the emergence of such affective-cognitive world images?*

Luc Ciompi: The phenomenon of emotional contagion, which is conveyed through a wide variety of linguistic and non-linguistic communication channels, plays a central role here. Feelings such as fear, anger or even enthusiasm can be extremely contagious and spread like a wildfire. Other psychological mechanisms are also very important, such as imitation and pressure to conform, fear of exclusion and/or, especially in authoritarian regimes, fear of massive social disadvantages and sanctions. Striking examples of lightning-fast emotional contagion can be found in mass phenomena such as mass panic or mass enthusiasm, as first systematically described by the French physician and social psychologist Gustave Le Bon in a book that became world-famous at the beginning of the 20th century. Since then, the influence of emotional phenomena has been researched in an increasingly differentiated manner and recognised and utilised, initially primarily in the advertising industry, but more recently also in politics and artificial intelligence.

Collective emotions can also be observed particularly impressively in football stadiums, for example in the form of a so-called Ola (= wave), in which, at the height of collective emotional tension, a wave of raised arms and shouting, triggered by a small group of activists, circles around the entire stadium once or sometimes even several times.

This also leads to the phenomenon of circular interactions between charismatic leaders and the “masses”, which Elke Endert and I analysed in detail in our book “Emotions Make

History”, using the example of Adolf Hitler and the spread of National Socialism in Germany in the 1920s. Hitler was an obscure nobody for a long time and had no idea of his hypnotic talent as a speaker until one evening in Munich, after a political event, a group of people suddenly gathered around him and listened spellbound to his improvised speeches. A few weeks later, after similar events on an ever-larger scale, he was the leader of the local Nazi group, and a few months later its national “Führer”. Leader figures of this kind are at least as much the product and symptom of a particular social situation and era as they are the creators of that situation.

*Elena SB: But there are always people who don't get infected.*

Luc Ciompi: Certainly, and that is also particularly interesting. Relevant studies have shown that emotional contagion only works if there is a certain inner readiness for it in the first place. If such a breeding ground is lacking, the exact opposite of enthusiastic approval can occur, namely disgust and rejection. Social systems of any size have a complex, self-similar structure with a mostly conservative core or mainstream that creates continuity and stability, around which a variety of outsiders, specialists, criminals, psychologically deviant individuals, scientists, artists and lateral thinkers are grouped. These outsiders also have certain functions that preserve the system, for example by serving as deterrent examples from which the mainstream can distance itself and thus consolidate its position. At the same time, they provide a kind of silent reserve of thought and feeling for emergencies, from which alternative approaches can emerge in times of crisis.

*Elena SB: Do you think that if people understand the mechanisms of affect-logics better, it could help them protect themselves emotionally from contagious phenomena?*

Luc Ciompi: Of course, you can't simply withdraw your sympathies and antipathies. However, I find that affect-logics really helps you understand a lot better from a distance. And that means you're not just a victim, but you can understand how one side in a conflict, such as the Israelis and the Palestinians, comes to feel and think the way they do.

*Elena SB: Does that mean the exact opposite, that as an outsider you shouldn't protect yourself from being infected, but perhaps plunge into the emotions or the mechanisms of infection of both sides of the conflict?*

Luc Ciompi: Yes, of course. Certainly. However, “plunge into” is not quite the right expression. But seriously try to understand a different point of view “from the inside”. If I understand both sides, there may be a chance that I can make an impact.

*Elena SB: Now I have another question about collective affect-logics. Can we talk about the topic of swarm intelligence that you describe in your books?*

Luc Ciompi: Yes, certainly, because I also consider the so-called swarm intelligence to be a highly interesting affective-cognitive phenomenon. I have often observed flocks of birds from our cabin in the Valais mountains and seen how a flock of jackdaws works. The cabin is at an altitude of 1,700 metres, and jackdaws usually live at around 3,000 metres, but when the

