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## THE INEVITABILITY OF WAR

**Mortimer Adler**

Part 2 of 2

Still the question arises: why, then, have there always been wars, if war is not required by the nature of man?

The answer is that men have so far failed to establish the social organization identical with total peace, as they have never yet failed to institute the social organizations identical with local peaces. That failure up to the present does not support the inference of perpetual failure. On the contrary, the fact that men know how to make local peace shows that they know how to make total peace

There is absolutely nothing in the nature of man repugnant to the existence of a world community, as there is something in the nature of man repugnant to the existence of no communities at all. The nature of man makes world peace possible, for the same rea-

son that it makes the war of *each* man against *every other* impossible. The reason is man's need for society and, in order to preserve the society, for peace.

The fact that wars have always existed between communities signifies only man's past failure to eradicate the cause of war—a cause which lies outside his nature, a cause which must be found in the character of his social institutions. These are ultimately the work of his intelligence and will. They have been made by man. They can be changed by man.

Just as the existence of slavery implies the existence of free men, the existence of war implies the existence of peace. We cannot even conceive of a society in which *all* men are slaves. But, Hitler to the contrary, we know that it is in no way impossible for all men to be their own masters. Nothing in the nature of man prevents a social organization in which all men are free.

The historical fact which enabled some men to understand the possibility of abolishing chattel slavery was the fact that freedom had always coexisted with slavery, even as peace has always coexisted with war. That helped them to see that slavery resulted from alterable social institutions, not from the essence of human nature which man cannot change at will.

Freedom and peace correspond to the deepest aspiration of human nature. That man is by nature *rational* makes slavery repugnant, even as the fact that man is by nature *political* makes war abnormal.

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Other animals are gregarious, but only man is by nature political.

Some of the gregarious species live in a relatively stable family group; some move in herds; some, as the social insects, belong to elaborate organizations with a hierarchy of functions and division of labor. But, in every case the form of social life is instinctively determined. Generation after generation, the social structure of the beehive or the ant mound remains the same. As long as a given species endures, its social pattern, like its modes of reproduction or nutrition, does not vary from species to species, not within a single species.

Though man is naturally gregarious, instinct does not determine the human forms of social organization. They exhibit a tremendous

range of variation. Wherever one finds a beehive, one expects to find the same social arrangements. Such uniformity cannot be found in human communities. Furthermore, even within the same community of men, the social structure undergoes transformation in the course of generations. Man is the only *historical* animal, as well as the only political animal.

Like some other gregarious animals, man needs the society of his kind, not merely for pleasure but for survival. This basic biological need can be regarded as an instinctive drive toward association. Because they are not self-sufficing, men are instinctively impelled to live together. But instinct goes no further than this fundamental impulse.

Human intelligence devises the forms of association and conceives the institutions through which the social impulse of man is realized in a wide variety of organizations. Hence to say that man is by nature a political animal means two things: first, that man cannot live except socially; second, that the forms of his social life result from the exercise of his intelligence and freedom. They are not predetermined to any particular form.

Even when, under primitive conditions, man lives in a large family or a small tribal organization, his political nature expresses itself in the fact that the social arrangements are conventional. Though the customs of the group may appear to run back to time immemorial, they reflect intelligent decisions to arrange affairs this way rather than that. Customs which have long persisted unchanged have had a history of development and an origin. They must have originated through the voluntary adoption of certain practices.

While the family and the tribe satisfy man's fundamental biological needs for society, affording him the bare conditions of subsistence and survival, they do not answer all the needs of human nature. Man's political character tends to express itself in the formation of larger communities which go beyond the bonds of consanguinity and which, being more populous, permit a more elaborate division of labor. Such communities afford more than the bare conditions of subsistence and survival—for some of their members, if not for all. In such communities, leisure and a degree of freedom from the daily ordeal of keeping alive enable the arts and sciences to flourish. The higher levels of civilization can now be reached.

Because the larger community had these advantages, the ancients regarded it as the *political* community par excellence. It was the

highest expression of man's political nature. It not only satisfied the needs of his daily life, but also provided him with occasions and opportunities for developing his talents—the capacities of his intellectual endowment.

The human race would not survive at all if every individual man attempted to lead a solitary life. The smallest social group, the family, may be sufficient to solve the problem of survival. But the political community or the state—I shall use these words interchangeably—enables men to do more than barely live. It makes it possible for them to live well, to live humanly, to cultivate their talents, and so, through the growth of culture, to magnify the characteristic features of human civilization.

The civil, as opposed to the domestic, society is the basis of civilization. The tribal group represents an intermediate stage of development between the family, or domestic society, and the state—the civil society or political community.

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There is no conflict between the modern theory of civil society as formed by a social contract and the ancient view that man is by nature a political animal.

The great political thinkers of modern times did not suppose that the human race could survive a single generation if all men tried to lead solitary lives. When they talked about man living in a “state of nature,” which he bonded to live with his fellows in a “state of civil society,” they had no historical event or process in mind. They simply meant that man's natural need for social life must be supplemented by the activity of his reason in devising, and the activity of his will in instituting, the political community.

The word “contract” signifies a voluntary or free engagement. Men do not have to live in civil societies. They are not instinctively determined to do so. They do so only when their reason tells them it is the best thing for them to do; and then they do so freely—by conventions which they voluntarily institute or accept.

In short, civil status, or membership in a political community, in both natural and non-natural to man. It is non-natural only in the sense that it is non-instinctive; or, to put it positively, in the sense that it is conventional—like any human artifice, the result of intelligence and volition. It is natural in the sense that it is natural for man (who does not act according to definite instinctive patterns) to

exercise his reason and will to devise those institutions which most fully satisfy his human needs, the demands of his nature.

