

PEACE, JUSTICE, FREEDOM, AND COMPETENCE

by *Kenneth E. Boulding*

Abstract. Peace, justice, and freedom are hard to define, but closely related. Peace has many meanings; an important one is "inclusive peace," defined by dividing total human activity into war and "not war." Justice is an elusive concept related to the legitimacy of property and the structure of equality. Freedom "to," "from," and "of" have different meanings, all related to the boundaries and legitimacy of property. The market has the virtue of economizing agreement and consensus. The existence of public goods necessitates government. Peace, justice, and freedom are unlikely to be achieved without competence, which fortunately can be learned.

Peace, justice, and freedom are all words with a great deal of emotive and evaluative content. *Competence* is a word with a curiously ambiguous, though rather mild evaluative content. It is hard to come out against it. On the other hand, to accuse somebody of being competent is at least rather faint praise. The intellectual content of all these four words is rich but difficult. The first three are difficult to define and the last is difficult to identify. Justice and freedom have unequivocal emotive content. Nobody ever comes out against them, even when he or she is not very clear about what they mean. Peace is ambiguous. Everybody is for it up to a point, but the long history of the just-war doctrine—and indeed the history of war itself—suggests that there are conditions under which peace is regarded as a vice and not a virtue. Only a very few people, like Quakers, come out for peace at any price.

THE PRICES OF PEACE

The price of peace is often defined in terms of some image of justice and freedom. All wars have to be justified in the minds of those who

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fight them; otherwise the fighters would simply quit and go home. This is why the doctrine of the just war seems to have so little content, simply because all wars are just wars in the minds of those on both sides who fight them. The only place where the just-war doctrine seems to have made any impact is on the codification of certain prohibited acts of war, such things as the treatment of prisoners, the care of the wounded, the activities of the Red Cross, all of which are codified into treaties and international conventions. The justice of war itself has been very rarely questioned, although this questioning has increased since the beginning of the nineteenth century with the rise of organized peace movements.

Nearly all the great religions have produced people and groups who find participation in war inconsistent with the principles of their religion and who have often been exempt from participation in war. Monks and priests are usually recognized as war abstainers. In the early Christian church, until Constantine, abstention from war was customary. The peace churches after the Protestant Reformation—the Mennonites in the sixteenth century, the Quakers in the seventeenth, the Brethren in the eighteenth, and the Adventists in the nineteenth (one is almost tempted to add some Roman Catholics in the twentieth century)—made war abstention a basic doctrine for their concerned members. Women have nearly always been exempted from combat.

THE MEANINGS OF PEACE

Peace is a word with a great many different meanings. At one end it is almost a synonym for death—rest in peace—or total inactivity—“Where they make a desert, they call it peace” (Tacitus sec. 30). Inner peace or peace of mind relates to the absence of internal conflict within the individual and leads to a condition of rapid and successful resolution of internal conflicts. Paul writes of “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding” (Phil. 4:7). Even inner peace may have different qualities. It may just be the peace of resignation, obedience, and defeat. It may be a response to an overwhelming form of power which might almost be called the “peace of obedience.” There is another kind of inner peace which rests more on the sense of companionship, being at one with the universe. This is the peace of Job: “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him, but I will maintain mine own ways before him” (Job 13:15). This is more attractive than the groveling obedience to an external will which a good many prophets have sought to impose on their followers. Some stand up to praise God, some kneel down, and some prostrate themselves.

INCLUSIVE PEACE

When it comes to social and political life, *peace* has even more meanings. The simplest concept, which I have sometimes called “inclusive peace,” is simply the absence of war or, in personal relations, the absence of direct violence. Human activity can be divided fairly sharply into war activity and not-war activity, which is inclusive peace. It looks at first like a rather negative concept, but inclusive peace includes the most positive aspects of life—plowing, sowing, reaping, producing things, teaching, dancing, acting, getting a job, getting married, raising children—everything that could be included in the ordinary business of life. War activity is also fairly identifiable. It involves the making and the using of weapons, the training and practice of soldiery, and so on. As inclusive peace is devoted to production and enjoyment, war is devoted to destruction and the production of the means of destruction—that is, weapons—or the means of avoiding destruction, defensive structures like castles and city walls, and so on. It is war that is negative activity involving enormous cost, producing at best a temporary victory.