winds are favourable, they sometimes suddenly descend into the villages and, looking for food, settle somewhere in a field with a few sentinels on the surrounding trees or houses. Sometimes a flock of a thousand jackdaws or more comes to our cabin, and then the ground is almost black with birds pecking and pecking and pecking. If one bird discovers a particularly good source of food, a carcass, or a dead mouse, for example, then the whole flock knows about it in an instant and the entire flock swoops down on this source of food. Suddenly, there is a disturbance, such as an unfamiliar sound. One jackdaw takes flight, others follow, but immediately settle back down if there is no danger. However, if it seems dangerous, all thousand or two thousand birds are gone in an instant. This is swarm intelligence, they infect each other emotionally and cognitively. Such swarm intelligence can also be observed in humans, for example at the train station, when everyone is staring in the same direction, wondering whether the train is finally coming or not, and shifting impatiently from one foot to the other. If the train is delayed, everyone collectively becomes a little annoyed and tense. And when it is suddenly announced that the train is arriving on a different platform, a swarm movement similar to that of the flying jackdaws is organised in a flash. Of course, humans do not function solely as a swarm, but rather as individuals, much more so than most other animals. And their affective and cognitive abilities have, in some cases, far surpassed those of animals. But there are also animal abilities that we do not possess. For example, we are unable to perceive the Earth's magnetism and thus find our way over thousands of kilometres like migratory birds and whales. We also do not perceive infrared rays like bees and do not have acoustic radar like bats. We are indeed something very special with our highly developed cognitive abilities. Nevertheless, our affect-logics and swarm intelligence, which is largely inherited from animals and based on emotional contagion, is highly relevant to our entire behaviour, and in particular to the issue of war and peace.

*...if I understand both sides, there may be a chance that I can make an impact.*

### **Collective peace logic and war logic**

*Elena SB: You spoke of a specific logic of peace and a logic of war. What exactly is that?*

Luc Ciompi: The logic of peace is a relaxed or perhaps even friendly, distanced attitude towards another country or people, which is accompanied by benevolent interest, sympathy, friendly relations and lively cultural and, of course, commercial exchange. In war, on the other hand, all this is reversed, and in some circumstances astonishingly quickly, as in the collective German shift away from a prevailing pacifism in favour of determined bellicism after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

The former potential partner becomes a bitter enemy, and everything they do, say and are is increasingly perceived solely through the prism of this enmity. Fear, anger and hatred become dominant emotions, whose switching and filtering effects colour all perceptions and

thoughts about the opponent in a negative light: everything negative is selectively noticed and reported, everything positive is suppressed. Old resentments are also reactivated and reinforced. One of the worst consequences of this “reevaluation of all values” is the progressive dehumanisation of the opponent, who is perceived less and less as a human being with joys and sorrows, weaknesses and strengths just like mine, and more and more as a kind of inhuman, unfeeling vermin whose disregard, mistreatment and killing are completely legitimate. Typical of the logic of war are also escalating so-called shame-rage spirals, in which frequent existential losses and humiliations initially lead to collective depression, resignation and repressed feelings of shame, which increasingly turn into anger and hatred and can ultimately erupt in horrific acts of terror, triggering similar shame-rage spirals on the other side with violent acts of retaliation, thus driving the escalation ever further.<sup>6</sup>

### **Part 3: Collective affective-cognitive escalation and possibilities for de-escalation in wars and conflicts**

*Elena SB: What you say shows that the findings of affect-logics are also applicable to the problem of war and peace. Can you explain this in more detail using the current conflicts in Ukraine and in Israel / Palestine? Does the perspective of affect-logics perhaps also open up certain possible solutions?*

Luc Ciompi: Before I address this question, I would like to refer to the escalation model developed by the well-known Austrian conflict researcher and mediator Fritz Glasl, with whom I participated in a symposium at the University of Wittenberg years ago and discovered many interesting convergences between our respective ideas and perspectives.<sup>7</sup>

Glasl distinguishes between three main phases of conflict escalation, both on a small and a large social scale, which he further divides into a total of seven sub-stages. Glasl calls the first main phase the win-win phase because the parties to the conflict still talk to each other, albeit increasingly polemically, and hope for a compromise that is acceptable to both sides. This phase is followed by a second main phase characterised by “actions instead of words” and a typical “win-lose” dynamic, in which hope for a compromise is lost and both sides focus solely on their own total victory or the total defeat of their opponent. The final phase, known as the “lose-lose” phase, corresponds to a war at any cost, even at the cost of significant, but hopefully relatively minor, self-harm which drags both parties into the abyss. It was clear to both Glasl and me that each of these main and secondary phases corresponds to a greater or lesser emotional escalation and critical bifurcation in the sense of affect-logics. Glasl also describes a gradual hardening, radicalisation and, at the same time, narrowing of thinking until it finally leads to “total irrationality”. However, I myself prefer to speak of an affect-logics here, albeit an extreme one, because even this “total irrationality” driven by hatred, anger and thirst for revenge does not exclude years of highly rational planning and calculation of highly complex terrorist acts, such as the Twin Tower attack on 9 September 2001 in New York, the Hamas attack on 7 October 2023 in Gaza, or the

murderous Israeli attack on Hezbollah members using sophisticated explosive pagers that had been smuggled in after years of careful planning and preparation.

