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FINDING A REASONABLE FOUNDATION FOR PEACE

It stands to reason that peace, order and good government are counted among the greatest goods for mankind. Ancient, medieval and modern philosophers (contractarians and utilitarians) agree about the benefits of peace, but disagree about the conditions that will bring it about. Will world peace come about through the creation of a world federation of governments that choose to obey a common law because it is reasonable?

In the older philosophical tradition political peace was said to depend upon the rule of wise kings who seek to know the divine source of all order. In Christian thought that order was described as being composed of divine, eternal, natural and human law. But moderns, writing in the 17th century and afterwards, said that it is political liberty, not wisdom, which will prove to be the foundation of peace. It is through the progress of reason and the apprehension of what is best for mankind.¹ Peace and justice will follow upon the adoption of liberal constitutions approved by democratically elected governments, wherein rights are enshrined.

¹ Among those who addressed this argument are such important figures of the late 18th century as Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *A Lasting Peace and the State of War*, and in a critical response to Rousseau, James Madison, *Universal Peace*.

The stark opposition between these two positions is a matter of great importance to the history of political philosophy, for it points to the fact that in the Western world ideas about the source of political peace have changed dramatically. In the older tradition it was said that government, its order or disorder, its laws and institutions, reflects the virtue and vice of the members of that society. Modern political theory presupposes that men do not have to be virtuous to write just laws; all that is necessary is to enshrine in law the self-evident principle that human beings are by nature free and equal, and write laws which ensure fair treatment, so that each person can enjoy a good quality of life without harming the life, liberty, and property of another. In the older tradition it was said that human nature is revealed through the study of the order of things created by God. In the modern tradition, this is denied; rather it is said that only by turning inward, examining our desires, do we see the nature of man.

The 14th century poet and philosopher Dante Alighieri, who represents the older philosophical tradition, wrote in *De Monarchia*, that he hoped for a just and wise ruler to ascend to the throne of the Holy Roman Empire. In his opinion, the peace and unity of Christendom would depend upon a ruler who would represent the true teaching about justice and truth (and God). In that manner the unity of the things in heaven will be represented, albeit imperfectly, in worldly unity.

Mortimer Adler, despite his intellectual debt to Aristotle, disagreed. Adler was persuaded that modern political philosophy proceeds upon superior principles. Republican government is the only way to peace, and like Immanuel Kant he advocated a kind of federation of republican governments based upon the principle of universal right as the means to world unity. Thus, whereas Dante emphasized the importance of wisdom, Adler suggests that it is reason, progressing over time and through education that will bring human beings to appreciate the rightness of enshrining freedom and equality in

law. Unlike Dante he did not think metaphysical agreement between peoples to be necessary. Politics is about satisfying practical needs, metaphysics is about truth.²

Dante and Adler disagree not only as to the terms of peace, but also as to the first principles of thought by which men may reason their way to peace. To differ on such matters is to differ on the essential intellectual nature of mankind. In addition, this raises the question of whether or not ancient and medieval philosophy is of continuing importance to political debate. For if there are unchanging first principles available to the intellect, Dante's position, then political philosophy requires the insight given in classical and medieval account of justice. But let us first turn to examine specific arguments.

In the *Divine Comedy* and *Monarchy*, Dante distinguishes *temporal* and *supernatural* peace. The former is what Adler means by speaking about world peace, but for Dante there are two dimensions of peace. In the "Paradise," the third canticle of the *Divine Comedy*, when Dante approaches God in a contemplative and mystical vision of the heavens above the planetary stars, he glimpses angelic hierarchies and the creation of all things, and learns that all creation is hierarchically arranged in the mind of God. From this perspective he looks downward, and seeing Earth anew, he observes Europe and the Mediterranean Sea far below, and calls it, the little "threshing floor."³

A threshing floor is the place where one takes the grain harvest and winnows it, separating the wheat kernels from the chaff. Sheaves of grain are opened up and the stalks spread across the threshing floor. The ears of grain taken from stalks, the grain is loosened from the husks. After this process, the broken stalks and grain are collected and then thrown up into the air with a winnowing fork or a winnowing fan.

² Mortimer J. Adler, *The Four Dimensions of Philosophy: Metaphysical, Moral, Objective, Categorical* (New York, NY: Collier Books, 1993), 124–141.

³ Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, Part 3: "Paradise," XXVII, trans. Dorothy L. Sayers (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1962), 85–87. Hereafter: Alighieri, "Paradise."

The chaff is then blown away by the wind; the short torn straw falls away; while the heavier grain falls at the winnowers' feet.