PEACE AS TABOO

It is not conflict that distinguishes war from peace, but the mode of conflict, particularly in regard to the taboos on human behavior. A taboo consists of not doing something that we have the power to do. Taboos are a very large part of morality, social life, and behavior. It is no accident that most of the Commandments are “Thou shalt not. . . .” Every person is aware, however dimly, of a “possibility boundary,” which divides the things that one can do from what one cannot do, especially in a physical sense. For instance, I cannot go to the moon, I cannot be in Australia in the next hour, or blow up the Pentagon. I could quite easily in the next hour continue dictating this paper or stop and go for a walk, jump off a cliff (I have one quite handy), set fire to my house, take all my clothes off in public. All these things I refrain from doing because there are other things I prefer to do. Some of the refraining is simply economic behavior. There are other things I would not do because there are strong social taboos on them, which I accept.

The main difference between war and peace is that in peace there are taboos which are observed. A nation refrains from doing things like invading a neighbor, dropping bombs on its capital, and so on, which it may have the power to do. Once war begins, however, these taboos start to break. The taboo on invasion is usually the first to go. As the war goes on, the taboos successively collapse. Hitler’s war on the Jews began

with the “day of broken glass” and ended with Auschwitz. The war on Hitler began with the “phony war,” with both sides refraining from the bombing of cities and civilians, and ended with Nagasaki and Dresden, which were really genocide, very much like Auschwitz, except for burning people alive instead of gassing them.

Within inclusive peace there are many different varieties of human life and society, some of which are much better than others. Even ruthless and brutal dictators can be at peace with their neighbors. Some rulers are so oppressive that they have internal peace because everybody is afraid to do anything about them. Peace of this type, however, is rarely stable in the long run: dictators die and are succeeded by different kinds of people and power, as Joseph Stalin was succeeded by Nikita Khrushchev; or they may create so much resentment and hatred that they are overthrown by violence, like Napoleon or Hitler, Czar Nicholas, Kaiser Wilhelm, and so on.

STABLE PEACE

On the other hand, the development of moderate and reasonable social-capitalist societies has also been characterized by the spread of stable peace, a situation in which independent nations have no plans whatever to go to war with each other, even though they maintain some armed forces. I have argued (Boulding 1978), indeed, that this is a somewhat new phenomenon in the world, beginning perhaps in Scandinavia after the Napoleonic Wars, when Sweden and Denmark, who had fought each other for centuries, suddenly stopped fighting each other. Stable peace spread to North America about 1870, beginning perhaps with the Rush-Bagot Agreement of 1817 that disarmed the Great Lakes, continuing with “Fifty-four forty and we didn’t fight” (a happy outcome of a president, Tyler, reneging on his campaign pledges), and culminating in the lucky failure of Britain to intervene in the Civil War on the side of the South. We also got stable peace with Mexico after 1853, in spite of the fact that we stole California, New Mexico, and Arizona, and even Texas.

Now we have a great triangle of stable peace stretching from Australia and Japan, across the Pacific to North America, to Western Europe. The communist countries form a somewhat less stable quadrilateral and, of course, the situation in the Middle East might almost be described as unstable war, evidence that both war and peace are habits. On the other hand, stable peace is a cheap and effective form of national security—in the nuclear age the *only* effective form of national security. It is not surprising, therefore, that the area of stable peace has almost continuously expanded. War may continue between two coun-

tries for centuries, but eventually the rising cost of war hits people's minds and the habit of peace becomes a stronger influence. The British and the French, for instance, after a very long history of warfare, have been at peace ever since 1815, 170 years, in spite of their sharply competing imperial ambitions in the nineteenth century.