Such examples in particular clearly demonstrate what is meant by emotional logic: namely, a peculiar mixture of rational logic, which likes to sail under the banner of “legitimate interests” or even “reason,” but in reality is selectively driven by intense underlying feelings such as hatred, anger and fear, the pursuit of power and money, envy, jealousy or even fear of humiliation and loss of face.

*...the logic of peace is a relaxed or perhaps even friendly, distanced attitude towards another country or people.*

Elena SB: *Can you explain this using the current examples you mentioned?*

Luc Ciompi: In both the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the war in Ukraine, the outbreak of massive violence was preceded by a long period of collective mutual escalation, which repeatedly drove emotional tensions to a critical breaking point. In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, this escalation has been going on for over 70 years, interrupted by deceptive hopes of de-escalation, such as in the early days of the so-called Oslo peace process beginning in 1992. This escalation was fuelled by both sides, initially on a verbal level and then also on a factual level, through repeated extreme demands – on the one hand, for example, the claim to the entire “original Jewish homeland” from the sea to the Jordan River, and on the other hand, the demand for the total destruction of the Jewish state. On the practical level, Palestinian terrorist attacks and rocket attacks on the one hand and, on the other, ever new “land grabs” for the establishment of Jewish settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem brought emotions to boiling point. This escalation reached a peak with the major Palestinian attack on 7 October 2023 and the massive war of retaliation and destruction unleashed by the Israelis in Gaza. On both sides, this ongoing escalation largely corresponds to the aforementioned shame-rage spirals, with ever new bifurcations into even higher registers of violence.

Elena SB: *Do you see such a collective emotional escalation in the war in Ukraine?*

Luc Ciompi: Certainly, although perhaps not with the same terrible clarity. For in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the contributions of both sides to the emotional escalation are quite obvious, whereas in Ukraine, they seem much less clear due to starkly different narratives that are strongly influenced by propaganda on both sides. Incidentally, what we commonly call propaganda is nothing more than pure affect-logics, namely the selective positivisation of all one’s own thoughts and actions while simultaneously suppressing everything negative, and the selective negativisation of the opponent to the point of constructing “alternative truths” and criminalising any dissenting opinion.

What is certain, at least, is that the collective emotional relationship between Russia and Ukraine has been significantly strained since at least the Ukrainian declaration of independence in 1991, but in reality even before that, due to events before and during the Second World War, and has gradually deteriorated since 1991. One bone of contention in

particular was the Crimean peninsula, which Khrushchev surprisingly annexed to Ukraine in 1956.

Emotional tensions were then greatly heightened by the anti-Russian political upheaval of the so-called Maidan Revolution of 2013/2014 on the one hand, and Russia's military occupation and political annexation of Crimea in 2014 on the other, as well as by the subsequent demands for Ukraine to join NATO, which were increasingly supported by the West. The question is whether the decision on accession can be left to Ukraine itself – a right that Russia has always denied, while the West has defended it in principle.

However, one does not need to be a so-called Putin sympathiser to understand that the prospect of cruise missiles with nuclear weapons being stationed in nearby Ukraine must have seemed at least as unacceptable to the Russian leadership as, for example, the stationing of Soviet nuclear weapons in Cuba by the USA in 1962 or, more recently, the prospect of an Iranian nuclear bomb for Israel, America and the entire West.

In addition, between 2014 and 2022, civil war-like violence repeatedly flared up in Donbass between pro-Russian and pro-Ukrainian population groups, claiming a total of over 14,000 lives, according to a UN report. Despite all the uncertainties, from the perspective of affect-logs, the seemingly sudden outbreak of the Ukraine war with the Russian attack in February 2022 clearly appears to be a bifurcation at a critical peak of a long-running affective-cognitive escalation process. It is not a given that the parties to the conflict want a peaceful solution at all.

