How Pragmatic is Peace?

• Definitions of Peace:
  • Negative peace: the (mere) absence of active violence (war, disputes, terror, civil unrest)
  • Positive peace: the absence of motives for active violence (greed, grievance, fear)
• Tradeoffs for these Definitions of Peace:

• Negative: More obtainable, less satisfying, less substantial, may “doom” us to war

• Positive: More substantial, less obtainable, might actually provoke additional conflict
War and Peace are Politics

• Definition of Politics:
  • The authoritative allocation of values, resources or prerogatives -- David Easton
  • Violence is a tool of politics ... is politics?
    • The origins of insecurity (Thomas Hobbes)
Civilization

• Definition of the State:

• Organization with a “monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory” -- Max Weber

• The state controls (or seeks to control) violence:
  • Useful tool (for actor)
  • Disruptive (to community of actors)
Conflict

• Whenever people disagree or resources are finite (scarce), there is room for conflict.

• There are other ways besides the use of force to deal with conflict.

• The study of peace then involves analysis of the alternatives to force (negative peace)

• Or the exploration of ways to address or dissipate disagreement (positive peace)
Conflict, continued

• So… because politics involves managing conflict, it is closely linked to violence.

• But politics is not necessarily violent, even as violence is not necessarily politics.

• Where are the overlaps and distinctions? A mugging is not politics. Why not?
Conflict, continued 2

• Law: the notion of legitimacy (rebels/revolutionaries argue law is illegitimate)
• Organization: political violence involves groups or their leaders (terrorists may attack individuals, but they aim to affect societies)
• Authority: political violence always involves hierarchy (leaders don’t kill, but instruct others to do so… still like organized crime).
• Consensus: violence is seen as a necessary evil, states are organized around exclusive domestic right to use violence, compete with other states (When is civil war international?)
Philosophical History of Peace

• The history of peace can be seen in terms of two conflicting tendencies, two wisdoms, and two competing intellectual perspectives:

• **Tendencies** ("ammunition" for opposing views):
  
  • War is endemic (few years in history pass without international bloodshed)
  
  • War is rare (most countries don’t fight most other countries most of the time)
Wisdoms:

- Peace must be possible because it is the modal condition.
- Negative peace predominates.
- Peace must be tenuous because it collapses.
- Warfare is recurrent if not frequent.
Phil. History, continued

• Perspectives:

  • Pessimists (realists, some Marxists):
    • Conflict is endemic to human social affairs.
  
  • Optimists (liberals, idealists, others):
    • Conflict as resolvable - at least containable.
    • Conflict only recurs because something is wrong in human affairs - fix what is broken
The Pessimist Perspective

• Realists offer stability.

• The best that can ensue is negative peace.

• Prevent any actor (state, individual) from seeing temporary advantage in using force, and violence will not occur.

• Classic arguments from Machiavelli and Hobbes epitomize the realist/pessimist view

• “...the natural state is one of war”
The State of Nature

• Definition:
  • Anarchy: the absence of central authority.
  • Anarchy is the world of “all against all”
  • Not necessarily chaos
Nature, continued

• Individuals compete for finite resources or incompatible objectives

• competition leads to conflict when might makes right (“the war of all against all”) The best that can ensue is negative peace.

• Politics originates in the dual needs to form common bonds of cooperation among some, and to better compete with others
• There is no politics without BOTH cooperation and conflict

• Evolutionary: innovation of politics allows some to better compete, because they don’t have to worry about “all against all”, just some.
Making the World “Unnatural”

• Definition:

  • Leviathan: an irresistible political authority, the totalitarian state.

  • Converts natural war into (negative) peace

  • Order within (the state authoritatively allocates resources, sets values)

  • Security without (the state itself is in a war of all against all, i.e. a protection racket)
Problems with Pessimism

• Even if this perspective is right empirically, it is disappointing

• Abandons prospect of moving beyond stability (order within, security without)

• May be self-fulfilling (if you believe pessimists, you behave in ways that make the pessimistic perspective a reality --- realism both positive and normative)
Problems, continued

• Leviathan can be illegitimate, despotic, possibly even worse than state of nature

• The advent of politics just re-organizes war

• Moves it to international politics.
• Optimists offer hope.

• Even if pessimist/realist arguments are correct about the past, they may not be true today.

• There are a wide variety of views about how to effect change.

• Most share a common conviction that pessimists are describing the world as it is in the absence of effective intervention by the insights of optimists.
Optimists, continued

- Each optimist argument attacks some element of the logical chain provided by pessimists.
- Human nature need not be exogenous (fixed) and preoccupied with competition.
- Religion: most religious traditions argue that the evolution of human nature can follow from religious belief.
- Education: many arguments implicitly or explicitly claim that peace can be achieved by information. Wars occur because...
Optimists, continued 2

• Education: many arguments implicitly or explicitly claim that peace can be achieved by making people more knowledgeable.

• Wars occur because people don’t know each other. Exchange programs and travel are designed to eliminate hate.

• Social Construction: violence can decline as communities develop habits or interests that take them away from the use of force in resolving problems. (but ... why now?)
• Even if human nature is exogenous (unchanging), social conditions can alter incentives.

• The Hobbesian leviathan is only one way to constrain latent conflict.

• Solutions need not attempt to change interests (positive peace), but to limit incentives to fight.
• Institutionalists argue that the rule of law, democracy, and other mechanisms promote cooperation domestically and peace globally.

• Functionalists: take this argument further, seeing the dense overlapping of institutions as a mechanism for social change.

• Once individuals or nations have become habituated to cooperating, this network of institutions and norms is no longer needed.
Problems with Optimists

• The empirical track record for optimists is not particularly encouraging (more below).

• Changing how people think could cause peace.

• But this has proven difficult to achieve.

• Societies that accommodate, rather than seek to alter, what many perceive as human nature often seem to do “better”

• Some of the worst mass violence in human history is tied to attempts to change human nature (Khmer Rouge, Nazis, Soviet Union)
Problems, continued

• If violence is illegitimate, how do we police?
• What do we do about other types of illegitimate behaviors (genocide, etc.)?
• Pessimists complain that optimists rely too heavily on good will (E. H. Carr).
• Either we must change human nature (which may not be possible)
• Or we have to use coercion to deal with the recalcitrant that are the very threat of force and violence we are trying to avoid.
Social/Intellectual Tradition

• History often occurs in cycles (Toynbee).
• The formative pessimist in Western tradition was Thucydides
  • Pessimists is that they generally accept that peace is possible/durable within the state
  • And yet they vigorously oppose the notion of world government.
Conclusion

• Development both increases and decreases conflict among nations, benign on balance
  • Increases less violent forms of conflict
  • Decreases war-prone territorial conflict
• Development inhibits initiators, not targets
  • Reduces incentive to conquer territory because wealth is no longer profitable to extract