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HOW TO THINK ABOUT WAR AND PEACE

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[Part 3 of 3]

A SOCIETY OF MEN

It has now been proved that universal and perpetual peace is possible. Let me briefly summarize the steps of the proof.

(1) We have seen the conditions required for any degree of peace. These conditions are the same regardless of the size of the population and of the area with which we may be concerned. Peace exists wherever there is a political community, a society of men living together under government—in a city, a state, a nation or the world.

(2) The universality of peace is only one aspect of its perfection. It is the quantitative aspect. There is also a qualitative aspects which varies with the likelihood of civil strife within any community have some degree of peace. Peace is qualitatively perfect only when it is perpetual, only when the justice and efficiency of government preclude the occasions or the need for civil violence.

Let us look for a moment at international law to see why it cannot possibly meet the needs of the situation. The point is not that international law is at present defective and that, when developed or improved, it will perform the task of keeping the peace. The point is that world peace requires a complete transformation of international law.

We have already seen the respects I which international law is like primitive law. It is the kind of law which belongs to an anarchic community in which the basic legal functions are performed by individuals judging and helping themselves. But there are still further respects in which international law differs from the law of a true political community, the sort of law which manifests the operations of government.

(1) It is supposed to be a matter of custom that nations respect each other's sovereignty. It is at least customary for each nation to demand respect for its own sovereignty.

(2) It is a moral precept that nations, like individuals, should keep the promises they have made.

These two maxims summarize the general content of international law in so far as it concerns the rights of nations and their duties to one another. It should be obvious at once, from the whole history of international affairs, that nations frequently violate each other's rights, and frequently fail to discharge their obligations. International law is as powerless to prevent the wars which result there from.

It seems a little odd to describe as customary law what is more frequently breached than observed. The general maxims of interna-

tional law can be regarded as customary only in the very special sense already observed. It is customary for each nation to demand that other nations fulfill their obligations. It is customary for each nation to demand that other nations respect its rights.

THE PROBABILITY OF PEACE

AN OPTIMISTIC VIEW OF HISTORY

The unity of human history lies in the simple fact that it is, all human. This justifies the philosopher in searching for a history that has never been written—the history of the human race.

That truth consists in understanding history as the working out of man's potentialities for social and cultural development.

The general pattern of social evolution is affected by all sorts of contingent circumstances which prevent it from moving in a straight line. It includes errors and failures as well as successes. Men have the capacity to brutalize and degrade their life as well as to humanize and civilize it. Nevertheless, in the course of time, the achievements of progress do become more stable and secure. Above all, human history, unlike natural evolution, must be viewed as only partly determined by physical factors. For good or for evil, it also represents the work of man's free will.

This optimistic view of history was held by Immanuel Kant. He devolved it in a book which has significant connections with his later work on Perpetual Peace. Ten years earlier, in 1788, he wrote a treatise entitled *Idea of a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View*. Its fundamental thesis was that human capacities are "destined to unfurl themselves completely in the course of time, and in accordance with the end to which they are adapted."

The attainment of the highest level of civilization is the goal of the race, as the attainment of happiness is the goal of the individual life. But, whereas the individual may fail to achieve the full good of his being, the race will succeed in fulfilling the promise of nature's endowment.

Human civilization is a work of reason and of freedom, not of instinct. Since men use their freedom for evil as well as for good, the motion of history will not be in a line of steady progress.

The struggle of many generations is needed for the predominance of good and for the increments of progress by which the human race gradually perfects its civilization.

Kant saw that the perfection of civilization depended upon the establishment of a civil society, the political constitution of which embodied the justice needed to fulfill man's social nature. He also saw that the internal well-being of particular societies is profoundly affected by their external relations with one another. The state of war between nations continually works against the tendency toward civilization within communities. Universal and perpetual peace is, therefore, the goal toward which man's striving tends.

PROGRESS TOWARD PEACE

In the field of political history, there seem to be two laws of growth. One formulates the tendency of political development from despotism to constitutional government and, under the auspices of constitutional government, from oligarchy to democracy. The other formulates the tendency of political expansion from communities small in area and sparse in population to states which embrace vast territories and populations, heterogeneous as well as numerous.

It should certainly be obvious that the nation-state is only the latest, not the last, stage in the process of political expansion.

The only limit to political expansion is the world-state. Nothing less than that can stop the process. The world-state is the natural limit of expansion, the last stage of political growth in which two fundamental unities coalesce: (1) the unity of the planet as the territorial basis for man's political life, and (2) the unity of human nature, underlying all racial and cultural differences, as the psychological basis for universal citizenship.

THE OBSTACLES OF PEACE

Peace is not an ultimate end, and absolute good in itself. Political peace, like the very existence of a civil society and its welfare, provides the conditions men need to lead a good human life. Peace is a means to happiness, and the pursuit of happiness requires both liberty and justice.

We see, therefore, that world peace cannot be made if men will not give up the things which stand in its way. Even if it is made, it cannot be perpetuated if the terms of its making demand the sacrifice of the very goods which peace should serve.

We see one further point. If men misconceive their happiness to consist in money, fame, or power, they do not really want peace even if they delude themselves into thinking that war disturbs their pursuit of these things.

There is nothing intrinsically evil in money, fame, or power. What is evil is the infinite lust which seeks to possess them at all costs—the desire to have them in unlimited quantities, and before anything else.

Men who place their happiness in such goods, pre-eminently or exclusively, not only defeat themselves, even in the short run of a single lifetime; they also jeopardize the common good of the society in which they live. No one—man or nation—can seek unlimited wealth without impoverishing others, without increasing rather than diminishing the inequitable of the material factors in human welfare. No man or nation can wield unlimited power without enslaving or subjecting others.