*Elena SB: From your emotion-centered perspective, are there certain possibilities for de-escalation?*

Luc Ciompi: In principle, yes, although the practical possibilities for intervention are undoubtedly limited, even for the most experienced mediators, given that both major conflicts have long since entered the win-lose or even lose-lose phase in Glasl's sense. After all, history shows that even the most seemingly hopeless conflicts find a solution over time—albeit sometimes over a very long period of time.

A spectacular example is the Franco-German reconciliation that began in 1945 after three murderous wars, or the (still somewhat precarious) *détente* in Anglo-French relations after centuries of enmity and rivalry. Even in Switzerland, which is so peaceful today, there was much hostility and war between the various cantons and denominations until the 19th century.

The most important prerequisite for de-escalation is undoubtedly, as Immanuel Kant emphasizes in the preface to his famous treatise "Perpetual Peace," that a genuine peace agreement is only possible on the basis of a sincere mutual desire for peace without ulterior motives. However, such a genuine desire for peace is still largely lacking in both current major conflicts. It cannot be taken for granted that the parties to the conflict even want a peaceful solution.

Sooner or later, however, some of the practical consequences of emotional logic may come to bear. Probably the most important consequence, which has been proven many times on a small scale in mediation and, for example, in psychosis therapy, is that all actions that increase emotional tension should be systematically avoided and, conversely, all actions and measures that reduce tension should be specifically promoted. However, chaos theory has uncovered an interesting but rather unpleasant law in this regard, namely the so-called hysteresis (=delay): Unfortunately, it is not enough to reduce the energetic tension in a complex system only to its current tipping point and then expect a kind of “snapback” to the previous state. Rather, the tension must be reduced considerably further before such a “snapback” can occur. Starting a war is therefore much easier than ending it. For this reason, too, it would certainly be desirable to avoid war as a matter of high priority.

Furthermore, when attempting to mediate in major conflicts, it is important to consider all possible techniques and tricks that have proven successful in smaller contexts, including the systematic observation and reinforcement of positive feelings (such as any remaining traces of understanding, respect, or even sympathy for the other party), the positive reinterpretation of seemingly negative behaviours (e.g., uncovering the concern and commitment behind despair, hatred, and aggression), and the rehumanization of the dehumanized opponent, for example through personal contacts and narratives outside the sphere of conflict. Another small-scale measure that has proven very effective is to foster understanding for the opponent’s situation through (real or virtual) role-playing. The targeted intervention of a powerful and mutually respected or even feared third party, recommended by Niklas Luhmann, who effectively grabs the irreconcilable combatants by the collar and forces them to make peace, is also worth considering in the interests of both parties to the conflict and the general public.

*...it cannot be taken for granted that the parties to the conflict even want a peaceful solution.*

Public acknowledgment of guilt and forgiveness can also contribute significantly to collective emotional de-escalation, as Mandela’s reconciliation commissions in South Africa and Willy Brandt’s kneeling in Warsaw have spectacularly demonstrated.

*Elena SB: You also mentioned the role of charismatic leaders, citing Hitler as a negative example. Can you also mention some positive examples?*

Luc Ciompi: Certainly, just think of Gandhi, Mandela, or the American Founding Fathers, who created the unifying constitution of the United States at the time. These were great historical leaders who, in some cases over centuries, as in America, or at least over decades, as in India and South Africa, changed the feelings and thinking of many people who were once enemies to such an extent that a reasonably peaceful coexistence became possible. Of course there are positive leaders. And in my opinion, Jesus was also such a leader.

*Elena SB: That brings us to the profound topic of religion, which we cannot go into in detail here. However, a quote from an American theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr, comes to my mind:*

*“Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”*

Luc Ciompi: That’s a beautiful saying, a real piece of wisdom! The affective-logical perspective shows us the limits of our thinking, but also brings hope.

Elena SB: *It’s also about the fact that people often don’t see their own limits. Is a balance between humility and hubris possible? Should we dare to push the boundaries of what is possible? Should we try to achieve the seemingly impossible – for example, peace in a deadlocked situation?*

Luc Ciompi: Affect-logics makes the limits of our thinking clear in that it forces us to recognise that we are inevitably prisoners of our affective regulations. This leads to a kind of humility and to the understanding that I am never completely right. On the other hand, however, affect-logics also gives us hope that what has long seemed unchangeable may one day suddenly change in a bifurcation-like manner.