There is a good deal of hope that stable peace can be very stable because it pays off so well. The price on it is very low. All it requires really is that national boundaries be taken off everybody's agendas. It is hard to point to any war that has been caused by economic conflicts, except as a very minor aspect of a much more complex situation. There have, indeed, been wars of conquest throughout human history. These have largely disappeared in the twentieth century simply because there is nothing much left to conquer. Even in the past, wars of conquest have rarely paid off for the conqueror. Empire has almost always been an economic drain on the imperial power; certainly the British, Dutch, and French Empires were. Raw materials likewise are rarely a significant cause of war. They are widely dispersed over the world and have countless substitutes. The organization of petroleum exporting countries (OPEC), although its members extracted, for a time, monopolistic tribute from Western countries, did not provoke conquest. Tribute here was clearly cheaper than defense (or attack), as very frequently it is. I doubt if anyone ever went to war for coal or oil or minerals—it is cheaper to buy them, as Japan does.

THE MEANING OF JUSTICE

This leaves us with the question of the relation of justice and freedom to peace. Peace, at least in the sense of inclusive peace, is a fairly clear concept. Unfortunately, justice and freedom are not clear concepts. They mean very different things to different people, and they even have quite contradictory meanings. Justice has at least two very different meanings. One is that people should get what they deserve. The other is that people should get what they need. Criminal justice is concerned mainly with deserts. There is an endless debate about who deserves what. Making the punishment fit the crime is presumably the task of criminal law. Justice certainly requires that people who commit the same crime should have the same punishment. Presumably somewhat the same principle applies to folly. The rake of "The Rake's Progress" presumably "deserves" the poverty that he ends with. Hardworking and thrifty Puritans presumably deserve the prosperous old age towards which they have worked and saved.

That people should get what they deserve, however, is not commonly regarded as an absolute ideal not to be modified. As William Shake-

spere's Hamlet remarks, "Use every man after his deserts, and who should 'scape whipping?" (*Hamlet*, II, ii, 553). Justice in this sense becomes intolerable unless it is tempered with mercy, because we are more than isolated individuals; we are "species beings" in the famous phrase of Karl Marx. We have sympathy and empathy with each other. We have pity, love, benevolence, as well as malevolence. There is indeed a certain demand for equality. This leads into the second facet of justice—the demand that everyone should get what they need. This is where socialism comes in, the demand for a "grants economy," and government intervention into private and market relations to produce a more equal distribution of income than would otherwise be the case. This is sometimes called "commensal justice," a "mensa" being a table, with the image that we all sit down at a great table and Mother Nature—or Mother State—dishes out the food and that it is quite wrong to have one plate piled high while another goes empty.

This is a very old concern of the human race and it must be taken seriously. On the other hand, it does run into difficulties. One trouble is that we do not all sit around the same table. There are innumerable tables and innumerable kitchens. The analogy of the family is a poor one when it comes to society at large. Not everybody can talk to everybody. With five people there are only ten different pairs; with ten people, forty-five; with twenty people, 190; with 100 people, 4,950 pairs, which is quite impossible for universal conversation. There just is not time for everybody to talk to everybody. Small may be beautiful (sometimes), but unfortunately the human race is very large. There is no way of getting around this. Consequently there have to be markets or hierarchies or both if we are to think of the five billion humans as a "whole" system.

THE DYNAMICS OF INEQUALITY

Both markets and hierarchy make equality somewhat unstable. The very concept of hierarchy implies inequality in the distribution of power. There is no way in which the employee of a corporation can have the same power as the manager, the subject the same power as the king, the citizen the same power as the president, or the Roman Catholic parishioner the same power as the Pope. The inequality that is produced by markets is more subtle but just as real. If we started off with equal distribution of property, random factors would give some people more than others, the richer ones would find it easier to consume less than they produce, and so they would accumulate and get richer than the poorer ones. I have sometimes called this the "Matthew Principle," although it is stated five times in the first three Gospels: "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given and he shall have more

abundance, but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath" (Matt. 13:12).

There are, fortunately, factors which offset or even reverse rising inequality. The power of members of the hierarchy is often limited by markets. People working for one employer or in one organization can often get a job in another organization. This mobility limits the power of all hierarchies. If citizens can emigrate to another country, their government has less power over them. If parishioners can join another church, the head of the church has less power over them. Inequality in property is likewise modified by the hierarchy of state through progressive taxation, inheritance taxes, and things of this kind, when the degree of inequality becomes politically unacceptable.