Both the ancients and the moderns saw that peace between men exists only within the bounds of a community and preeminently under the auspices of the civil or political community. Aristotle, for example, who first enunciated the truth that man is by nature political, made a point of adding that the man who finds himself an outcast from society for whatever reason is “forthwith a lover of war.”

Hobbes and Locke and Rousseau all identified their hypothetical “state of nature” with a “state of war.” Though the war of each against every other never existed as a condition prior to all forms of social life, a “state of war” has always existed historically among sovereign princes or independent communities.

To explain what they mean by a “state of nature” in contrast to a “state of civil society,” these modern thinkers always point to the relation of sovereigns—-independent princes or states—and contrast this with the relation of men living under the auspices of a single political community.

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Men form political communities in order to have peace, in order to live without fighting and violence and to enjoy the positive benefits which peace confers. Peace, which is identical with the order of civil life, represents the normal condition toward which the nature of man aspires. War, identical with the absence of civil order, violates and frustrates human nature. *That is why war is abnormal.*

Rousseau recognized the paradox that the abnormal is as prevalent as the normal. just as he said, “Man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains,” so he might have said, “Man is born for peace, yet everywhere he is at war.” What he did say amounts to this: “As individuals, we live in the civil state., under the control of law; as nations, each is in the state of nature. . . . Living as we do at once in the civil order and in the state of nature, we find ourselves exposed to the evils of both conditions, without winning the security we need in either.”

How can we account for the fact that most of the great political philosophers who understood the abnormality of war also accepted war as unavoidable? Plato and Aristotle, Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas, Grotius and Hobbes, Locke and Hegel, differing on many

points, concurred in thinking that war could not be eliminated from human affairs. Even Kant and Veblen, who wrote tracts on peace and understood the conditions of its perpetuation, regarded a lasting and universal peace as an ideal, a goal toward which men *should* strive but which they can *never* reach.

The answer is simply that none of these men were in a position to imagine the development of a world political community as a real eventuality in the course of history. We might say that they should have been able to foresee the event in terms of their fundamental insights about war and peace. But that is asking too much. Historic limitations prevented most men, even the most enlightened men, from seeing that war could be eliminated, as it prevented most of them from seeing that chattel slavery could be totally abolished.

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The abnormality of war is further evidenced by its effect on the highest forms of political life.

Men establish themselves in a civil society in order to live well. The conditions of its origin thus show the state or political community to be a means, not an end. Its purpose is to serve the happiness of individual persons. When the state subordinates the good of individual lives to its own welfare, it violates its own reason for being.

Such violence is done by the totalitarian states, whose exponents declare the good of the state to be an ultimate end, and who practice this false religion of "statism" by sacrificing men to the idol. We know totalitarianism to be a monstrous perversion of the natural order. But we frequently forget or overlook the fact that during a war every society tends to adopt the disorder of totalitarianism to some degree. Every departure from the normal mode of the citizen's life signifies a degree of that disorder in which men serve the state rather than the state men.

In a world in which wars exist, and in which nations feel that they have to struggle for their honor or existence, all the impulses of patriotism are natural and justified. But this does not make it any the less unfortunate that patriotism should have to go to the excesses which war, and only war, demands.

The more justly constituted the society, the more admirable its political form ' the more war threatens to weaken its institutions and to pervert them. And it is also true that the best form of government is that which is least adapted to the exigencies of war.

*Not all political communities exist under constitutional government.* Both historically and in the present, a large number have been and are under despotic regimes. Under despotic government, whether by absolute kings or by absolute parties, the governed do not enjoy the rights of citizenship.

*Not all constitutional governments are democratic.* Many historic and existing constitutions have been and are instruments of class privilege, embodying all sorts of unjust discriminations, including disfranchisement of large numbers in the population. The democratic constitution extends the franchise to every normal person, and repudiates wealth, birth, and other accidents as conditions of privilege. Only in a democracy are *all* men citizens, and are *all* equally entitled to hold public office at the pleasure and discretion of the electorate.

*Democracy is the only completely just form of government* for it is the only form of government under which *all* men receive what is their due—the rights and privileges of equal political status. If the political community originates to help men *live well*, then the history of political life does not teach the natural term of its development until democracies come into being. Only then does a society exist in which *all* men, not just *some*, can live well.

In short, it is not civil society under any form of government, but only constitutional democracy, which adequately fulfills the needs of man's political nature. Anything less necessarily frustrates and degrades, even when it does not enslave, the many who, while members of the population, cannot call themselves and each other, "citizen."

Now, it is a significant fact that the enterprise of war is more injurious to the political processes of a democracy than to the governmental procedures of the less advanced forms of civil society. Despotic government can undertake war without deviating from its ordinary pattern. But a constitutional democracy requires all sorts of emergency measures in order to engage efficiently in war making. The worst forms of government—the least just and the least mature—are those most inclined toward war and the best prepared for its trials.

*This confirms the abnormality of war—or the normality of Fascism!* The form of government which is best adapted to the nature of man is least adapted for the nature of war. War runs counter to

man's nature, even threatening to destroy the very institutions which represent his achievement of political maturity.

The abnormality of war is in no way lessened by the distinction between good and bad wars, just and unjust wars. *All* wars violate the nature of man and defeat his normal aspiration for the goods of social life—the goods which reflect the beneficence of peace. 📖

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