Elena SB: *When you think about future generations, what would you wish for them? What would you like to pass on to them?*

Luc Ciompi: Well, when you talk about the future, the world looks rather bleak now. But when I think back to my youth and my long life, the world was never simply perfect in the past either. In 1944, when I was 15, the terrible Second World War was raging around Switzerland. In the 1960s, there was an acute threat of global nuclear war, and in the 1970s, a global economic crisis. On 11 September 2001, the Twin Towers were attacked in New York. Many wars raged, for example in Sudan, Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, and Yemen, many of which are still not over. After another very severe economic crisis, the global COVID-19 pandemic struck. So the world has never been perfect, and that is why we should put the current global situation into perspective to some extent: Of course, new disasters, wars and other unpleasant things are looming. But we should also remember that humanity and life have prevailed against terrible disasters time and again over millions of years. Life is resilient. There are young people who believe that humanity will disappear in ten years, and they therefore do not want to have children. This profound pessimism worries me. But I think it is completely nonsensical that humanity could simply disappear. Let us think back to the plague and cholera epidemics that repeatedly wiped out up to two-thirds of the population in the Middle Ages – and yet humans, I say this in quotation marks, continued to live happily ever after! I do not believe at all that humans or life can simply disappear like that. We are far too resilient, too versatile, especially in terms of our unique ability to adapt, and we also have other tremendous advantages. All in all, the whole of history and prehistory show that the seemingly impossible can become possible sooner or later. To return to this example, it was completely unthinkable in my youth that Germans and French people could ever truly reconcile and build a new Europe together.

*...the affective-logical perspective shows us the limits of our thinking, but also brings hope.*

*Elena SB: Do you perhaps even have a kind of dream for the future, based on your individual affect-logics, about how the impossible could become possible in the two major conflicts you mentioned?*

Luc Ciompi: Yes, I have dreams for the future like that. At first glance, they may sound completely utopian, but in the long term they seem to me to be far more reasonable and therefore more realistic than all the deceptive hopes for total victory and the total annihilation of the enemy, which in reality can only set in motion new spirals of hatred and rage. Of course, it is incredibly difficult to talk about compromise in the face of daily bombings and ever-increasing suffering and hatred, i.e. to shift from a dominant war logic to peace logic. However, I believe that positive visions of the future are urgently needed, especially in the darkest times, and would therefore like to at least try to provide food for thought by seriously considering a possible peace alongside war, in line with your interview project.

In view of the terrible events of the past two years, the so-called two-state solution — that is, the creation of an autonomous Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza — is once again being increasingly advocated on the international stage in the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. However, despite how desirable such a solution may appear to me in principle, I remain highly sceptical. In the meantime, as a result of the systematic Jewish settlement and fragmentation of the West Bank — now inhabited by nearly 800,000 Jewish settlers in a territory with about three million Palestinians — the territorial situation has changed so drastically that the creation of a viable Palestinian state has in fact become impossible. The call for a two-state solution therefore seems to me primarily a rhetorical exercise serving as an alibi for expressing support for the mistreated Palestinians. Moreover, for reasons also rooted in affect logics, it is hardly conceivable that the religiously motivated, far-right Jewish settlers would relinquish even a single square metre of their illegally appropriated land without a civil war. And given all that has happened in Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem, a peaceful coexistence with Israel will, for the Palestinians as well, surely remain impossible for a long time to come.

And yet, I still hope — in the long term — for a federal, secular-republican Israeli–Palestinian commonwealth encompassing present-day Israel as well as the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, with equal rights for all, supported also by the roughly one million “Arab Israelis” who live in Israel as second-class citizens. Such a vision was already advocated by thinkers of Jewish origin such as Martin Buber, Hannah Arendt, and Albert Einstein.

Mere idle fantasies? Let us recall the Franco-German reconciliation, which, after three cruel wars, seemed utterly unthinkable just eighty years ago — and yet has long since become a matter-of-course reality. In much the same way, the now deeply hostile Semitic brothers, sharing their common ancestor Abraham — Ibrahim — in their ancestral homeland, might one day, both united by the immense suffering they have endured and inflicted, rebuild together all that was destroyed — above all, trust — and gradually transform their land into

a peaceful and prosperous multicultural model state, perhaps not entirely unlike today's Switzerland.