The simplest test of a true conception of human happiness is that it should be attainable by each individual without in any way impeding or preventing an attainment of the same goods by others. Anyone who regards the pursuit of happiness as a competitive enterprise, in which first severed and the devil take the hindmost is doomed to discover that the first shall be last in the devil's accounting.

All of the oral obstacles to peace arise from disordered desires, desires for things in the wrong order, or unlimited desires for things which are good in their place and under some limitation of quantity which respects the needs of others.

For the deepest spiritual brotherhood to obtain among all men, it may be necessary for all to recognize the fatherhood of one God. But that is not necessary for political comradeship among citizens of the same state. For the peace of God, nothing less; than the theological virtue of charity will do. But justice—political and economic—is sufficient for civil peace.

One further point must be observed. There is a prevalent tendency to overemphasize cultural differences, and to minimize or neglect the profound similarities between diverse cultures. These common elements lie deep, because they are rooted in the underlying humanity of men everywhere. The differences being accidents of place or breeding or history, are necessarily superficial.

But the confusions about sovereignty still persist, especially the failure to distinguish between its internal and external aspects. This prevents men from seeing that subjugation or political dependency is not the only alternative to national independence.

They do not see that if they give up external sovereignty in order to establish a world federation, they necessarily retain the internal sovereignty of their government in local affairs. They do not see that the choice between national independence and subjugation arises only in the anarchic situation.

If they were to decide against international anarchy in favor of world government, they would be avoiding the possible loss of national independence at the hands of a conqueror, at the very same time that they would be surrendering external sovereignty for federal status. This most men do not see.

REVOLUTION FOR PEACE

For the last time, let us face the question whether peace is possible.

It is certainly impossible if the obstacles to it reside in any unchangeable features of human nature. If peace required men to be angels, or even most men to be saints, it would be a human impossibility. But the requisite changes in moral attitude and intellectual outlook, do not entail superhuman aspirations counsels of perfection.

Attitudes and opinions are both matters of habit. How men feel toward certain things, and what they believe about them, are consequences of nurture, not endowment of nature.

Were this not so, cultures could not differ from one another in fundamentals of belief or desire. The variety of cultures and historic changes in the growth of any single civilization show plainly enough that men vary in their habits of emotion and thought.

If the moral obstacles to peace were founded on something as instinctive as the impulse to self-preservation, then an unalterable

aspect of human nature would forever prevent peace—at least for men so long as they remained men. But the moral failings and the intellectual misconceptions which seem to be the chief impediments are not instinctive.

They are habits of character and of mind. They have been acquired in the course of history and under certain cultural influences. These habits can be changed in the course of time and by means of the same factors which originally formed them—education and experience.

The intellectual habits are the easier to change. Men have outgrown superstitions as profound as the belief that loss of national independence always amounts to political subjection. The conquest of false opinion has been accomplished not only in the fields of physics and medicine; it has also taken place in the sphere of social and political ideas.

Most men once thought that subjection to a despot was the natural condition of the majority. Most men no longer think so in some parts of the world. That is quite sufficient to show that, in the future, most men everywhere can become enlightened on this point.

We can argue similarly in the case of peace. Some men in the world today—however few relatively—do not understand that world federation would in no way deprive nations or their people of any degree of true human liberty. This fact shows that the prevalent notions about national independence are not innate ideas which all men have from birth, and from which they cannot free themselves. Inculcated by mis-education, the confusion about sovereignty can be removed by sound teaching.

In these matters, formal schooling usually needs to be reinforced by the lessons of experience. Experience supplemented teaching in bringing large numbers of men to understand their natural right to self-government—the right which despotism violates. In the same way that the whole atmosphere of political thought has been changed on this point, it can and will be changed with regard to the false notion that absolute sovereignty belongs to nations by natural right.

There is, in short, no intellectual impediment to peace which sound education, supported by some experience, cannot cure. But

the moral difficulties, ultimately due to emotional disorders, may be less susceptible to such remedies.

EDUCATION FOR PEACE

Civil liberty is not unlimited freedom. It is a freedom bounded by maximal and minimal conditions. In a just society, no man should have more liberty than he can use justly, or less than he needs to live a good life. More liberty than this becomes criminal license. Less deprives men of dignity, degrading them to slavery, which consists in their being used as means to the happiness or, more strictly, the selfish interests of other men.

It should be obvious that civil liberty is not incompatible with law and government. A man is no less free because he must obey a just law, even if he is not the author of that law, or would have wished to see it formulated differently in some particulars. Political freedom does not mean self-determination or self-government in that anarchic sense which recognizes no authority except one's own will—or whim—and hence yields obedience only to superior force.

At one extreme, there is the error of supposing that peace can be established by world political institutions prior to any of the moral and intellectual changes needed to make these institutions sufficiently acceptable to enough people. AT the opposite extreme is the error of supposing that the heart and mind of man must be completely ready before the necessary institutions can be initiated.

The institutionalist and the moralist fail to see that two sets of factors are everywhere interactive. Men must be morally and intellectually ready for political institutions—but only to some degree. Once the institutions exist, they will condition the whole social environment, and produce further moral and intellectual changes favorable to their own operation.

The moralist underestimates the educative influence of political institutions. The institutionalist does not pay enough attention to the psychological soil in which institutions must take root. It has been said, for example, that international institutions will not work until an international conscience exists. This strains the truth. The truth is that an international conscience will not be robust until international agencies become operative, and that international institutions will not work well until an international conscience matures. At an earlier stage, the weakest strain on international con-

science may be sufficient to permit the tentative and halfhearted adoption of international institutions. 

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