This is temporal life from the perspective of heaven. Dante's imagery is indebted to both the Gospel of Matthew—when John the Baptist states of the Holy Ghost: “Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire” (Matt. 3:11–12)—and the first of the Psalms: “The ungodly . . . are like the chaff which the wind bloweth away” (Psalm 1:4). Set in an earthly paradise, Adam and Eve turned away from God. Given the fullness of peace and rest, they freely chose war and disorder. After the Fall, peace and order are only experienced in a limited way. Human beings have the ability and power to tame the seas and cultivate the land, to build great cities and draw up laws by which to live at peace. Men can turn what was wasteland into civilization; unfortunately, they can also turn what was a civilization into wasteland, and change freedom for tyranny. Aristotle and Plato said that given their faculties and powers, human beings have the potential to achieve excellence, but also to pervert their talents. This perversion is remedied through a love of wisdom. But hope lies in the fact that human beings are rational and desire to exercise their reason in pursuit of that excellence.

That excellence which the ancient philosophers recognized as belonging to the rational animal led them to say that even higher than the life of the city, the life of temporal order, is the life ordered to speculation about divine things. For without the certainty that there are divine and unchanging things, skepticism results. The sophists, whom they knew, had argued that there is no justice and that might is the only right, because they were skeptics. Plato and Aristotle said that it is only by taking the measure of justice as it is in its essential nature, by being wise, by discovering the order of being, that one might know how to live justly, and that directing men to justice is the end and purpose of law.

Christian thinkers did not disagree. Revelation adds certainty to the knowledge of God found through philosophical investigation and dialectical reasoning; it reveals the essential nature of God, and faith offers the promise of the beatific vision and eternal life. As to the life of politics, it will ultimately end, as things temporal gives way to things eternal. That means, as Dante states, temporal peace is “subordinate to thinking as the best activity for which the Primal Goodness brought mankind into existence.”⁴ Doing and making rank second to the contemplation of divine things in the order of human activity.

This is what Dante states: “justice, considered in itself and its own nature, is a kind of rectitude or rule which spurns deviation from the straight path to either side; and thus it does not admit of a more or a less.”⁵ But justice is always practiced to a greater or lesser extent—greater or lesser because impeded in the will of the agent, who is a composite of soul and body. The will impedes: “for where the will is not entirely free of all greed, even if justice is present, nonetheless [it] is not entirely present in the splendor of its purity.”⁶ Not only impeded in the will, justice is impeded with regard to power, “for justice is a virtue that operates in relation to other people,” and one does not always have the power to give justice to each person as is fitting.⁷ So the composite nature of human agents, bodily as well as spirit and mind, limits the potential for the exercise of justice, although one can grasp justice in its purity in speculation.

Note the manner in which Dante speaks of freedom. A rational animal is free when acting without greed or pride. Greed and pride hinder the free exercise of the will. Greed is directed towards self-interest rather than the public good, in this sense it hinders the public good, it is self-obsessed. It is not that far again from the Greek

⁴ Dante Alighieri, *Monarchy*, Book I, iii, ed. Prue Shaw (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 7–8.

⁵ *Ibid.*, Book I, xi, 15–16.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

conception of *hubris*. According to Homer and the ancient tragedies, the sin of *hubris*, or human pride, led not only to disorder within the soul, but to political disorder and despotism. The plays of Aeschylus and Sophocles both ponder human limit. *Hubris*, pride, is a rejection of limit. Therefore the good ruler and the good citizen is he who can live freely in accord with the order given in human nature and the cosmos. “Justice—says Socrates—holds together heaven and earth, the gods and men,” it is a partnership, a friendship.⁸

This is why Dante depicts paradise as friendship between God and man in a heavenly city. Paradise is a vision of order, the heavenly order of angels and saints. Hell depicts the perversion of order, there is no friendship; there is no love between man and man, only betrayal and fraud. Dante depicts the Italy of his lifetime in his poem about Hell; for during his lifetime Italy was wracked by war. His early life as a poet and citizen of Florence came to an abrupt end because of this disorder. He was abruptly exiled from Florence when he was accused of graft and political corruption, after attempting to intervene justly in the political disputes between Guelf and Ghibelline factions. Each side was vying for control in Florence, an independent republican city in Italy. After being exiled, he never returned. Yet, in his exile he did not long for revenge, as many have said, rather he identified the true nature of homelessness as exile from the heavenly city. So all Christendom, he argued, was homeless in this primary sense—without Emperor or Pope who accepted that his role was limited by a higher law, the law of God’s divine providential order.

Although it sounds strange to modern ears, for Dante temporal peace does not result from the discovery of the most efficacious means to resolve a political dispute among a particular group of people. If all that were needed for men to live at peace is a very cleverly set of written laws and a liberal constitution, then surely peace would result from finding a very clever group of people who could write such laws.

