



WHAT PEACE IS

Mortimer Adler

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“**W**ar consisteth not in battle only, or the act of fighting,” wrote Hobbes, “but in the known disposition thereto, during all the time there is no assurance to the contrary. All other time is Peace.”

The peace which Hobbes has in mind is civil peace, not peace between independent nations. It is the “king’s peace,” against which criminals offend when they commit “a breach of the peace.” It is the sort of peace which can exist within a country while it is waging war on foreign fields.

The conception of war as not limited to battle, and of peace as not being merely the absence of fighting, applies to the external relationships of a state, as well as to its internal condition. Rousseau generalized Hobbes’ basic insight in the following manner:

War between two Powers is the result of a settled intention, manifested on both sides, to destroy the enemy State, or at least to weaken it by all means at their disposal. The carrying of this intention into act is war, strictly so called; so long as it does not take shape in act, it is only a state of war. . . . The state of war is the natural relation of one Power to another.

The fact that we call states or nations “powers” confirms the truth that distinct political communities are always in a *state of war*, which becomes *actual warfare* when the shooting begins. Rousseau observed that we use the word “power” only when we wish to refer to the state in its foreign relations.

In diplomatic intercourse, adds J. A. Hobson, “states are represented in their capacity of ‘Powers.’ ” And Thorstein Veblen completes the picture by pointing out that “ ‘power’ here means eventual warlike force.”

Each state is a power to the extent that it has capacity for war, the great powers having greater warlike capacity than their smaller neighbors. During the period of truce or no shooting, the nations defend themselves and prepare for war, not only through military establishments, but also through treaties and alliances and all the machinery of diplomacy. Because of its military capacity, each is a power during the period of a truce, just as much as during actual fighting when it exercises this capacity. The weight of a nation’s words in diplomatic parley is seldom greater than the weight of its armament in battle.

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These considerations oblige us to define our words.

The king’s peace is maintained by his sheriffs and bailiffs operating under the laws of the realm, not by his armies or diplomats fighting or conniving abroad. The king’s soldiers engaged in foreign combat do not breach the king’s peace. Nor is that done by foreigners who undertake aggressive attack upon the king’s people. The peace of the realm is disturbed by the king’s own subjects when they violate his ordinances.

There seem to be two quite distinct situations for which we use the one word “peace,” and two for which we use the one word “war.” The following definitions are, therefore, needed to clarify any discussion of the problem of war and peace.

1. INTERNAL PEACE

This is the peace which obtains *within* any political community. It is sometimes called “civil peace.” Whenever the word “peace” is used without qualification, the reference will be to peace in this sense.

2. EXTERNAL PEACE

This is the peace which obtains *between* distinct political communities, nations, or states. It is sometimes called “international peace.”

Hobbes and Rousseau seem right in regarding it as, not peace at all, but a “state of war.” Between nations there is always *potential* war when there is not actual fighting, the potentiality of the war being indicated by the fact that nations, in their external relations, are *powers*, which means a capacity for actual war.

This situation will never be referred to as “peace” unless the word is put in quotation marks to indicate that it is really a *truce*, which is the same as *potential war*.

3. EXTERNAL WAR

This is the war *between* distinct political communities, which we now call “international war,” but which could have been called “interstate war” when states were city-states instead of national states.

Since such war always exists between communities’, it is sometimes necessary to use such words as “fighting” or “shooting,” “battle” or “combat,” to distinguish the *act* of war, or actual warfare, from the potential war which is identical with an armed truce.

4. INTERNAL WAR

This is the war *within* a single political community, which we usually call “civil war” or “rebellion,” “revolution” or “civil strife.”

Even when such internal disorders reach the stage of *actual* violence, civil peace remains *potentially* present in so far as the community endures these convulsions and survives to reinstate the peaceful order which was temporarily in abeyance.

In order to distinguish the strife which reduces civil peace to potentiality from the strife which actualizes the potentiality for international war, the words “war” and “truce” will always be used for the latter, and the words “peace” and “civil war” for the former.

Once these fundamental distinctions are understood, it is not necessary to memorize the vocabulary. The context will always furnish sufficient indication of the sense in which the crucial words are intended.

What is necessary is a conscious effort on our part, especially during a period of actual warfare, to overcome our natural inclination to look forward to the day when the shooting stops as the day when peace begins or can be made. The inveterate habit, on the part of most historians and journalists, to use the word “peace” for what is only a truce will, if we adopt it, blind us to the nature of peace and its causes. As Mr. Emery Reves has so well said:

All those brief respites from war which we called “peace” were nothing but diplomatic, economic, political, and financial wars between the various groups of men called “nations,” with the only distinction that these conflicts, rivalries, and hostilities have been fought out with all the means except actual shooting.

The tyranny of words is nowhere more destructive of good sense and clear ideas than in the discussion of war and peace. I cannot resist quoting my favorite authority on semantics, *The New Yorker*, which observes editorially that “this cantankerous attitude which we seem to be striking, this harping on the meaning of words, comes from our belief that there is a sharp need for definition and that, in the words of Saroyan’s barfly, there is ‘no foundation all the way down the line.’ ”

The New Yorker was commenting on the mythical sense of the word “law” when we appeal to international law. The comment, in paraphrase, runs as follows:

Nothing is more frightening than to hear what is not law called law, what is not peace called peace. . . . To speak as though we had peace when what we’ve got is treaties and pacts, to use the word “peace” for non-peace, is to lessen our chance of ever getting world peace, since the first step toward getting it is to realize with dazzling clearness that we haven’t got it and never have had it.

What peace is and how it is made are not the same question. The two questions are, however, closely related; for what a thing is determines how it can be made.

