



WHAT PEACE IS

Mortimer Adler

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For the time being, I shall not discuss the degrees of peace. That becomes an important consideration later. What does matter now is the distinction between political peace and all the other forms of social peace—that of the family or the university or the business corporation.

To distinguish political peace, we must separate the political community from all others. This is not an easy task, but it can be done with sufficient precision for our purposes.

A distinguishing mark of the political community, which enables us to locate it by reference to obvious realities, is the fact that *it includes other communities and is included by no other*. It includes families, universities, and churches, political parties and economic associations. All these and many others are societies which it sub-

ordinates. These subordinate associations are among its members, even as individual persons are., They are to some extent subject to its regulations.

Every individual belongs to some all-inclusive political community, as well as to many subordinate communities. The various communities to which he belongs serve different purposes, which help to distinguish them. Through belonging to each, he participates along with its other members in the common good which that association aims at, and for which its members, work co-operatively.

We could define the political community by specifying the political common good. But it is easier to separate it from all the others by its inclusiveness. By its “inclusiveness” or “comprehensiveness” I do not mean to imply that the political community should arrogate to itself every social function. That is the horror of totalitarianism. A well-ordered political community not only permits but also encourages the existence of subordinate associations to perform a wide variety of functions—economic, educational, or recreational.

When we understand what is meant by “inclusiveness,” we see that the political community is distinguished by the *extent* of the peace it provides. Under the auspices of the political community, the individual lives at peace with a large number of persons than he does through any of the other subordinate associations of which he is a member.

In consequence, the peace of the political community underlies and supports all the other instances of peaceful unity. Political peace is the paramount form of peace which the individual enjoys, just as the political society is the paramount community to which he belongs.

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Under primitive conditions, a large family group may be the most comprehensive community to which a given individual belongs. If that family group is autonomous, if it does not acknowledge its subordination to any other group, it is at once both a domestic and a political society. We do not call such a family a “state,” but it has much in common with the more elaborate political communities we do call “states.”

Under modern conditions, incorporated towns and villages, chartered cities, and even states having their own constitutions may be

included in a more comprehensive political community. It would seem that these subordinate societies should be called “political communities” even if they are not the most inclusive society to which their members belong. That cannot be denied. But its significance is controlled by the fact that these subordinate societies derive their political character from being the local or decentralized instruments of the one over-all political community to which their own members always also belong.

For our purposes, it makes no difference whether we consider the peace which belongs to the United States as a political community, or the peace of any of the forty-eight states, or the peace of their cities, towns, and villages. In each case we shall be dealing with a political community and, hence, with political peace. What is characteristic of political peace in the smallest of these communities will obtain equally in the largest.

HOW PEACE IS MADE

The cause of peace is government. The effective operations of government make *peace*, and *keep* it.

Without government no community could long endure, if it could ever exist at all. Since peace is equivalent to the life of a community, since peace obtains only among the members of a community, whatever is needed to establish and sustain a community is needed for the establishment and preservation of peace.

The reader knows these things to be true of his local community-village, town, or city. He knows that such local peace flourishes only through the institutions of government and only to the extent that its instrumentalities function effectively. He knows in general what these institutions and functions are. He does not suppose that any of the basic elements of government can be dispensed with—that the community can get along without civic organization and some form of administration, without ordinances, without courts, without police.

The reader may remember what happened in Boston during the police strike, how even in the few hours before the governor of Massachusetts summoned the militia, the peace of a great city could be mocked by thugs and bandits. The laws of Boston, like international treaties, could be torn to shreds. He knows from this one historic example how truly Thomas Hobbes spoke when he

said: "Covenants without the sword are but words, and of no strength to secure a man at all."

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If the reader knows these things, as he does, can he claim that he does not know how world peace can be made and how it must be kept? Can he suppose that these fundamental truths he would never think of denying when he thinks of his immediate locality suddenly turn false, lose their significance, or become inapplicable when the size of a community increases?

The reader also lives in a larger community—in a state or province, in a nation. He knows that national peace requires national government no less than village peace requires village government, that state peace depends upon state government as city peace depends upon city government.

If anyone wishes to test his grasp of these truths, let him abstract his thinking from all the imagery of the actual communities in which he has lived or which he knows. Let him imagine instead any limited area of the earth's surface, vast or small, but less than the whole. Let him populate this area with human beings, sparsely or thickly. Add one further condition and only one: that no part of this population be completely isolated from any other, that no part be entirely self-sufficient, that contact and communication, commerce and culture, interlock their lives. Let him then proceed to solve the problem of peace versus war for this area of the earth's surface.

Can he, in the first place, imagine peace being *made* without the formation of a single political community? Can he, in the second place, imagine this community without political organization and government? Can he, in the third place, imagine the political peace of this area, once made, being kept for this population without the continued and effective operation of governmental machinery and some sort of legal system, formulating, applying, enforcing rules?

Though performed in the imagination, this is a crucial experiment in thought. Like any good experiment, it supports an induction of unlimited generality.

When Newton broke the sun's rays into the spectrum by means of a prism in his Cambridge room, he did not conclude that sunlight was complex in a certain room in a certain part of England in a certain century. A single well-conducted experiment told him the truth

about the spectral variety in sunlight everywhere and at all times. Other scientists may repeat the experiment, altering the conditions to remove all accidental factors, but they will merely confirm the crucial character of the first experiment.

The political experiment we can perform in our imaginations is confirmed for us by all our local experience in civil communities and by all our historical knowledge. We see that quantitative variations in the extent of the area or the numbers of population are entirely accidental factors which do not affect the truth of our induction.