⁸ Plato, *Gorgias*, trans. D. Zehl (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1987), 507e–508a.

Dante, however, does not accuse those who have destroyed Italy and brought civil war, whether Pope Boniface VIII or various kings and emperors, of not being quite clever enough. Nor does he suggest a better education would improve the situation. Rather, he exhorted conversion to God and giving up the obsession with temporal goods; he exhorted men to practice the virtues of humility, generosity, zeal for goodness, temperance, and charity (love of God and love of man) above all. Furthermore, he said that only when Europe has a temporal ruler who exercises these virtues, particularly charity (and here he echoes Thomas Aquinas who wrote much the same in *On Kingship*) will men become good.⁹ Justice flows down from above, it is not a creation of autonomous human will. Only if, as Plato recognized, the ruler recognizes the justice given in the world order and understands its essential nature, will men be free. Only then will the citizenry not have to live for the sake of the ruler, but the ruler will rule for the sake of the citizens. Dante added:

for just as a political community is not formed for the sake of the laws, but the laws are framed for the benefit of the political community, in the same way those whose lives are governed by the law are not there for the sake of the legislator, but rather he is there for their sake, as Aristotle says in those writings he left us on this subject.¹⁰

The political community is formed for the sake of obedience to a higher law, it is not formed so that the citizens might obey the laws of the majority or a particular ruler.

For this reason a virtuous ruler is desired not just for one nation but for the whole world. He does not rule single-handedly, as nations

⁹ Alighieri, *Monarchy*, Book I, xii, 21.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* The editor notes that Aristotle does not make this point as clearly as does Aquinas in his commentary on *Ethics* 5, 3 (*Commentary on Aristotle's Nichomachean Ethics*, trans. C. I. Litzinger, O. P. (Notre Dame, IN: Dumb Ox Books 1993)).

and kingdoms and cities all have distinct laws and characteristics, but through the common principles. The principle is this:

rule or law should be received from him by individual rulers, just as the practical intellect, in order to proceed to action, receives the major premiss from the theoretical intellect and then derives the minor premiss appropriate to its own particular case, and then proceeds to the action in question.¹¹

Reasoning about nature, Dante states: “what is contrary to nature’s intention is against God’s will.”¹² This is the first principle of reason, says Dante. It is the first principle from which to think about temporal peace. Reason and revelation together affirm that human beings have two ends: one end, a temporal end, discerned by reasoning about human nature, as Aristotle had; and the second through God’s word revealed.

Thomas Aquinas wrote of nature’s intention for human order in his discussion of the State of Innocence found in the *Summa*. Social order is natural to mankind, necessary for living excellently as a composite being, soul and body. Thomas stated that: (1) in the state of perfection, those who are perfectly fitted to rule would have been, according to right reason, master over others;¹³ (2) natural inequality as to knowledge of justice, and the knowledge which makes for social hierarchies, would have been apparent to all who have rectitude of reason; and (3) rectitude of reason would have led to a society wherein those superior in knowledge and justice would be recognized as rightfully ruling over others.¹⁴ This “rectitude consisted in reason being subject to God, the lower powers to reason.”¹⁵

¹¹ *Ibid.*, Book I, xiv, 25.

¹² *Ibid.*, Book III,ii, p. 64.

¹³ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947), Ia, q. 96, a. 4.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Ia, q. 95, a. 1.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

The return to innocence is not possible, of course, but human beings were made to live in ordered society. The will *naturally* has an appetite for the good, and the intellect an appetite for truth, yet neither power is perfected without divine help. The monarch, in whom justice can have its purest abode, he states, is the man who has love, and “scorning all other things, seeks God and man, and hence the true good of man.”¹⁶ Thus the human race is in its ideal state when it is most free from sin and governed by a just monarch who has that special kind of wisdom proper to kings.¹⁷

In the end, however, Dante’s final concern is not political. As much as the ruler who is practically wise, and is able in his judgement and excellent in charity is necessary to peace, the ruler himself does not practice that highest life for which human beings were created, which is the contemplation of the divine hierarchy itself. Only thus a man comes to see “the circulation of the heavens, which is the guiding of the world; which world is a kind of ordered civility perceived in the speculation of its movers.”¹⁸

Hence the best life for man exists in two forms, temporal and spiritual, just rule and contemplation. But the speculative life is that to which the active life is finally ordered. In the “Paradise” the excellence of Charity is described in two ways, in the heaven of Jupiter are the just rulers and in Saturn are the contemplatives, the former just lower than the latter in the hierarchy of heaven.¹⁹ Charity, or the perfection of human nature, takes two forms because man alone among all creatures is the “link between corruptible and incorruptible things.”²⁰

¹⁶ Alighieri, *Monarchy*, Book I, xi, 18.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Book I, xii, p. 19. See also St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II–II, q. 50, a. 1, 2.