Mr. Walter Lippmann, quite clear in his mind about the foreign policy his country should adopt, confesses to being not so clear about what peace is. In *Some Notes on War and Peace* he writes:

Peace is as desirable, and just about as indefinable and elusive as good health. And war is as undesirable as a bad disease, but there are many kinds of disease. We may enjoy peace as we enjoy good health without knowing why, which is largely the case of the United States; or we may have bad health, like the wars of Europe and Asia, without knowing which pill, if any, will cure it.

It should be obvious that Mr. Lippmann is using the word “peace” in its internal sense when he refers to the United States, and “war” in its external sense when he refers to Europe. His main comparison, therefore, becomes misleading.

The health of a living body is strictly an internal condition, a harmony of its functioning parts. Health does not consist in a body’s relation to other bodies outside itself, even though it may *depend* on these. When what we are talking about is the internal condition of the body politic, peace, like good health, does not defy definition.

The comparison suffers from another fault. The diseases of the body politic are both internal and external disorders, whereas in the case of the living body, disease is purely an internal disorder, whatever its cause. We do know how to cure many diseases once we know their causes; and knowing the cause of the political pathology that is war, we shall know how to cure it, too. Nor is this too difficult to know. The cause of—war *its only cause*, for all practical purposes—will become apparent as soon as we understand the cause of peace.

To know the cause of peace, we must first know *what peace* is. Let me appeal to a writer who thought he could define peace. In *The City of God*, Saint Augustine said:

“The peace of the body is ordered temperature of parts...The peace of body and soul is ordered life and health of animate being....The peace of man is ordered concord. The peace of the household is the ordered concord of commanding and obeying among those living together. The peace of the city is the ordered concord of commanding and obeying among citizens...The peace of all things is the tranquility of order. Order is the disposition of equal and unequal things attributing to each its place.”

In this statement, several points should be observed. In the first place, Saint Augustine is considering both the peace of an individ-

ual living thing and the peace of a community which includes a multitude of distinct individuals. The latter is peace in the social sense, whereas the former is peace in an individual sense—the inward peace of the heart, the peace between man and God. These two should never be confused. Social peace is primarily an affair of political institutions, justice, and law; individual peace, primarily a moral matter, an affair of virtue and charity.

In the second place, any condition of peace involves these elements: a multitude of things; their concord with one another; and an order among them which establishes this concord. In the social sphere, peace consists in a multitude of persons living together in concord and enjoying the tranquility of order.

In the third place, *order* is the central term. On the one hand, it establishes concord in a multitude; on the other, it confers tranquility upon their living together. And when the multitude comprises of human beings who can live together by rules of their own devising, rather than by instinct, order results from two factors: from “commanding and obeying” and from “the disposition of equal and unequal things attributing to each its place.”

Order results from the reign of law or from the operations of governments, according to which men are related as rulers and ruled. Order in a multitude also results from the organization of that multitude, in such wise that each member occupies a place according to his equality or inequality with every other member.

A multitude of things is nothing but a heap without organization. A multitude of persons is a mob, not a society or community, unless it is arranged according to some principle of organization. And any principle of organization involves some discrimination of likeness and difference among the things or persons to be organized.

Whether the discriminations are just or unjust, social organization always involves the distribution of status to the members of a community; and through the status they are assigned, they are related as equal and unequal.

Saint Augustine has given us not only a definition of peace, but also some insight into its causes. Postponing a consideration of the causes, let us look more closely at the definition.

It would seem that peace consists in making a *one* out of a many. The maxim *e Pluribus unum* defines peace. But the natural unity of an individual thing must be differentiated from the social unity of a multitude of separate individuals.

An individual living body has parts or members. These parts are organized by nature to form a single whole, which is the one living thing. The parts do not associate themselves to form the organism. But when men form a society, they do voluntarily associate with each other to form a community.

The very word “community,” which has the word “unity” at its root, signifies that here is *a unity which has come together*. The significance of “community” also involves the notion of many persons having something *in common*. When men associate for a common purpose and share in common benefits derived from their association, they form a community—whether this be a social club or an industrial cooperation, a university or a political party, a family or a state.

However a community is formed, whatever be its size, its purpose, or the special characteristics of its personnel, social peace will be found wherever we find men living or working together in a community. The most important thing for us to see is that the peace of a family does not differ essentially from the peace of a village, nor does the peace of a small country, restricted in area, sparse in population, differ essentially from the peace of the largest state which has ever existed.

The same thing is true for all the other varieties of community. The characteristics of peace are everywhere the same.

Anyone who has belonged to a large family living together under one roof will know the meaning of domestic peace—the peace of the family community. He will also know that peace does not consist in the total absence of fighting or quarreling, that it does not require all the members of the household to agree about everything.

So long as the family holds together, it is an order of equal and unequal persons, each having a place and role in the group. So long as husband and wife, parents and children, brothers and sisters—and even, perhaps, the cousins and the aunts—have a way of settling disagreements and a way of patching up quarrels, the members will continue to enjoy the benefits of peaceful association, even as they will continue to collaborate for the family’s good.

The familiar facts of family life remind us that peace can exist in many degrees. It is seldom if ever *perfect concord or harmony*. Such imperfect peace, which is probably the only kind that will ever exist on earth, may be more or less imperfect according as elements of strain and discord tax the unity of any group and threaten to break it into utterly discordant fragments.

Hence, peace must be realistically defined, not only by reference to the ideal perfection, but also, considering its degrees of imperfection, by reference to the vanishing point at the other extreme. The vanishing point is reached, and peace disappears, only when the community dissolves. When, for example, the family breaks up into feuding clans, each with its own common purpose, that purpose being founded on rivalry and antagonism to the other fragment of the family, then the peace of the family is totally destroyed.

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