And in Ukraine, my “realistic, affective-logical dream for the future” would be a compromise that, although initially very painful for many of those involved, would ultimately be beneficial for everyone, more or less based on the current status quo, in which Russia would have to renounce the conquest and subjugation of Ukraine, and Ukraine, conversely, would have to renounce joining NATO and reconquering the Donbass and Crimea. Why have I long advocated such a compromise, which is certainly difficult and perhaps not entirely balanced? Because a total victory for one side or the other would in all likelihood be equally catastrophic for all involved: if, for example, the Russians were suddenly to achieve a military breakthrough and conquer the whole of Ukraine, a further bitter escalation between West and East, possibly leading to a nuclear Third World War, would be the almost inevitable consequence. And a very similar escalation would be even more certain if, conversely, Ukraine were to achieve a breakthrough with a real or even seriously threatened recapture of the entire Donbass and Crimea. However, on such a basis, in addition to eliminating a hotbed of war that is highly dangerous for the entire world, an invaluable gain could be the emergence of a peaceful and prosperous multicultural model state in Ukraine, with equal rights for all languages and minorities with important potential for building bridges, stabilising relations and mediating between East and West.

*Elena SB: At the end of this fascinating conversation, I would like to refer once again to your book “Emotions Make History” and warmly recommend it to all readers of this interview. Could you perhaps summarise once again what the essence of “Emotions Make History” is? Do you see your concept of affect-logics as a way of better understanding the world?*

Luc Ciompi: “Emotions Make History” means that not only in the individual sphere but also in the great flow of history, the driving forces behind collective events are emotional in nature. This fact must be central to any attempt to understand or influence events—particularly in relation to war and peace.

*Elena SB: Thank you very much for this informative and exciting conversation you would like to say something at the end that is particularly close to your heart for the readers?*

Luc Ciompi: I would like to ask all readers the following question.

Dear reader—ask yourself honestly whether you are guided mainly by a logic of hatred, anger, and resentment, or rather by a logic of love. And if it is the former, are you able to recognise the spark of love hidden behind every hatred? Seeing it is not so difficult: you want to change and improve something—and that too is a kind of love, perhaps even love for the greater whole and for all of us. And with that, you can make a difference—even if at first it is only by infecting others with this spark of love.

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## 2

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## 3

Chaos theory and synergetics show how and why sudden, abrupt changes in the prevailing functional patterns can occur in complex open systems of all kinds.

## 4

Sympathicotonic: predominance of the sympathetic nervous system – causes activation, e.g. increased heart rate, dilated pupils, inhibition of digestion. Parasympathetic tone: predominance of the parasympathetic nervous system – ensures relaxation and regeneration, e.g. slowed heartbeat, promotion of digestion, constriction of the pupils.

## 5

cf. Ciampi, Luc: Ein blinder Fleck bei Niklas Luhmann? Soziodynamische Wirkungen von Emotionen nach dem Konzept der fraktalen Affektlogik.[A blind spot in Niklas Luhmann? Sociodynamic effects of emotions according to the concept of fractal affect logic], Soziale Systeme, 10:21-49, 2004. (available in German)

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cf. Ciampi, Luc: Die Bedeutung von verletzten Selbstwertgefühlen und Scham in der Sozialpsychiatrie [The significance of wounded self-esteem and shame in social psychiatry], Leading opinions, Iatros I, Neurologie und Psychiatrie 1:40-42, 2014.(available in German)

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cf. Ballreich, Rudi / Ciampi, Luc / Glasl, Friedrich / von Schlippe, Arist: Die Macht der Emotionen. Affektlogik im Konflikt und in der Konfliktbekämpfung (The Power of Emotions: Affect Logic in Conflict and Conflict Resolution), film (DVD), Verlag Contadora, 2016;  
Ballreich, Rudi / Ciampi, Luc: Hasslogik und Liebeslogik (The Logic of Hate and Love). What Strengthens Positive Feelings in Mediation, film (DVD), Contadora Publishing, 2020.(available in German)

## A KI-Summary for young readers and for anyone with little time to read

### [Understand War, Think Peace.](#)

#### **Emotions Make History - a summary of the interview with Luc Ciompi about affect-logics, logics of war and logics of peace**

Luciano “Luc” Ciompi was born in 1929 in Florence, Italy and grew up in Switzerland. He was a professor of social psychiatry in Bern, and was best known for his research on schizophrenia and for founding the Soteria Bern residential community for people in acute psychological crises. From the interviewer’s perspective, his most important contribution—one that extends far beyond psychiatry—is the concept of affect-logics.