¹⁸ Dante Alighieri, *The Convivio of Dante Alighieri*, II, v (London: J. M. Dent and co., 1903), 80.

¹⁹ See Alighieri, “Paradise,” discussion of contemplation in canticle XXIX.

²⁰ Alighieri, *Monarchy*, Book III, xvi, 91.

For if he is considered in terms of his essential constituent parts, that is soul and body, man is corruptible; if he is considered only in terms of one, his soul, he is incorruptible. . . . Infallible providence has thus set before us two goals to aim at: i.e. happiness in this life, which consists in the exercise of our own powers and is figured in the earthly paradise; and happiness in the eternal life which consists in the enjoyment of the vision of God (to which our own powers cannot raise us except with the help of God's light) and which is signified by the heavenly paradise.²¹

This follows from human beings having the capacity to be both practically and speculatively wise, as Plato and Aristotle had said.

To wit man was created with two faculties of the rational soul, *intellectus* and *ratio*, both fitted to knowing God and his creation. It is intellect which grasps the principles of knowledge, those principles which cannot be discovered entirely by dialectical reasoning. Reason, beginning from those first principles grasped by intellect, proceeds to understanding and action. "*Intellectus* is that in man which approximates most nearly to angelic *intelligentia*. . . . We are enjoying *intellectus* when we 'just see' a self-evident truth; we are exercising *ratio* when we proceed step by step to prove a truth which is not self-evident."²² *Ratio*, so described, is suited to human nature, its bodily nature, it is connected to the outer and inner senses. Yet the human

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² The distinction between intellect and reason is thus explained in Boethius and then repeated in Thomas. C. S. Lewis makes this clear in *The Discarded Image*: "its relation to reason described by Aquinas: 'intellect (*intelligere*) is the simple (i.e. indivisible, uncompounded) grasp of an intelligible truth, whereas reasoning (*ratiocinari*) is the progression towards an intelligible truth by going from one understood point to another. The difference between them is thus like the difference between rest and motion or between possession and acquisition'." Clive S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 157. (Although Lewis notes the passage from *Summa Theologica* wrongly, as Ia, q. 89, a. 8, instead of Ia, q. 79, a. 8).

intellect can grasp truth directly, a gift otherwise given only to the angels.

In the allegory of Mount Purgatory in the second of his great poems about the afterlife, Dante stated it this way: purgation of sin leads to the edge of the Earthly Paradise (Eden). Purgation leads to the kind of virtue that allows for just rule. Virgil's last words to Dante, before Dante enters that earthly paradise are: "I mitre thee and crown." The mitre is the symbol of the bishop, and the crown of the prince; Dante, purged of sin during his climb up Mount Purgatory, symbolizes perfection in reason and will, like Adam before the fall, the individual is able to enter into the earthly Paradise (Garden of Eden). In this state a man is fitted to be king or priest because of his love of God's law.

Reason discovers the natural order of things, divine grace maintains that order. But sin cannot be washed away entirely except by the blood of Christ in the sacraments. All this is made clear in the symbolism of the pageants Dante witnesses in the Earthly Paradise. This place, interestingly, is described by Dante as empty, except as a meeting place for those who underwent purgation, and visitors from heaven. For perfection this side of heaven is not possible. The profound alienation of mankind from complete earthly peace is here aptly expressed. Human beings cannot return to their original innocent state. Is it therefore the case that mankind will never see peace? Perhaps it may, but only during the life of the just ruler. On my reading, Dante's project is to remind a fallen world of the first principles of political justice, hoping that it is possible, even if unlikely, for world peace. The reason why contemplation is higher than just rule is this: contemplation of God is given to us for eternity, temporal peace will only ever be short-lived, on this threshing floor. The vices depicted in Hell destroy community, turn neighbor against neighbor, and lead to war and discord, for they are the result of having lost 'the good of the intellect', given by the first principles of thought which belong to reason.

Several centuries later, in the 18th century, it became a commonplace for philosophers to say that the human race could progress towards some kind of political perfection and *perpetual* peace would result. Immanuel Kant, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Jeremy Bentham, even James Madison opined on the possibility of a future where perpetual peace might reign throughout time were states to become republican or democratic. This marks a very great change in what is said about the rational potentiality of people, if it is the case that perpetual peace might come to be through democratic action. Nothing is said in these thinkers about contemplation of God or freedom from sin and virtue, but rather it is said that through the development and progress of human reasoning powers, people around the world will eventually accept that the “goal of progress in all civil societies is constitutional government, with universal suffrage and the securing of natural rights including the right to a decent livelihood,” as Adler puts it.²³

Mortimer Adler wrote his book *How to Think about War and Peace* at the end of the Second World War when there was great optimism about the possibility of international peace. The European Economic Community and the United Nations offered hope that some kind of international government might be created to combine an effective lawmaking power with military force. In this context, Adler’s hope for world peace through the building of world government is understandable.