THE "GREAT FALLACY" ABOUT JUSTICE

This whole system, however, is pretty complex and it is not easy to see how to intervene in it. We must beware of what I call the "fallacy of the pie." The product of an economy, especially the world economy, is not a pie which is baked and then shared among the people. It is rather a very large number of little tarts growing at different rates with some spooning from one to another.

What might almost be called the "great fallacy"—that social justice can be "done" by a single act of revolution or redistribution—has caused an enormous amount of human misery. The truth is that the existing distribution of power or riches is the end result of a very long, historical process of continuous change. Redistribution is something that goes on all the time as a result of birth, death, inheritance, saving, squandering, earning, investing, giving, taking, making money, losing money, inflation, deflation, bad debts, and so on. The constant change in the relative price structure of different stocks, bonds, land, houses, real estate, commodities, and so on, produces a virtual hurricane of redistribution of net worth (wealth) constantly. Those who own things the relative price of which is rising gain at the expense of those who own things the relative price of which is falling. The critical question is, What factors and institutions in this system of perpetual change move it towards various distributions, more equal, less equal, more deserving, less deserving, and so on? In all this process there is an inevitable element of luck and chance, and how much we should try to offset this by private or social insurance, by disaster and famine relief organizations, and so on, is a very important question.

THE DEMAND FOR JUSTICE

The question of what is the demand for justice, of what kind of justice is there a demand for, is a very interesting and difficult one. The fact that

there seems to be an almost universal demand for lottery tickets suggests that there is a demand for inequality for which people are prepared to pay. If we were to ask people whether they would rather live in a society in which there was no chance of being rich or a small chance of being rich, they might well vote for the latter. On the other hand, if we asked them whether they would rather live in a society in which there was some chance of being very poor or no chance, they might also vote for the latter. This suggests a "safety net theory" of social justice, a lower limit below which people would not be allowed to fall, usually through some public-grants economy. Beyond that stretches the lottery of life, part of which rewards the deserving and part the undeserving, and part of which rewards the lucky. How much of each we want—and can achieve—every society has to work out for itself.

THE RELATIONS OF PEACE AND JUSTICE

To the question as to whether we want peace and justice, the answer is certainly yes. If the question is Must we have justice before we can have peace? the answer is probably a cautious no. If the question is Must we have peace before we have justice? the answer is, again, a cautious yes. International peace is much easier than justice. We have seen that it merely requires a relatively small adjustment in human behavior—that is, taking national boundaries off our agendas, which also involves a certain amount of nonintervention in each other's affairs. Justice, as we have seen, is something very real but very hard to define. What the dynamics of it are—that is, how the world becomes more just instead of less just—is a very complex system. And while we have some clues to it, there are no easy answers. Certainly justice is most easily increased when there is a strong sense of community, when the "integrative systems," as I have called them, are visible and strong. People then feel bonds of fellowship and empathy with others, and the poverty of the poor is seen as a disgrace by the rich. Another important condition for the increase in justice is that the political structure should have a minimum degree of competence, defined as the ability not only to want the right things but to know what has to be done to get them.

War, whether international or internal, tends to destroy these preconditions of the dynamics of increasing justice. It creates enemies and enmities, it destroys the larger sense of community, it destroys the sense of common humanity. In order to justify our own violence we have to deny humanity to its victims. There is a fair amount of evidence that the most just societies that we see around the world, that are accepted by their citizens as reasonably just without strong dissent, are those that have been created by the slow growth of the sense of community, that on the whole have abjured violence, that have believed in

buying people off rather than knocking them down, and that have had reasonably competent government.

It was not Oliver Cromwell but the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688, in which not a shot was fired, which set Britain off on a path to greater riches and justice. The Meiji Restoration in Japan in 1868 was rather similar. Australia and Canada internally are much more peaceable and relaxed societies than the United States. Neither of them had a revolution or a civil war, although their tie-in with the British Empire involved them in some very traumatic foreign wars, such as World War I and II, from which the independence of the United States did not save it either. The French Revolution produced Napoleon, Oliver Cromwell produced the tragedy of Ireland, the Russian Revolution produced Stalin. There may be exceptions to this rule, but they are hard to find. The appeal to justice is often disguised self-justification. A just war is one that is easily justified, no matter what the evidence to the contrary.

