

ON STRUGGLING FOR PEACE OR SURRENDERING THERETO: *HEGEL, DE MAISTRE AND PROUDHON SEEKING BALANCE WHERE NONE IS*³¹

Taha A. Al-Douri, PhD, Associate Prof.
Strategic Advisor, Development, Middle East Region
New York Institute of Technology, New York

Abstract

Conflict is a primary idea in art. I use the term “conflict” for the essential determinant of identity where “an individual makes its appearance in antithesis to an individual”³² risking mutual damage, trouble or striking – all in pursuit of certainty (let us remember that an earlier pursuit of certainty about the forbidden fruit anticipated the expulsion from Paradise.)³³ A term that delegates no blame, identifies no perpetrator or victim, conflict denotes no externalization of other as enemy beyond ascertaining existence “each is indeed certain of its own self, but not of the other, and hence its own certainty of itself is still without truth;”³⁴ it may at once be *war* or *revolution* in one human condition that is self-validating, self-manifesting, and self-fulfilling along the lines dividing self from other. In conflict, as in art, man surrendered to an impulse to exchange forces with nature toward a desired state of equilibrium of forces; and while creativity is the free will to clothe thought into sensuous form, dedicating resources to creative endeavors often requires patronage. The same totalitarian authority drives making art -- managing resources, combining and isolating, tempering qualities and altering roles—as the one that drives managing a conflict: the same natural

31 This paper was published in “Advances in Architecture, Urbanity, and Social Sustainability”, Vol. V; Lasker, George (Editor-in-Chief); Greg Andonian (Editor); The International Institute for Advanced Studies in Systems Research and Cybernetics, 2013. ISBN 978-1-897233-37-5

32 Hegel, G. W. F. *The Phenomenology Of The Spirit*, Translated by Friedrich, Carl J., The Modern Library, New York, 1953, pp. 401ff.

33 Com- usually meaning “with, together,” from Latin com, archaic form of classical Latin cum; conflict from Latin conflictus “to strike together, to “afflict” together. From Old French afflicter and Latin afflictare “to damage, harass, torment, overthrow, press, crush. Transferred meaning of “trouble, distress.” Is first recorded 1530s.

34 Hegel, *Ibid.*

instinct as a tool for reason –Kant’s Practical Reason—of the mind to run and orchestrate the external world to serve the purpose of the craft. That instinct was to define creativity via imitating the universe, at once home and captivity. Existing prior to Reason, the universe had its norms and properties with which Reason only could reckon if reason were to self-fulfill, as Reason had no say in the authorship of those norms and properties. Combination, separation, distillation, heating up and cooling down were few of several means to make suitable the extreme qualities of materials for purposes past simple utility into happiness and self-realization through work and achievement, for Reason is, at once, the faculty by which the craftsman found a place in the universe and the quality that set him apart from –if not at odds with-- everything else in Nature.

Keywords: Art theory, Esthetic, conflict, war, peace, Hegel, Proudhon, De Maistre, Kant, Political theory, Philosophy of History.

Peace, unlike either art or conflict is unattainable in the absence of reason and reasonable prescription for natural necessity. There exists natural tendency toward conflict, unlike peace: a construct of reason and necessity that, once brought about, ought to be maintained against the natural forces of skepticism and deterioration. In April 1797, *Considerations on France* by Joseph de Maistre appeared. Less a direct critique of Jean Jacques Rousseau in general than of *On the State of Nature* and *On the Sovereignty of People*, *Considerations on France* established de Maistre as “an apologist of throne and altar.”³⁵ De Maistre wrote: “I am not sure if those who claim that *the arts are friends of peace* know what they are saying. At least, this proposition would have to be explained and limited; because I see nothing in the least peaceful in the ages of Alexander and Pericles, of Augustus, of Leo X and Francis I, of Louis XIV and Queen Anne.”³⁶ Examples continued after the life and times of De Maistre testifying to the uncanny association between the arts and totalitarianism, if not plainly dictatorship. “Just as the meanest and most revolting substances are nevertheless still capable of some degeneration, so the vices natural to humanity are still more corrupt in the savages.” De Maistre asserted that all might be left to decay when natural tendency is without rule of reason or morality.