Adler’s argument also makes sense on one level—human beings are political animals,²⁴ they learn from each other, reasoned discussion is common to all human beings, and human beings have always lived

²³ Adler, *The Four Dimensions of Philosophy*, 134. For Adler’s thoughts on socialism as the model of political freedom towards which men are progressing, see pages 133–137.

²⁴ Mortimer J. Adler, *How to Think About War and Peace* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1977), 36–43.

within governments. Anarchy (the absence of government)²⁵ is the cause of war, and it is by good rule that peace is kept. In the current situation, when technological progress draws the world closer and closer together,²⁶ there is no community which is so economically self-sufficient that it can exist in isolation from all others. There aren't national economies, rather there is now a single economic community throughout the world.²⁷ Integration, through economic and technological developments, has made international interdependence a fact, and the next step is to move towards an integrated world government. This is his argument.

Peace is an absolute good, he states, although not the ultimate end.²⁸ (Although what that absolute end might be is unclear.) Peace requires that men not misconceive happiness as success, money, fame, or power. All moral obstacles to peace which arise from disordered desires, both individual and national will be overcome.²⁹ The obstacles to peace can be overcome by changing the *wants* of people and nations by moral education.

He presumes that there is a fixed human nature, and that political science is the realm of desires and prescriptive truth, not descriptive truth.³⁰ It is prescribing the right laws for mankind given their nature as desiring creatures. He argued that those desires can be shaped by a liberal arts education. World peace may not require "for all to recognize the fatherhood of one God,"³¹ which is to say that peace can be obtained without agreement about metaphysical questions. Thus the pursuit of descriptive truth about human nature, the common good or

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 74 ff.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 217.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 227.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 231.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 232–234.

³⁰ Adler, *The Four Dimensions of Philosophy*, 126–127.

³¹ Adler, *How to Think About War and Peace*, 237.

truth which informs do not belong to politics.³² Government is about prescribing what we ought to desire. To that end one needs to consult self-evident principles.

Adler states that “something is self-evident if its opposite is unthinkable. It is unthinkable that we ought to desire anything that is really bad for us; and it is equally unthinkable that we ought not to desire anything that is really good for us.”³³ No mention of taking the measure of reason from nature. Rather what is unthinkable for Adler is to deny that liberty and equality are the final good for mankind, or that progress and economic well-being are necessary to the realization of liberty, understood as political liberty alone.³⁴

These are not the same principles which were evidently true to Thomas Aquinas, however. They are not the principles of reason which made social hierarchy and kingship the way to justice according to Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century. Adler’s self-evident principles reflect appetite rather than the created order of nature. Appetite is the source of justice, and education helps society prescribe what we ought to desire if we do not do it automatically. Thus education must emphasize that freedom and equality are the chief goods to which one should direct one’s desires.

Adler rejects the idea that the providential order of the universe is self-evident because this idea is too theological. The middle ages added little to nothing to philosophy, he states. If anything, “there is a loss of energy and clarity”³⁵ because of confusion of philosophy and

³² Prescriptive truth, Adler writes, is to be sharply distinguished from descriptive truth. “The latter, it has been said earlier, consists in the agreement or conformity of the mind with reality. When we think that that which is, is, and that which is not, is not, we think truly. To be true, what we think must conform to the way things are. In sharp contrast, prescriptive truth consist in the conformity of our appetites with right desire. The practical or prescriptive judgements we make are true if they conform to right desire; or, in other words, if they prescribe what we ought to desire.” *Ibid.*, 127.

³³ Adler, *The Four Dimensions of Philosophy*, 129.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 133–138.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 237.

theology. Openness to eternity, steadfast attention to the whole, which ancients and medievals took to be foundational to thinking about human order, is irrelevant; the medievals, he said, mistook descriptive truths (metaphysics) for prescriptive ones (political), or perhaps I should say they combined them wrongly. Today, Adler states, we know because of Hume the ‘naturalistic fallacy’³⁶ which is the error of deriving an ought from nature, ethics from metaphysics. “Propositions containing the word ‘ought’ cannot conform to reality.”³⁷ Hence he seems also to accept the Weberian distinction between knowledge of fact and value, thereby separating the realm of objective truth from that of ethics.