In his book „Emotions Make History“ (2011), co-written with German sociologist Elke Endert, Ciompi examines how feelings or emotions not only shape our personal lives but also influence history. Feelings or emotions affect how people act and why wars break out or peace becomes possible. The book made him well-known far beyond academic circles. In 2025, he received the WinWinno Prize of the International Federation for Mediation for his life’s work.

For the interviewer, it is a crucial matter that knowledge of his work be spread, particularly in the context of war and peace.

#### **What does “affect-logics” mean?**

The interviewer begins by asking Ciompi to explain the term.

“Affect-logics” may sound complicated, but at its core it is quite simple: emotions and thinking always work together. Human beings do not make purely rational decisions. Even when we believe we are completely neutral, emotions are always operating in the background.

Ciompi explains that feelings such as fear, joy, anger, or sadness act like filters. A fearful person perceives danger everywhere. An angry person finds endless reasons for annoyance. A relaxed or happy person sees beauty and has open thoughts. And feelings are not only fear and joy—subtler nuances and moods such as irritability, serenity, or curiosity are part of the spectrum.

American psychologist and Nobel laureate in economic sciences Daniel Kahneman demonstrated in his famous book „Thinking, Fast and Slow“ that our “rational” thinking is often strongly influenced by unconscious feelings or emotions. Ciompi goes further, showing

how this influence operates not only in individuals but also in groups, societies, and history itself.

### **How Ciompi came to affect-logics**

The interviewer asks about the origins of his theory.

Ciompi's concept is the result of decades of work. His professional path took him through many fields:

- He first worked as a psychiatrist, influenced by psychoanalysis, in which emotions play a central role.
- He later trained in systemic family therapy to better understand complex relationship networks.
- He was also inspired by Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget, who studied how thinking develops in children.
- From chaos theory, he learned how complex systems—such as societies or human thought—can sometimes suddenly change state when tensions become too high.

After his retirement, he researched the evolutionary roots of emotions and thinking at the Konrad Lorenz Institute in Altenberg near Vienna. All these influences came together in his theory: emotions and thoughts are always intertwined.

### **Emotions as energy**

Ciompi describes emotions and feelings as a form of energy. Fear drives us to avoid danger. Anger motivates resistance. Joy draws us toward things we like. When emotional tension rises sharply, sudden shifts can occur—love can turn into hate, uncertainty into panic.

These sudden “bifurcations”—a term from chaos theory—occur not only in individuals but also in entire societies. Examples include the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the “Arab Spring” in 2009, or the storming of the US Capitol in 2021. In all these cases, collective emotions had built up over a long time and then erupted suddenly.

### **How emotions shape our thinking**

Emotions not only influence our actions in the moment; they also shape our perceptions over the long term. Situations in which we experience strong emotions are stored as feel-think-behaviour programs in memory. These programs are reactivated in similar situations.

Over time, “individual world images” emerge—emotional filters through which we see everything. These individual world images can differ greatly. Two people may experience the same event entirely differently, depending on the experiences and feelings they bring with them.

### **From individual to collective affect-logics**

The interviewer asks whether there are also collective emotions — a collective affect-logics.

Ciampi stresses that affect-logics operates not only in individuals. Whole groups, societies, or states can develop shared emotional world images.

Early sociologists like Émile Durkheim and Georg Simmel had no problem speaking of collective emotions. German sociologist Niklas Luhmann, however, rejected the term, arguing that emotions are individual. Ciampi disagrees: emotions spread through communication, media, and symbols—and when many people share the same feelings, collective emotions arise.

These collective emotions can be focused like a laser. This can generate great energy—sometimes positive, as in peacetime, when trust and cooperation grow; sometimes negative, when fear, anger, or hatred dominate, creating prejudice and enemy images.

An extreme example is the mass enthusiasm in Nazi Germany. In his book “Emotions Make History”, Ciampi and Endert analyse how Adolf Hitler was at first insignificant whose speaker talent only became apparent when he captivated a crowd in Munich. From then on, speaker and audience reinforced each other in a spiral of emotions—a classic case of collective affect-logics.

### **Swarm intelligence**

The interviewer asks Ciampi to explain swarm intelligence.

