

Peace – Remarks on the Difficult History of a Key Cultural Term

The concept of peace is as old as human knowledge of society. However comprehensible it may seem that the problem of how to confine and control violence becomes virulent wherever human society transcends its smallest possible units, the interpretations of what is called peace in our days are still manifold.

Peace as a synonym for nature

The energetic peace concept of archaic societies has always been, and still is, influenced by an attachment to nature, experienced and worshiped as the Great Mother. During that phase of history, human beings experience their being nourished by Mother Nature as peace. This is why these civilizations always have female and identical divinities for peace and fertility.

The continuous growth of societies, the development of more complex structures as well as the differentiation between horticulture and agriculture all resulted in an increased appreciation of the male counterpart to female peace and fertility goddesses. Peace and fertility rituals dedicated to male divinities usually derive from stock farming. They emerge with the evolutionary transition from the magic to the mythical phase with extended social units defining themselves through abstract divinities and more complex systems of rule.

The beliefs introduced to the Hellenic-European civilization by Indo-Germanic war folks were entirely different. To these people war represented the natural state of social being. From this consciousness they developed a highly moral war ethic and came to consider war interruptions, known as Eirene, to be inevitable intermissions within a more noble activity rather than a desirable state. It is only in the fifth century before Christ that Greek writers such as Plato, Aristophanes or Herodotus acknowledge peace as a value in itself. With the emergence of the Greek city states (Polis) the concept of peace in terms of a judicial institutional treaty evolved.

Contractually arranged peace

The above concept was in consequence adopted by the Roman Empire. Under Emperor Augustus the former fertility goddess, Pax, together with the victory goddess, Victoria, were worshiped as Siegfriede, the peace of victory, while Mars, the former companion of Pax was redefined as a god of war adapted to the Greek Ares. The final transition from the magic to the mystical world view was thus accompanied by a reinterpretation of the concept of peace.

This also had an effect on the three large religions in the Mediterranean. Among Jews and Christians the word Shalom (Salam) originally stood for the name of a god, that is to say a god who was called peace and, therefore, IS peace. With the institutionalisation of the church, he slowly turned into the Creator God that GIVES peace with the giving being bound to certain conditions interpreted by god's earthly representatives.

The same process was, later on, observed within Islam and was by no means a Mediterranean phenomenon. With the arrival of Confucianism China, too, underwent a strict moralisation of the originally energetic peace concept. In Hinduism the process was reflected by the Brahmanic interpretations of religious rules. In Buddhism, the same development took place when the different Mahayana and Zen schools emerged and even within the rebellious shamanic Tantra of Hinduist, Buddhist and Daoist influence, the very same institutionalising responses could be

observed. The same is true for America where a politically institutionalised priesthood replaced an energetically oriented Shamanism to further develop it into the splendid advanced civilizations of the Maya, Aztec, Inca or Chibcha, which then for their part imploded or become victims of the European invasion. In Africa, on the other hand, numerous energetic world and peace concepts are able to survive the internal nation building process as well as the European and Arabic invasions. With strong social power they continued to exist underneath the surface of a largely failed institutionalisation of the state and a moralist church affected by Islam and Christianity.

The self-conception of the Enlightenment included a rational reaction to the pre-rational concepts of peace and society. Wherever this succeeded, a new terminology for antiquated paradigms developed. Thomas Hobbes, one of the most important masterminds of modern peace regulations, for example, basically adopted the concept of a negative peace contenting itself with the absence of physical violence, just as did the Greek Eirene. The impulse for a reevaluation of the peace concept towards an ethic self-worth by agreement based on the model of the Roman Pax was given by Kant's famous treatise on Perpetual Peace.

The Realist and the Idealist schools

This approach later on transformed into the Realist and the Idealist schools of the scientific discipline of International Relations. This discipline emerged out of the trauma of the First World War. Within the frame of the Paris peace negotiations, the delegates agreed on establishing centres for research of the international system in order to avoid any future catastrophes of similar dimension. It is not surprising that neither of the two approaches of the young discipline managed to avert the following disaster of World War Two. They both departed from the institutional and moral beliefs which had led to the development of the meanwhile global capitalism and its inherent structures of violence. The critical approach of Marxism to this regard was at that time dismissed as unscientific for ideological reasons. It was only long after World War Two that these critical voices, via the detour of structuralism, eventually became a matter of scientific debate within those parts of the world which were not dominated by the Soviet Union and Real Socialism.

Within the European context, the introduction of a new debate was mainly attributed to the Norwegian Johan Galtung. As early as in 1958 the conscientious objector had founded his first peace research institute, PRIO, in Oslo with approaches very different to those of the science of International Relationships. His breakthrough came in 1972 when he introduced the concept of structural violence as an irresistible term to the debates around peace and war. This post-Marxist term completely discarded the realist idea of negative peace and was far more comprehensive than the idealistic concepts. According to Galtung, structural violence arises where political-economic structures impede individuals or groups from unfolding their mental and somatic skills. This approach brought forth the claim for positive peace and a paradigm shift within peace research.

"Go beyond" progress-oriented thinking

Another tradition that had, since the times of Jean Jacques Rousseau, been criticising the euphoria of progress-oriented thinking beyond material aspects did not attract that much attention. The main concern was the definition of culture as an emancipatory human activity as opposed to an environment perceived as separate, as is characteristic of the modern age. Peace

research within that context was mainly dealing with the fact that a culture defined as above was in the course of the modern age progressively burying existing cultures of societies with different forms of organisation underneath it, a development that can hardly be called peace. This concern was most vigorously articulated by post-modern philosophers in the late twentieth century. A fierce debate arose on whether all societies that are not organised according to Western enlightened moral concepts inevitably follow pre-modern, pre-rational and therefore merely antiquated paradigms. Or was there after all a trans-rational, spiritual level of organisation and thinking that did not discard modernist thinking but rather "went beyond"? Not in the sense of overcoming but rather in the threefold sense of preserving, neutralising and enhancing modernist thinking.

Twenty years after introducing structural violence, Galtung completed his violence concept with the term of cultural violence and defined physical, structural and cultural violence as an entity with the single aspects mutually conditioning each other. The category of cultural violence, therefore, comprises any thought concept that legitimates structural or physical violence. With this approach Galtung substantiated his pacifist criticism of Western capitalist progress oriented thinking and called for the recognition of alternative, trans-rational energetic concepts on a level of equality. The decisive factor is no longer to relate to conflict as an immoral opposite to peace but rather as a positive sign of social energy, which can, through non-violent means, be extracted in order to transform problem situations. Under this proposition key terms of international politics such as conflict prevention, peace building, peace keeping or even peace enforcement no longer make any sense but are shown to conserve and block the potentially positive energy of conflict.

Interdisciplinary research results support this concept. They demonstrate that even though the guidelines of traditional, advanced religions and cognitive philosophies such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Daoism, Christian and Islamic Mysticism as well as a number of shamanist traditions trace back to a pre-modern and pre-rational history, their essence rests upon the insights and experience of single outstanding individuals – a mindset that is passionately rejected by the traditional schools of Realism, Idealism and Marxism.

Today moral and energetic peace concepts exist parallel to each other and are given equal value. They each have limited reach and are not universally applicable. Nor are they arbitrarily exchangeable. Peace and conflict are always determined by the definite interpersonal correlations in the here and now. For the purpose of non-violent conflict transformation, these correlations have to be defined, analysed and recognised. Through this recognition combined with the equal valuation of the two peace concepts, conflict energy can be used to outweigh, that is, to transform itself.

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