There were many reasons for why modern thinkers, such as Hume, came to eschew the so-called naturalistic fallacy, separating metaphysics from ethics and politics, not least the replacement of an Aristotelian teleological view of nature with that of modern physics, governed by laws of chance and necessity.³⁸ But in his wholesale rejection of Aristotelian science, Hume also rejected the idea that there are first principles of thought. Men *value* freedom and equality, and so it should be provided by the state. Rather than seek first principles in nature, as did the ancients who held that what is contrary to nature cannot be true, the question of truth is set aside. Among the contract thinkers some rather facile attempts were made to describe a ‘state of nature’, suitable to one’s particular theory, and thus to justify a particular theory. This turns the reasoning and intellective faculty into an instrument which serves a theory about desires. The goal is to write a constitution which balances the differing desires of a multitude of

³⁶ For a persuasive argument about the dangers of adopting the naturalistic fallacy as the *sine qua non* of ethical thought read George Parkin Grant, *English-Speaking Justice* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1974).

³⁷ Adler, *The Four Dimensions of Philosophy*, 127.

³⁸ One explanation of this development can be found in Étienne Gilson, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience*. Another in Charles Taylor’s works such as *A Secular Age*. Also George Parkin Grant, *Technology and Justice*.

people in such a way that they do not antagonize each other to the point of civil breakdown. This project is ‘instrumental’ to peace, it ought to be engaged in for the sake of good government. However, this view of reason is very limited. As has been said many times, the instrumentalization of reason accompanied the death of speculative reasoning.³⁹ Thus reason, harnessed to the social process, becomes an instrument by which to rationalize and organize human beings, shaping society by our subjective ideas and creative will. That is an important difference between medieval and modern thought—the way in which reason is perceived—is it receptive or is it instrumental?

Mortimer Adler in his book *The Four Dimensions of Philosophy* advocates the liberal democratic or socialistic model as the only model of political organization which can bring world peace. He does so, in my opinion, quite naively, without perhaps quite recognizing the degree to which its principles eviscerate the Aristotelian philosophy which he otherwise quite admires. Adler asks why it is that most of the great political philosophers, Plato, Aristotle, and Saint Thomas included, were simply wrong as to think that there never could be a universal or perfect peace.

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. . . . 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.⁴⁰

³⁹ A classic critique of modern reason, written by a philosopher who is not a friend to historical philosophy, but who understood the philosophy of his age very well, is found in *Eclipse of Reason*, by Max Horkheimer, written in 1947.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Adler argues that there is “no intellectual impediment to peace which sound education, supported by some experience, cannot cure.”⁴¹ We must use our reason to solve the problem, it should serve the end which we want. Thus, prejudice can be eradicated through the redirection of human desires; so also one can eradicate the moral obstacles arising from economic inequalities and economic nationalism.⁴² If each person were to receive the same liberal education, citizens would most certainly all agree about what is right and wrong.⁴³ An educated and morally improved citizenry, all agreeing that all people should share equally in the goods for the body, spread throughout the world, would bring peace. This is a prospect which he hoped might come about in about 500 years. In this, he echoes Dewey more than Aristotle. The liberal arts can be the means to simply gaining information or social conditioning, rather than tempering the desires of the soul, if one adopts an historicist approach as to their truth.

This is not to say that Mortimer Adler does not praise ancient philosophy, but he underplays the distinction between what Aristotle meant by saying that man is a rational animal and what was put forward about reason in the contract theory.⁴⁴ For in the classical tradition reason is receptive, it learns from what is, it is only hindered by appetites and desires which are untrustworthy. But in mooted the possibility of a new age when a world government will come into being, chosen by free and intelligent beings, reason becomes a creative moral will which acts instrumentally assisted by the inevitability of historical progress.⁴⁵ Adler is prescribing a theory. Quoting Immanuel Kant, Adler said that human capacities are “destined to unfold

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Adler, *How to Think About War and Peace*, 259–263.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 266.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 37–39.

⁴⁵ Adler thinks he is correcting ancient and medieval philosophy. I direct the reader to read his chapter: “Philosophy’s Past, Present and Future,” in *The Four Dimensions of Philosophy*.

themselves completely in the course of time, and in accordance with the end to which they are adapted.”⁴⁶ There is no suggestion here that justice is permanently impeded by the will. Rather over time our wills improve. The key question is: why should we accept Adler’s theory as true? Secondly one must wonder—when reasoning is reduced to a tool or instrument to serve the popular will during the historical development of mankind, what can be said of the human intellect as formerly understood? Is it merely useless in the political arena? Is there no knowledge of an unchanging good to guide the statesman?