THE MEANINGS OF FREEDOM

Freedom is at least as difficult a concept as justice, but it is also invoked to justify organized violence ("freedom fighters"), whether internal or external. Freedom, like justice, has many different meanings. The broadest meaning is that it is simply the area within the possibility boundary that divides what we can do from what we cannot do, and this is clearly a much smaller boundary for the poor than it is for the rich. This suggests that freedom and justice are closely related. But the fact that I cannot go to the moon does not make me feel desperately unfree. The fact that I have to pay income taxes is unpleasant, especially as what I am buying by them is a positive chance of being killed in a nuclear war. But I am also buying by my federal taxes a license to live in a society for which I have a great affection, so I prefer not make a fuss about it and to accept this diminution of my riches.

From a political point of view especially, freedom is identified by the legitimacy, the acceptance, and the quality of the possibility boundary which hems us in. If I feel that what is hemming me in is illegitimate, particularly if it is imposed by somebody else for whom I do not feel much affection or empathy, then I am likely to feel unfree. Just what creates the legitimacy of the possibility boundary, however, is a very puzzling question. Where the possibility boundary is imposed by somebody else, the legitimacy of that somebody else is very important. If it is imposed by someone or something that I accept as belonging to the larger community in which I live, I may feel limited but I will not feel unfree. If these limits are imposed, however, by somebody who is not of my community, such as the imperial ruler of the colony where I live, then I am more likely to fuss about it. This is the kind of unfreedom

that is most likely to lead into violence, into revolution, or into war. As I have said elsewhere, the dynamics of legitimacy dominates all other social systems, but what it is that creates and destroys legitimacy is very hard to understand and often extremely puzzling (Boulding 1978). For instance, in 1773 the French Canadians who were much more alien to their British rulers than were the Bostonians, having a different language and religion, which the Bostonians did not, nevertheless did not revolt while the Bostonians had a famous tea party.

Two different meanings of the word freedom are summed up in the expressions "freedom from" and "freedom to," to which we might even add "freedom of" as in freedom of religion. Freedom "from" implies that somebody or something is preventing us from doing something that we would like to do. This is the political aspect of freedom. Freedom "to" simply describes the area within the possibility boundary. Freedom "of" has certain implications of freedom from arbitrary threat of political rulers. Freedom "of" then resides in the social, constitutional, and political structure, in the legal system, and so on.

THE ROLE OF THE LEGITIMATION OF PROPERTY IN JUSTICE AND FREEDOM

Law, custom, and taboo are, of course, limitations on freedom that in a "just" society are accepted as legitimate. In the case of both freedom and justice, perhaps the most critical concept is that of property and its legitimation and definition. A very good example would be the stoplight at an intersection. When I am looking at the green light I have property in the intersection and I am free to cross it. When I have a red light the other line of traffic has the property and I do not, and I am not free to cross it. Then, of course, there are always the confounded yellow lights in which who owns the right to cross the intersection is not always clear. Stoplights probably cause the least social trouble when they are equal, that is, when each direction has a green light or red light half the time. When they are unequal, the traffic that has the briefer green light may have people in it who feel a sense of injustice and lack of freedom, unless they are prepared to accept the principle that the road with the heaviest traffic gets a larger proportion of green lights. We have a good example here of the interference with freedom which is very widely accepted (except maybe in Boston, perhaps because of the tradition of the Tea Party) because, especially if there is a fair amount of traffic, it is better to have traffic lights than not; otherwise people would run into each other, there would be a loss of property or even of life, and traffic would be held up. The interference with freedom actually creates more freedom, which presumably is a good

test. As we move into more complex and harder-to-define forms of property, we run into legal and legislative conflicts and disagreement. Even in the United States what is a legitimate form of property in one state may not be in another, and between capitalist and socialist societies there is a great gulf as to what constitutes legitimate property.