In 1861 an essay entitled *la Guerre et la Paix* by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon was published. In the book that *surprised his enemies and troubled his friends*, Proudhon recognized a right to war, an idea of its time. In the wake of the 1848 revolution, Proudhon contemplated war as an artistic

35 Lebrun, R., *Against Rousseau*. Intro., p. xi.

36 De Maistre, J., *Considerations on France*. The Works of Joseph de Maistre, p. 63.

necessity that would have been invented by art had it not existed. He established the practice of nations on three interdependent propositions: First that there is a right to war, second that war is a form of judgment, and third that that judgment was to be rendered in the name of and by virtue of force. The first and third propositions seem to be a continuation to Hegel's ideas on conflict and those of De Maistre that war, or conflict, is a natural tendency. The second proposition, however, on war being judgment, remains problematic to me. Reason, the faculty for judgment, may or may not be present upon following tendency. As a tendency, would happen when circumstances lead thereto, in the presence or absence of Reason, unlike judgment, for which Reason is essential. In the case of war, however, conflict is on such large magnitude and the stakes are so high that much foresight, planning and deliberation must be dedicated toward an aim, by means of much reasonable prescription. Thus I would set war outside the bounds of conflict as natural tendency, by its sheer magnitude and recognize the duality of conflict and peace, rather than war and piece. The complexity of war sets it outside conflict as intuitive indulgence of natural tendency, and into judgment, thus weakening the parallel between war and the arts, as exchange of forces with nature.

Henri Moysset –a French historian and politician-- considered Proudhon a Hegel enthusiast and witness to the large popularity of Hegelianism upon the July Revolution and after. Proudhon, however, had admired Joseph de Maistre *the great theosopher*, “a thousand times more profound in his theosophy than the so-called rationalists whom he put to shame with his words. De Maistre, the first to establish war as a sort of manifestation of the Divine Will --one that admittedly he never understood and-- precisely by that admission he showed that he had understood something.”³⁷ Proudhon examined war in phenomenological terms rather than by a study of morals or religion. In fact, he considered war a means for arriving at moral revelation on equal par with religion and art. “By a prevalent belief of the common,” wrote Moysset; “victory is a producer of right. To the simple man, force, reason, and right are synonyms.”³⁸ Victory, not exclusively a military term, might conclude other forms of conflict including when no force is used –such as struggle within oneself, debate, and struggle for values and meaning-- where victory is attained through right rather than right claimed upon achieving victory. Settling non-forceful conflict by arguing a right established a priori versus establishing right by

37 “Ainsi parle de Maistre, le grand théosophe, plus profond mille fois dans sa théosophie que les soi-disant rationalistes que sa parole scandalise. De Maistre le premier, faisant de la guerre une sorte de manifestation des volontés du Ciel, et précisément parce qu’il avoue n’y rien comprendre, a montré qu’il y comprenait quelque chose.” Proudhon, p. 31.

38 Moysset, Introduction to Proudhon, p. XXI.

force may be two facets of what von Clausewitz considered as “politics only by other means”³⁹ and termed as war for convenience, probably other than military conflict. War to von Clausewitz must have been, as it was to Proudhon, a revelation of an *ideal* that remained unchanged as conflict took various *forms*. That understanding of war as a representation of idea, as a form of manifestation of the self to an other, brought close the idea of right and that of force to the extent that necessitated “a long historic effort to disengage the idea of right from the idea of force.”⁴⁰