We see how Hamilton, Madison, and Jay, in the first nine of the Federalist Papers, could argue inductively from their own colonial experience and from the history of European affairs, to the conclusion that in the area between the Atlantic and the Appalachians and for the three million inhabitants of that long and narrow strip of land, peace could be made and kept in only one way. The Federalists could feel perfectly assured of the soundness of their conclusion, even though they were solving a political, not a mathematical, problem. They did not have to wait until the experiment was tried again in this new area to know how it would turn out.*

* “To look for a continuation of harmony,” wrote Hamilton, “between a number of independent, unconnected sovereignties in the same neighborhood, would be to disregard the uniform course of human events, and to set at defiance the accumulated experience of ages.”

Let the reader then take the last step in this line of thinking. Let him extend the area he is imagining from any limited part of the earth’s surface to the whole globe. Let him enlarge the population from some men to all. Let him retain the one essential condition that no part of this population live in isolation or self-sufficiency, without communication or intercourse.

Can anyone deny that *e pluribus unum* is the maxim of world peace—and for the same reasons that it is the principle of local peace? Can anyone think how to put this maxim into practice universally without satisfying the same conditions on which its practical realization depends locally? Does it make any difference that the *pluribus* now signifies the multitude of *all* men, not *some*; and that the *unum* now signifies the whole world, not a city, state, or nation?

If the reader has the faintest trace of doubt or reservation in answering these questions, it must be because he has somehow come to regard the “international scene” as utterly freakish—as a myste-

rious domain where none of the familiar principles of politics apply, or where they can be brushed aside with impunity. As if two plus two could make four here and there, but not everywhere!

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There are as many types of governments as there are types of communities. There is familial government and business government. Within the sphere of civil government, there are many forms of political organization. None of these variations in type or form alters the principle that every sort of community requires government.

Under the term *government* I mean to include every aspect of a community's structure and organization. I mean not only the acts of commanding and obeying by which government most obviously manifests itself. I mean as well the disposition of status and function to every member of the community, the arrangement of public offices, and the distribution of rights and privileges.

Ordinarily when we speak of "*the government*" we mean the group of officials who occupy public office by election or appointment. Sometimes, we have an even more restricted meaning, referring to the executive branch of the government, in contrast to the legislature and the judiciary. But obviously the citizens who vote, who elect officials and can effect the amendment of the constitution, take part in the government of the country to which they belong.

Differences in form of civil government do not affect what we mean by the words "state" or "political community." Persia under an absolute despot and Athens under a constitution were both political communities, though they differed radically in form of government. And a political community remains the same state even when its form of government varies from time to time; as, for example, Rome under the Tarquins, under the Republic, and under the Caesars.

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The chief function of government is to settle differences among men who engage to live together. That is the reason why government is needed to keep the peace.

Children playing sand-lot baseball soon discover this. They know that they have to have rules. They know that if a dispute arises about the rules, they must appeal to some ultimate principle of

government, such as a majority vote, in order to get on with the game. They know that teamwork requires organization, that organization requires a division of responsibility, and that someone must usually be given the responsibility of making whatever decisions are not submitted to a majority vote.

The two ultimate principles of government are the principle of decision by a majority and the principle of decision by a leader. Both are methods of reaching a decision which will be acceptable to the group, despite the individual differences of opinion about what should be done.

It would be utter folly to trust to the possibility that a number of individuals will always agree about what is to be done. The fact is that they will very frequently disagree. Therefore, there must be some way to get men who may disagree to concur in a common action. When men form a community, they not only live together, but also work for a common good in which they all share. Just as all hope to share in, so all must co-operate for, the common good. They must have a way of deciding what should be done by all for the good of each, and by each for the good of all.

Each man cannot decide for himself what he should do or what the others should do; for if individuals disagree in their separate judgments—*as they will*—no common action can be taken. Nor can the principle of decision be the requirement of unanimity. That is equivalent to each man deciding for himself. Unlike the principle of a majority, a unanimous vote cannot be relied upon to settle differences *without fail*. One stubborn man who insists upon his own opinion is enough to hang up a jury.

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In the administration of the common affairs of an isolated frontier settlement, all sorts of practical questions will arise, both questions of general policy and questions about what is to be done on particular occasions. Agreement on such matters cannot be expected. But neither can fundamental disagreements about urgent practical matters be permitted to go unsettled for long. Factions will form, and when argument is worn thin and patience frayed, the quarrel in words will become a quarrel in deeds. The community will be destroyed by violence.

Fundamental disagreements cannot be avoided, but recourse to violence can be. About difficult practical matters, even the most rational men, prudent men and men with the common interest at

heart, are as likely to disagree as to agree. This unalterable fact requires any community, small or large, to adopt some rules of procedure for reaching a decision in which the dissident parties will concur.

Either the rule that all will abide by a majority vote or the rule that all will accept the judgment of some one given the authority to decide can effectively settle disputes when they arise.

Neither rule determines which side of a practical dispute is in truth the *right* side. In fact, the minority may be right, or a majority of the group, dissenting from their leader's judgment, may hold the sounder opinion. The rule of procedure is not a way of always finding the *right* answer to the question; it is only a way of always finding *some answer without recourse to violence*. That is the essential minimum condition which a principle of government must satisfy. In addition, one hopes that a rule of procedure will more frequently tend to produce a sound decision. Under different circumstances one may place one's faith in the wisdom of the majority, or in the prudence of those to whom authority has been given.

Recourse to violence will not be avoided unless rules of procedure can be enforced against those who may refuse to comply with the decisions reached. The force to be employed must obviously be the force of the group, supporting the authority of the rule which they themselves have voluntarily adopted.

If in a small frontier community, the dissenters on any occasion are numerous, the opposition of forces will tend to approach a balance of power. The exercise of force by one side will be resisted by force on the other. Unless those who would support the authority of the rule have a predominance of power against one or a few individuals, no rule of procedure will prevent violence or, ultimately, the dissolution of the community.

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