But convinced as he was that providence would eventually lead the people of each nation to see the benefits of democratic government, he said that if all nations were republics, if one could rid the world of the heterogeneity that exists between the “democratic capitalist nations and the totalitarian communist dictatorships,” it might be possible for a world union to be politically and economically homogeneous.⁴⁷ Indeed, “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.”⁴⁸

How unlike Thomas and Dante, and unlike Plato! Whatever the future of the ‘race’ (such a loaded word), the race will never fulfill the promise of ‘nature’s endowment’. “Plato describes how Man, assisted by the power of grace, passes out of the cavern of this world, but he doesn’t say that a whole city can pass out of it. On the contrary, he depicts the collectivity as something animal, which hinders the soul’s salvation.”⁴⁹ That is a quotation from someone who saw very clearly the ways in which the philosophy of Plato is a necessary correction to the *hubris* of modern thought.

⁴⁶ Adler, *How to Think About War and Peace*, 175. Quoting Immanuel Kant, *Idea of a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View*.

⁴⁷ Adler, *The Four Dimensions of Philosophy*, 141.

⁴⁸ Adler, *How to Think About War and Peace*, 175.

⁴⁹ Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1952), 125–126.

In a later book, Adler mentions that Eternal Law and Divine Law are the foundation for natural law.⁵⁰ What does Adler mean by natural law? Thomas defined it as rational participation in the Eternal Law of God. How can Adler agree with that definition when it commits the ‘naturalistic fallacy’? He is left speaking of natural law as if it were an innate sense of what is right and wrong, entirely subjective. Indeed it must be subjective if, as he states, there is need neither for metaphysics as a foundation for political reasoning, nor agreement about God. If, as he states, modern philosophy corrects Aristotle and the philosophers of medieval Christendom as to the foundation of political justice, what aspect of Aristotle? To say that by nature men can know the unchanging first principles of practical reason, as Aristotle did, and in the next breath to suggest a historical, progressive view of learning, requires holding to two opposing visions of human reason at the same time.

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I imagine at this point someone might ask this question—it is all very well to show that Adler is too enamored of the questionable progressivism of late Enlightenment thought, he misunderstands the nature of the intellect, and is naïve to believe that a regime of freedom and equality will eventually be embraced by all mankind, but: How does medieval Christian philosophy offer a solution in today’s world? Do not the modern contract thinkers solve the problem of peaceful government in a useful way? Was it not a good thing to put an end to religious warfare by founding governments on secular principles, the self-interest of the individual? Was it not necessary to reject the political philosophy of medieval Christendom to accommodate a multicultural and secular and multi-religious world?

This is a very difficult question and one that I do not want to minimize. But clearly one can see what has been lost. In modern

⁵⁰ Adler, *The Four Dimensions of Philosophy*, 204–205.

philosophy, contemplation of God and speculative philosophy as understood by Aristotle, is regarded as “alien to, and perhaps quite subversive of, politics. The philosopher who spent his days trying to behold eternity, the mystic whose only desire was to lose himself in God, were of necessity withdrawn from and contemptuous of politics.”⁵¹ But in times of metaphysical skepticism such as ours, when it assumed that people cannot attain to a knowledge of the unchanging truth which is the source of order and peace, it follows that the flux of existence comes to dominate thinking. To focus exclusively upon the flux of existence will blind one to what is common to human life. Religion can provide an answer, but as people do not all agree about religion, and philosophical speculation doesn’t provide a foundation for rights if that speculation begins from the presupposition that the truths discovered in the past are of merely passing interest. It is not too much to suggest that if one’s view of the progress of human knowing is progressive and historical, politics becomes a ceaseless struggle to affirm one’s own point of view.

Adler would agree that the ideological nationalism of the last century has been the enemy of international peace. But one of the reasons why nationalism was so destructive was that it was founded on an idea which made truth immanent, in the cultural psyche of the nation, thus not transcendent. The ideology of nationalism exalted struggle and differences between peoples as absolute. It advanced the idea that national autonomy and true freedom would not be “achieved here and now, once and for all, it is rather to be struggled for ceaselessly, perhaps never to be attained or permanently secured.”⁵² This perspective is very different from that of thinkers from Socrates to Dante, who pointed out that if the struggle and imperfection of this world is all there is, then politics will only end in tyranny, when a tyrant imposes a peace.

⁵¹ Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 33.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 24.

Where do politics lie? Do politics not lie in discussion, in debate, in the life of the mind? Were the ancient philosophers, who identified the goods of the intellect as more important than bodily goods, attempting to protect a robust political life? To make it free? Were they not making arguments for the sake of politics? Were they not warning that human beings, given their way, are materialistic, endlessly desiring, given over to license and therefore ungovernable? Were they wrong to suggest that justice lies in limiting those ungovernable desires? Complete license leads to the rule of a tyrant who comes to power by satisfying the people's endless wants, it was said. Justice results from open and free discussion in the polis about goodness and truth—the rule of wisdom. Dante writing over a millennium later, in a political and ecclesiastical situation that was very different, regarded that teaching about wisdom as unchanged, because human nature was unchanged.