A special phenomenon of collective affect-logics is swarm intelligence. Ciampi illustrates it with jackdaws he observed from his mountain cabin in the Swiss Valais. When a flock of a thousand birds finds food, all react at once as if they were a single organism. When danger arises, they all take flight in the same instant.

Similar patterns occur in human behaviour. In a football stadium, a “wave” (Ola) can arise when emotional tension is high. On a train platform, a crowd can move instantly if the departure platform changes. People often react like a swarm—emotionally contagious but also collectively coordinated.

### **Positive leadership figures**

There are positive examples of charismatic leaders who have guided societies toward a peace logic: Mahatma Gandhi, who led India to independence without violence; Nelson Mandela, who reconciled South Africa after decades in prison; or the Founding Fathers of the United States, who created a shared constitution. Ciampi also sees Jesus as such a positive leader.

The interviewer recalls a quotation from Reinhold Niebuhr that moves her deeply:

“Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

Luc Ciampi says it is a beautiful saying, a genuine piece of life wisdom. From the perspective of affect-logics, it shows us the limits of our thinking but also gives hope.

## **Peace logic and war logic**

The interviewer asks Ciompi what he means by peace logic and war logic.

Ciompi distinguishes two basic attitudes:

- Peace logic means a relaxed curious and respectful relationship between peoples. There is trade, cultural exchange, and mutual interest.
- War logic means mistrust, fear, and hatred dominate. Everything the opponent does is interpreted negatively. Old resentments are revived, and the opponent is dehumanised.

These logics can change rapidly—a country can switch from peace logic to war logic in a matter of months. A current example was the emotional change in Germany after Russia's attack on Ukraine in 2022: from a predominantly pacifist stance to strong support for arms deliveries.

## **Applying it to current conflicts**

The interviewer asks Ciompi to apply his ideas to current conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East.

In the Israel–Palestine conflict, Ciompi sees long escalation. Both sides have experienced injury, violence, and humiliation over long periods in history. The hopes of the Oslo Peace Process in 1992 were disappointed. Extremist demands—such as claiming the entire territory or destroying the opponent—and actions such as terrorist attacks or settlement construction have deepened mistrust. The Hamas attack of 7 October 2023 and massive Israeli reprisals are typical escalation points of war logic.

In the Ukraine war, Ciompi sees a similar pattern. Tensions between Russia and Ukraine go back far. The 2022 Russian invasion did not come out of nowhere but was the result of a long spiral of mistrust and fear.

## **Possibilities for de-escalation**

Ciompi refers to the model of Austrian conflict researcher Fritz Glasl, which describes stages of escalation—from win–win (both sides still talk) to win–lose (one side hopes to win, wants the other to lose) to lose–lose (both lose, everything is destroyed). Each stage is accompanied by rising emotions.

He emphasises that peace is only possible if both sides leave war logic and return to peace logic—often requiring painful compromises.

For Israel and Palestine, he sees in the long run a shared secular federal and republican state with equal rights for Jews and Arabs—inspired by thinkers of Jewish origin such as Martin Buber, Hannah Arendt and Albert Einstein.

For Ukraine and Russia, a compromise based on the current status quo could be possible: Russia forgoes complete conquest; Ukraine forgoes NATO membership and the reconquest of Crimea and Donbas.

### **A message to the younger generation**

At the end, Ciompi addresses young people in particular. The world often seems threatening: wars, climate crisis, conflicts. But he reminds them that earlier generations also lived in difficult times. When he was 15, World War II was raging. Later, there were threats of nuclear war, economic crises, terrorist attacks such as September 11, 2001, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet humanity has survived—because it is adaptable.

“Life is resilient,” Ciompi says. And sometimes the seemingly impossible happens—like Franco-German reconciliation or the fall of the Berlin Wall.

### **What Emotions Make History means**

“Emotions Make History” means that not only in the individual sphere but also in the great flow of history, the driving forces behind collective events are emotional in nature. This fact must be central to any attempt to understand or influence events—particularly in relation to war and peace.

### **Appeal to the readers**

Dear reader—ask yourself honestly whether you are guided mainly by a logic of hatred, anger, and resentment, or rather by a logic of love. And if it is the former, are you able to recognise the spark of love hidden behind every hatred? Seeing it is not so difficult: you want to change and improve something—and that too is a kind of love, perhaps even love for the greater whole and for all of us. And with that, you can make a difference—even if at first it is only by infecting others with this spark of love.