PROPERTY AS DEFINING FREEDOM

Property could almost be defined as that area within which we have freedom. That freedom is never unlimited because property has to be in some sense a creation of society if it is to be legitimate. An important source of violence is the refusal to accept the existing structure of property as legitimate and the attempt to change it by threat. Pierre Proudhon may not have been right in saying that property is theft, but certainly a good deal of property originates in ancient theft. My grandfather used to tell a story of a friend of his who got into an argument with a local squire in England as to why the squire owned these broad acres, whereas my grandfather's friend owned nothing. The squire drew himself up and said, "Well, my ancestors fought for it," whereupon my grandfather's friend squared off and said, "Right, I'll fight you for it now." The offer was not accepted. This illustrates the principle that the legitimation of property is the delegitimation of violence. This is why the stability of national boundaries is so important for stable peace. It means in fact that each nation respects the other's property in its national sovereignty in a system of mutual taboo on change by violence.

THE ROLE OF THE MARKET

The role of the market in establishing peace, freedom, and justice is sometimes ambiguous, but by no means insignificant. The great virtue of the market is that property can be bought and sold or exchanged; and, where trade is seen to be successful and of benefit to both parties, it is an alternative to threat and to violence. The difference between slaves and free workers was that the slaves had been stolen by the original slave traders, even though they may have been bought by their present owner. Slaves are not their own property; free workers are their own slaves. Slavery is now illegal. People can sell themselves by the day, week, or year, but not for a lifetime. Similarly, we can put a quarter in the parking meter and buy a little piece of land on which to put our car for an hour or so. Without the market, we would have parking by hierarchy, with those in authority owning the best places permanently and not allowing anybody else to use them; the lower classes would end up parking out in the boondocks.

The market economizes agreement and consensus. We think of the market as increasing personal freedom, but perhaps at a certain cost in terms of overall equality and a sense of community. Life within a community of property involves endless discussion and palaver in the search for agreement. There is a lot to be said for economizing discussion. This is why the individual household where only a few people have to agree has on the whole been more successful than the commune, where a lot of people have to agree. A community on a large scale frequently leads to tyranny and the use of threat. What starts off as love often ends as fear, as in Peter's commune in Jerusalem. After Ananias and Sapphira's deaths, "great fear came upon all the church" (Acts 5:11).

PUBLIC GOODS AS A CASE AGAINST ANARCHISM

The market, however, cannot do everything. There are public goods, where the interaction of so many people is involved that the "tragedy of the commons" cannot be solved simply by dividing the commons up as private property. It is very hard, therefore, to be a thoroughgoing anarchist, though I confess to some temptation in that direction. Complex structures, like human beings in societies, get into unfamiliar and threatening regions, so there has to be some apparatus for dealing with these. In all societies there may be positive-feedback systems which make things go from bad to worse, and there may also be "prisoner's dilemmas," situations in which at least perceived and temporary private interests and public interests do not coincide. Some kind of government does seem to be a regrettable necessity. The invention of constitutions, indeed, as a set of taboos on government is one answer to this question. Whether it is always an adequate answer is still another question, for even the best constitutions require a political culture to support them and even rather bad constitutions may be workable if the political culture as well as the constitution limit the operations of government.

COMPETENCE AND IDEOLOGY

It is clear that peace, freedom, and justice—and we might add to this, riches—are in good measure a result of political, social, and personal competence over a considerable period of time. Incompetence is much more important than ill will as an explanation of the tragedies and sufferings of human history. Just how competence is defined, however, what it consists of, and especially how powerful people acquire it are perhaps the most important questions the human race has to face. Competence may be more important than ideology, although some

ideologies are more favorable to it than others. Within all ideology there is a wide divergence of competence and there are failures of competence as well as successes. The more rigid the ideology, the more it is a handicap, but even a handicapping ideology can be overcome. Competence in a decision maker, whether possessing small or great power, always involves movement towards greater realism in the decision makers' images of the environments that surround them. Realism is some kind of more or less accurate mapping between the image of the world in the decision maker's head and the real world that lies in and around it. Competence, therefore, always involves a learning process by which experience leads to a diminution in error. Error has two aspects: there may be error in the image of the environment around us—we may believe things about the world that are not true—or there may be error in the evaluation system by which we evaluate alternative futures leading us into decisions which we or others eventually regret.