Proudhon dismissed Kant’s argument for eternal peace –without direct reference: “I would abstain, as I would from blasphemy, from all talk against war. I would regard the partisans of perpetual peace the most detestable of hypocrites, the plague of civilization and the pest of societies.”⁴¹ While maintaining agreement with Kant –the prime advocate of eternal peace-- that peace was a construct, an artifact, and a work of reason. He spoke against the military institution of his time, stopping short of advocating abolishing war, probably for his romantic view of conflict as a revelation of an ideal central to the creative thought of man not unlike art and faith, the latter to Kant being what makes representation of the visible world possible at all. In the very imitation of nature in art, Kant sees implicit faith, not as mediation, but as practically acknowledging the supremacy of nature as the true model for all creativity by reason. Proudhon could not escape Kant: “A statue is not only the marble out of which it was carved,” wrote Proudhon; “however, would the artist have had the idea of making a statue had it not been, in part, because nature had furnished marble?” Material in itself would not define the work of art without meaning or ideal content. In other words, an objective form of artifact may not be reduced to its material component but is as much in the *spirit* that affords an object its artifact status, its purpose. Form was thus dependent on the dynamic nature of the spirit for its perpetual character.

A frequent subject of artistic endeavor, war is an occasion for revelation of the ideal through art. By phenomenological approach, Proudhon contemplated war in all its immediacy with no reference to certain detachment or distance necessary for an analysis to be thorough and coherent; distance that was crucial to Friedrich Schiller’s concept of art. Divorce from immediate actions and passions of war would make possible

39 Von Clausewitz was aware of, and arguably influenced by Hegels philosophy of the Right. See Creuzinger, *Hegels Einfluss auf Clausewitz*, Berlin, in-8°, 1911.

40 “C’est un long effort historique qui a dégagé l’idée de droit de l’idée de force.” Moysset, *Intro. To Proudhon*, p. XXI

41 “... je m’abstieudrais, comme d’un blasphème tout parole contre la guerre; je regarderais les parisans de la paix perpétuelle xomme les plus détestables des hypocrites, le fléau de la civilisation et la peste de sociétés.” Proudhon, p. 50.

contemplating war as a *form*, a construct of no reference external to itself, no former *whole* ought to be supposed in contemplating the debris. “We are aided in forming this acquaintance by the fearfully magnificent spectacle of all-destroying, re-producing, and again destroying mutation –or ruin, now slowly undermining, now suddenly invading—by the pathetic pictures of humanity yielding in the struggle with destiny, of the incessant flight of prosperity, of betrayed security, of triumphant injustice and of prostrate innocence, which history furnishes abundantly, and which tragic art brings with imitative skill before our eyes.”⁴² Only by contemplation, free from the natural fetters of violence and destruction⁴³, while remaining fully aware of all cultural and ideological discontinuity, could an imitative artist realize war as a subject matter for esthetic representation. Schiller dismissed the possibility of true idealism as only “what the complete realist practices unconsciously, and denies at the expense of consistency.”⁴⁴ By allowing a take-over of the unconscious, the mind of the realist voluntarily submits to a force of nature thus completely annihilating its power⁴⁵. A conscious submission to the unconscious would liberate *will* from the reductive duality of things being *real* or *ideal*. Stimulated by sensible objects, the mind seeks freedom for its esthetic tendency in ennobling itself through divorcing the objects of esthetic affinity from possession. It is the object as possession or property that Edmund Burke described as “sluggish, inert and timid.”⁴⁶

What appears to be a convulsion of nature is, therefore, argued to be a manifestation of a force of the unknown operating on Nature, or by means of the visibility of natural phenomena. “Our social life is the best Tragedy,” Plato writes in the *Laws*. There would always be a reason, however, to create works of art in imitation of reality. Inconsequential and, ultimately, impersonal⁴⁷, imitations evoke select emotions, and thus are formally suitable for certain occasions and not others. This notion Aristotle uses to counter -argue Plato’s conclusion that since Art is a representation of the representation of the senses to reality, then Art is “three removes from truth.” “As representative of universal truths,” Aristotle argues in *The Poetics*, “Art is closer to the truth than history.” A poet’s creation, rather than being an account of facts, employs facts only as constituents of past probabilities and

42 Schiller, F., *The Sublime*, pp. 258-259.

43 “... her [nature’s] imitator, creative art, is completely free, because she [art] abstracts all contingent limitations from her object, ..., because she imitates only the show and not the reality.” Schiller, *The Sublime*, p. 260.

44 Schiller, p. 247 [footnote.]

45 “But abolishing a force in idea, is nothing else than voluntarily submitting to it.” Schiller, p. 246.

