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What is peace?

Peace as the absence of war would be the most straightforward answer to this question. For example, the Oxford English Dictionary provides the following definition of peace: 'freedom from or the cessation of war' (1993). Peace as the absence of war or violent conflict can be understood as 'negative peace' (Galtung 1996: 61). It is important to realise that in a situation of negative peace, there may still be animosity between the former belligerents and the underlying conflict may often continue unabated. Conflict, therefore, is not synonymous with war or violence. Conflict itself is not the problem. Conflict can be managed or resolved in parliaments and in other democratic institutions. This is what happens in any peaceful liberal democracy, in which conflicts about how best to organise society are abundant. This is also what happens in international politics, where many conflicts are managed or resolved peacefully through mediation, negotiation and judicial settlement, for example. Understood in this way, the management of conflict - and the search for compromise and consensus - is synonymous with politics (Heywood 2002: 9-10). A concrete example of an international conflict that did involve warfare is the Cold War. From 1945 to 1991, the USA and the Soviet Union were entangled in a fierce ideological, political and economic conflict. Although the Cold War witnessed so-called proxy wars in Korea, Vietnam and a few other places, the USA and the Soviet Union never fought each other directly. Therefore the Cold War was characterised by a negative peace in which the superpowers managed issues using political tools including deterrence, but also bilateral and multilateral diplomacy rather than military force. When conflict management or conflict resolution fails and military force is used to fight out differences, one speaks of *armed* or *violent* conflict. Armed conflict becomes a war when it involves organised, large-scale violence (see the chapter on the Causes of War for a definition of war).

Negative peace as the absence of war or armed conflict is only part of the story. Peace can also be conceptualised as 'positive peace' (Galtung 1996: 61). Positive peace is much more difficult to define than negative peace. It is often associated with the concept of justice as is illustrated by the following textbook definition:

Positive peace refers to a social condition in which exploitation is minimized or eliminated and in which there is neither overt violence nor the more subtle phenomenon of underlying *structural violence* [sic]. It denotes the continuing presence of an equitable and just social order, as well as ecological harmony (Barash & Webel 2009: 7).

The term structural violence was coined by Galtung and entails a form of violence that is not physical or committed by or directed towards a specific actor (as is the case when belligerent forces fire weapons at each other). Instead, the violence is indirect and embedded in a specific social structure. Galtung describes structural violence as 'avoidable insults to basic human needs, and more generally to *life* [sic]' (1996: 197). Slavery is an example of this, as are other situations in which human beings are deprived of basic human rights, such as racial discrimination and oppression. The definition is very broad and even includes poverty, disease and

environmental degradation. All three are considered to be violence because they inhibit the development and well being of human beings (Barash & Webel 2009: 8). Therefore, positive peace can only exist when structural violence is absent. The assumption behind this is that factors like social injustice and exploitation are key causes of (armed) conflict. That is why positive peace is often associated with solid, stable or sustainable peace. Whereas negative peace easily reverts into war, this is not the case with positive peace. Negative peace can be concluded by reaching an armistice between belligerents, for example. An armistice puts a stop to the violence, but does not address the root causes of the armed conflict. As a result, violence often reoccurs. The achievement of positive peace, in the form of a comprehensive peace agreement which goes beyond a mere armistice, for example, would prevent this as it implies in and of itself that structural violence, seen as a key cause of conflict, will have been addressed. That being said, positive peace is difficult to achieve and should be seen more as an ongoing process than an outcome.

The democratic peace thesis

The concepts of positive and negative peace can be applied to societies at a national level, but also to international society. Whereas many countries enjoy at least a negative peace domestically, in international society the attainment of peace (of any kind) is more problematic. The history of the world is rife with warfare and armed conflict. Nonetheless, the overall majority of states currently enjoy at least a negative peace situation. Why is that? How is peace established in international society? One thesis that attempts to answer this question is the democratic peace thesis.

Democratic peace theorists claim that democratic states are not inherently peaceful, but that they will act peacefully among each other (for the next two paragraphs, cf. Levy and Thomson 2010: 104-17). This claim is supported by empirical evidence because no democracies have fought against each other. The claim may be contested based on the fact that an interpretation of the empirical evidence depends on the chosen definition of 'democracy'. The empirical evidence in support of democratic peace theory is strongest when it involves consolidated liberal democracies. A liberal democracy is a democracy in which basic human rights and fundamental political freedoms are respected. In that sense, liberal democracy differs from electoral democracy in which John Stuart Mill's 'tyranny of the majority' might lead to infringements upon fundamental political freedoms (Mill 1989: 8; Diamond 1999: 10). A democracy is consolidated when it will not easily revert to autocracy. In other words, when democracy has become 'the only game in town' (as quoted in Linz and Stepan 1996: 5).

In addition to empirical contestation, the democratic peace thesis could be criticised for lacking a coherent theoretical explanation. In other words, the exact causes of the democratic peace are contested. Roughly two groups of theorists can be distinguished. One group claims that democratic institutions constrain politicians in their military ambitions (Bueno de Mesquita et.al. 1999). The costs of war are paid by the population and in a democracy, a rational population would only vote for war at last resort. That makes political leaders sensitive to public support (or the lack thereof) and therefore restrictive in their use of force. A second group emphasises the importance of democratic norms and culture, which makes citizens and politicians alike restrictive in using military force to settle differences (Maoz & Russett 1993).

These two groups of theorists are not the only ones offering explanations of the absence of war between democracies. For example, other theorists argue that democracies do not fight each other due to economic interdependence (Keohane and Nye 1977), cultural proximity (Henderson 1998), and the existence of an international balance of power (Rosato 2003).

Nonetheless, the democratic peace thesis has become quite influential among the Western foreign policy elite. The logic was: if democracies do not fight each other, international society would benefit from the presence of as many democracies as possible. In 1989, in his famous article 'The End of History', Fukuyama argued that the end of the Cold War meant the victory of liberal democracy. Liberal democracy was the logical outcome of a historical process in which other ideologies, including communism and fascism, had lost (Fukuyama 1989). Fukuyama realised that it would take time for liberal democracy to spread around the world, but he claimed it would be an unstoppable process. Critics attacked Fukuyama's theoretical assumptions as well as his empirical arguments (Burns 1994). There is thus much to say about the extent to which Fukuyama was right or wrong, but that is beyond the scope of this chapter. What we would like to emphasise here is that (mainly Western) policymakers were eager to support democratisation worldwide. The transition from autocracy to (consolidated) democracy, however, did not necessarily imply less armed conflict. Whereas democracies tend not to fight each other, democratising states, i.e. states experiencing the transition towards democracy, seem particularly vulnerable to violent conflict (Snyder 2000). One could therefore ask the normative question: can the objective of democratic peace justify the risks of war as a result of democratisation efforts?

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