THE LEARNING OF COMPETENCE

Our image of the past here is extremely significant. Most images of the future are probably derived from the image of the more immediate past and, if the system is fairly stable, this may not be too bad. If, however, there is rapid change going on, particularly if we are passing from one region of time into another, with the basic parameters of the system changing, then the immediate past may give us a very poor guide to the future and we may need a larger image of the past, the more distant past, in order to perceive what is happening in the present. This is why the sense of history is often very important to the development of competence, even though the record of history itself is often ambiguous.

In the Cuban crisis of 1962, when we went to the edge of the nuclear cliff and almost jumped, the fact that President Kennedy had just read Barbara Tuchman's *The Guns of August* and had a strong image of the fatal mistakes which the rulers of Europe made in 1914 that swept them all away, may well have saved us from an unparalleled disaster. The fact that Herbert Hoover, an intelligent and decent president, had no idea what was really happening to the American economy between 1929 and 1932, again, almost took us over a cliff. The appalling tragedies of Cambodia, of the "Great Leap Forward" and the "Cultural Revolution" in China, of the First Collectivization in the Soviet Union, and of the catastrophes that are looming all over Africa are closely related to unrealistic political images on the part of the powerful, aided and abetted in a good many cases by ideology. By comparison, the unfortunate conversion of the Federal Reserve Bank to monetarism in the

early 1980s, which produced a mild depression and tragically high interest rates, seems like a relatively mild display of incompetence in a society that has a strong political culture and widespread competence in many fields. Even here, though, the virtual certainty that the United States Department of Defense, unless it changes drastically, will destroy us sometime in the future is an alarming example of incompetence based on images of the future that are derived from obsolete images of the past.

GOOD COMES FROM COMPETENCE IN LEARNING AND PRODUCTION

The fact that the learning capacity of the human race is very far from being exhausted, however, is an important source of hope. There is hope even in the development of more economic and less romantic frames of mind. When it comes to human betterment, it does pay to count costs and ask for benefits, to be very wary of absolute values, to take something of a marginal approach to decision-making, to ask whether or not a little more of this will be worth the cost. There may be occasions indeed where we can say with Robert Browning, "Oh, the little more, and how much it is! And the little less, and what worlds away!" (Browning 1934, stanza 39). Then it may be that marginal muddling-through breaks down and heroic steps are needed. One would like to see the capacity for heroism, however, moved towards the acceptance of the danger involved in a dramatic unilateral disarmament as a risky and exciting step towards national security by stable peace. Indeed, there is even a nonheroic economic case for unilateral disarmament, rather than the present urge for risking total destruction in the name of some abstract justice and freedom.

Peace is much more a prerequisite to justice and freedom than justice and freedom are prerequisites to peace. This is not to say that we should give up on justice and freedom. It does mean, however, that unless we have the competence to stay out of war, especially nuclear war, there is not much hope for justice or freedom. One of the greatest illusions is dialectics, that all good things come by struggle or by winning something. The truth is that good things mainly come not by winning them but by producing them, whether this is riches or whether this is justice, freedom, and peace. But to produce these desirables we must know how to do it. That is where competence comes in.

Competence involves both knowledge and know-how, which are closely related. Both of these are in part products of the educational system, which is embedded in a culture of learning. Formal education alone will not do it; it is easily corrupted. Where there is a culture of learning, however, a love of the great variety of the world, and an

earnest desire to be increasingly free from error, even a bad educational system may produce competence. The family, the church, and the media all have responsibilities here. Knowledge and competence are too important to be left to formal education.

One has the hope that error is a little less stable than truth; that is, if what we think and what we value turn out to be wrong, we are much more likely to change them than if they are right. There is, therefore, a prejudice in the world towards human betterment and towards the competence that will produce it. In the present crisis we just have to hope that this worthy prejudice acts fast.

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