46 Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, p. 140.

47 I say impersonal in the Platonic sense that Art represents not the “particulars” of sense but “universal” truths, the inner interpretation of the mind.

future possibilities.⁴⁸ Historical accounts, however, are but ingredients for a poetic construct and the poet writing an epic, is no more an author of, say, the Trojan War than a metalworker is an author of the ductility of raw steel.

Peace is not a natural phenomenon. It has to be established and maintained by work of human agency. It is not the mere absence of a state of war. Rather, it is eliminating the possibility of war. Kant identified states as essentially existing in multiplicity and are thus against the law of nature wherein things gravitate toward unity. Kant was amongst those who recognized war as natural. War is a force of nature by which a state of equilibrium amongst nations may be recovered. “It is far from easy to explain why war produces different effects in different circumstances. What is sufficiently clear is that humanity can be considered as a tree that an invisible hand is continually pruning, often to its benefit.”⁴⁹

It is by war --or fear thereof--that the natural tendency of power-escalation in a world of national multiplicity is tempered. Not only tempering force, war is also a means for spatial temperance as people are dispersed throughout the earth along the flow of force. After the Providence has instituted living in all the various regions and climates on earth, nature “has by war driven them everywhere, even into the most inhospitable regions in order to populate them.”⁵⁰ This population is in geographical proximity where ethics contrast, wealth varies, and ambition conflicts. Nature had seen to it, namely by war, that resolutions are reached and observed. “...She has forced them [human beings] by war to enter into more or less legal relationships.”⁵¹ Not motivated by any moral views, man would “labor at the noble work of peace” to sustain himself by means of commerce and economical exchange. And so, need rather than fear is the primary motive to tend toward peace. One consequence of war, namely dispersal, created the configuration, which necessitated peaceful communication. This necessity is less a moral one than a Platonic necessity (i.e. necessity due to circumstance.) In other words, the constitution of peace is in the pretext for waging war. Once conflict had run its course leveling out power, ego, and wealth, a new and tempered reality is at hand wherein even the victor is so to

48 “ a poet’s object is not to tell what actually happened but what could and would happen either probably or inevitably. The difference between a historian and a poet is not that one writes in prose and the other in verse –indeed the writings of Herodotus could be put into verse and yet would still be a kind of history, whether written in metre or not. The real difference is this, that one tells what had happened and the other what might happen. For this reason poetry is something more scientific and serious than history, because poetry tends to give general truths while history gives particular facts.” Aristotle, *Poetics*, IX § 1.

49 De Maistre, *Considerations on France*, p. 62.

50 Kant, p. 496.

51 Kant, p. 496.

an extent. Virtue lies not in the victory or loss, only in the extent to which either is achieved.

Conclusion:

Peace is possible essentially a strife for balanced order, one that -- once established-- might as well be tensile, precarious and cautious as it might be comfortable, stable and effortlessly enduring; all else in variation with place, time and the particulars of the human condition. A structure, peace is a manifestation of a structure's every basic aspect, no less than the Vitruvian⁵² sense thereof: *Firmness*, *Utility* and *Beauty* (Firmitas, Utilitas, Venustas) where each of the qualities stands for a number of mutable characteristics of political order such as *stability*, *feasibility*, and *effective foreign policy*, respectively. As a form of political discourse, war must be economically, technically, and strategically feasible to be allowed, otherwise it might naturally occur as a form of slippage or a state of imminent and sudden natural entropy, if one could exist; and thus war would be managed as a crisis would be, made less likely or probable by raising the stakes beyond collective tolerance. Otherwise, war is Nature's means of tackling -- even eliminating-- the multiplicity of will and reason by which political order, amongst other human creations, shook and, often enough, destabilized a natural order tending toward unity of philosophical experience, natural order, and common existence.

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52 Marcus Vitruvius Pollio (First Century BC) --Vitruvius-- a Roman architect, best known for having authored the first complete work (treatise) on architecture and design to live in its entirety to the present day from Antiquity. The final chapter of his ten-chapter De Architectura is on the design and construction of war machine (invoking the common linguistic root between art and artillery.)

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