Is speculation about metaphysical truth a necessary part of human life? Does justice depend upon knowledge available to the intellectual and speculative part of the soul? This is an impasse between modern and ancient, for if the ancients are correct, people will not be happy by just being given stuff, or even by exercising the franchise, but by knowledge of goodness and truth. So also they will not be free if they do not prize the life of the mind over the life of the body.

Clearly the body needs food, shelter, rest and freedom, but the purpose of freedom is to think. For people must ask themselves these questions: Why does anyone deserve anything by right? Why should people participate in government? Does politics have anything to do with the nature of the soul?

When Adler states that world peace is the outcome of an historical world process of political struggle, only emerging over a series of democratic changes, he has made a judgement about the nature of reality, which is a metaphysical judgement. If there is historical progress toward justice over time, then justice is not available to reason

now. We are beings who are only capable of rationally engaging with what is in flux.

When Dante argues that political justice is intimately related to freedom from sin, is he not saying something that might still be relevant? He said that the capacity to act justly only exists by virtue of the knowledge of what is good, and the power to act in accord with that goodness—to free oneself as much as possible from sin. Doing the good one knows is the mark of the free man, and the state wherein men act in such a way will be a state where men limit themselves by justice. Can one really know justice without reference to the metaphysicians of the ancient world?

Finally, is it not necessary for political philosophers to take into account the power of the human soul to contemplate divine things? According to ancient and medieval philosophers, and those modern philosophers who continued to read Aristotle, philosophical speculation about the nature of reality was not considered a private talent, unique to some but not to others, just as some people are good at golf and others good at playing the piano. It belongs to the very nature of mankind. To ignore that side of human nature is no small thing.

In Western democracies, freedom of conscience is under attack. For example, the state defines marriage and family, and those who disagree with the state have been in some cases silenced. It is assumed that the bond uniting people in marriage is mutual *feeling*, not an external order given in nature or the history of rational thought. Ordinary people think that “I am what I can fashion out of my own being.”⁵³ Perceptions of marriage, like perceptions of gender are now engulfed in the ideology of progress and liberation, they are not subject to rational discourse.

To put it another way, liberal constitutional governments built upon the separation of fact and value have lost the rationale for limiting their power over all aspects of life. The church and family have become

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 82–83.

subordinate to the state because they are not recognized as having an objective 'value'. Not only is religion suspect but debate and discussion itself, formerly the purview of the intellect, is considered unimportant. Power attached to ideology is all there is.

Adler wanted to unify the world under an idea or set of ideas which held to what he thought best about late Enlightenment ideas of freedom and concern for equality. He accepted that modern science had undermined ancient philosophy in important ways. He claimed that the liberal contract theorists were correct, and given that fact, the gradual acceptance of their ideals over time through education would lead human beings to end the kinds of prejudice and economic inequalities that give rise to war. We could, as Kant and others said, arrive at world peace.

Peace is that good to which all sane men will aspire. But is liberal contract theory the only foundation for peace? Can people discover peace if they make the goods of the body of greater importance than the goods of the mind? Can we protect freedom if ancient and medieval philosophy is treated as irrelevant to the modern political project? Is the essential order of justice written into the very nature of things? Or is justice a matter of human invention and work over time, possibly even inevitable? These are not insignificant questions for future generations to contemplate.

FINDING A REASONABLE FOUNDATION FOR PEACE

SUMMARY

Can world peace come about through a world federation of governments? Is growing agreement and appreciation for, throughout the world, the doctrine of equal human rights inevitable? Such questions are raised by Mortimer Adler in *How to Think about War and Peace*. Adler argues in this book that both are possible, and in doing so he argues that the insights of liberal contract thinkers, particularly Immanuel Kant, are essentially true. Kant argues that each person has the capacity to discover within himself the foundation for human rights because they are self-evident. It follows that

over time inequalities and prejudices will disappear, and people will gain the freedom to advance the cause of peace. About this account of the possibility of world peace I ask the question: is it indeed reasonable? For if it is reasonable, it is not reasonable for the reasons that would have been advanced by Aristotle or Plato or their medieval followers. In older political philosophy it is agreement about the unchanging truth of things that can bring peace. To seek the unchanging truth of things, philosophical speculation about God and things divine, is the highest human activity. It is that end to which life in this world is directed, and upon which human flourishing depends. Freedom depends upon our openness to unchanging eternal truth, even more than self-evident rights; the exercise of speculative reasoning allows for political discourse and an open society.

KEYWORDS

Dante Alighieri, Mortimer Adler, peace, ancient, medieval, *Divine Comedy*, *Monarchy* (*De Monarchia*), Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, right(s), education, reason, metaphysics, freedom (liberty), politics.

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