

IF THE DEVIL IS INTERESTED IN PEACE RESEARCH--

Three Guiding Principles: A Proposal

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The basic concern of peace research is the pursuit of peace with peaceful means, if possible in a holistic and global manner. One day an invitation comes from someone less virtuous. It may be from the Devil himself who is not at all pursuing peace: a superpower, for instance. It may be from some lesser devil that wants peace, but then with less than peaceful means, and of such lesser satans there are many, indeed. Or, the invitation may come from somebody neither holistic, nor global – these being lesser sins we shall assume that case to be unproblematic. After all, peace research has been instrumental in making the whole field of international studies more holistic and global, and often through contact.

So, what is the answer when virtue is confronted by vice? The situation is not unproblematic. The right instinct is to pursue contact, both with the hope of changing the devil and his evil ways; of making oneself available to change, for instance of the perception of the devil as a devil; in order to change the whole relationship in a more peaceful direction. But then, on the other hand, there is also the risk that the Devil used the contact for his evil purposes as a part of his pursuit of direct and/or structural violence. He may be spying to legitimize himself by showing off his contacts with angels; and he may try to convert the more naïve among peace researchers into

instruments of his trade whether the Devil is national or international: military/defense/security, foreign affairs, or corporate. In most cases his resources are considerably beyond those of the peace researchers, and here comes that invitation for supper.

In principle the answer is simple and already well known: when eating supper with the Devil, bring a long spoon. It is the precise nature of that long spoon that has to be spelt out, and the following are three simple rules I use to decide whether to accept or reject an invitation. They are offered here as proposals for discussion.

The problem is easily stated and much more general than the title indicates. The problem is simply this: how far does one go in interactions/cooperation with "those on the other side"? The dilemma is well known. On the one hand no contact at all, no interaction, leaving alone no cooperation, may lead to an intolerably high level of polarization relative to the other side, a "stripping for action" which in itself may serve as a condition for launching a conflict that may turn violent. Much peace thinking in general and conflict resolution thinking in particular is based on the assumption that interaction is needed also between very diverse parties, to keep violent conflict away.

However, the condition is usually that the interaction is somehow symbiotic, or cooperative as stated above. When interaction is "with the other side" this condition is easily undermined and reality may turn out to be exactly the opposite. Instead of some kind of symbiosis some kind of exploitation may be the result. Assuming now for the sake of the argument that the other side is what is usually referred to as "stronger" so many things may happen. Thus, the other side may simply be interested in whatever resource can be offered, and in the case of intellectuals that means intellectual resources, ideas, imagination, mapping of the world, information. They might be quite willing to pay for that with being the object of some scolding moralism, provided the exchange rate between information received and rebut suffered is not too unfavorable.

Second, they may simply be out for the type of moral legitimation that could derive from being seen as cooperative. There is the

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famous hostage function, pointing to the presence in the immediate neighborhood of people from "the other side" as evidence of tolerance, as evidence of peaceful coexistence, and above all as evidence of some kind of recognition bestowed upon what might be a rather unsavory person/regime/country, whether the unsavory character derives from supporting or initiating structural or direct violence, within or between countries, or all of these combined in the pattern known as imperialism.

The net consequence of what has been said so far would be the need to strike a balance between on the one hand contact for exchange of information, possibly also efforts to influence the other party and to let oneself be influenced, assuming that ones own view may be also be based on prejudice, lack of information, and so on--and on the other side the need to keep a distance. One might say that the compromise would take the form: interact, be willing to keep contact, even initiate contact on the assumption that no relationship will have to remain the same over long periods of time, but can be changed and for the better; but---

It is this but part that has to be spelled out. And the following are three simple rules derived from my own practice in this field, put forward as a basis for discussion, with no pretense that they are water tight. However, I have found them useful, have accepted invitations to the extent I think the rules or conditions are met and have rejected invitations to the extent they are not. The rules are as follows.

FIRST RULE: Total freedom of expression, before, during and after the contact! Most important is the situation during the contact, and this has both a qualitative and quantitative aspect. Qualitatively it is the problem of being permitted to speak one's own mind, within reasonable limits, given by the context, of what can be communicated, what will be understood when saints and sinners are communicating, presumably in somewhat different idiom. If one is not permitted to speak one's mind, or is seriously curtailed in the effort to do so then better not participate at all, or interrupt the interaction, pointing out that this is not what interaction is supposed to serve.

And in this there is also a quantitative aspect. It is not sufficient to be permitted to say a couple of words in a panel discussion; in most cases of rather serious conflict communication can only be obtained if either side is given a chance to present both premises and conclusions and why they think they are logically related to each other. A panel discussion would have a tendency either to focus on conclusions with no background data, theory, value; or to focus on some premises with no chance to arrive at conclusions. It goes without saying that the insistence on this as a "human right" implies ability to concede this right to the other party, not only to listening to oneself repeat favorite deductions as one is used to doing at home, in ones own camp--or favorite facts and favorite values.

An important point in this connection is often overlooked: freedom of speech is not only important during the encounter, but also be-

fore and after. The focus is usually on the contact itself with the drama of being denied the word, of literally being carried off the rostrum (as happened to the present author once in DDR as my forthcoming remarks on the conflict in Vietnam were not considered sufficiently predictable); not on before and after. Thus, an invitation to contact should not serve to muffle anybody and a contact, often combined with lavish hospitality, should not invoke a contract of gratitude that would be broken by acts of explicit honesty afterwards. Both themes are very well known in the reality of contact transcending conflict blocs, and should be pointed out explicitly. Of these two I would consider freedom of speech after the encounter much more important than the one before since the argument can be made that restraints should be exercised before the contact in order not to destroy the atmosphere. After all, a contact is an invitation to a new deal in the relation between two parties, and should at least be tried, through dialogue, for its peace building potential.

SECOND RULE: Make the interaction public! It is rather important not to be suspected, when dealing with the other side, of making secret deals that others are not party to. More particularly, to speak one version of reality in one direction and another version in another may in the short run look like clever diplomacy, but in the longer run will almost certainly be counterproductive. If third parties find out that this is the case credibility will be drastically reduced. And the second party, party to private communication, will definitely find out and may already from the very beginning notice.

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the disparity between what is said in one direction and what comes out in the other. This may in the short run lead to a feeling of having been let in on the secret, that "we have our private language of discourse, a higher form of understanding than what either of us would permit in other contacts." But in the longer run the discrepancy, even contradictions may be very hard to live with.

Of course there are limitations to this principle. The idea may emerge, particularly after a successful encounter, that some new level of interaction has been arrived at, a language has been established, that results have even been obtained. However, there may also be a shared awareness that others are not on the same wavelength and for that reason will have difficulties understanding what has happened much like the language established between two lovers may look strange, even silly to outsiders. A period of cooling off, of wait-and-see until more normal conditions are obtained may be necessary, and in that period public insight will be limited. After all, lovers may sooner or later communicate in highly understandable language, for instance by living together, and it is not generally considered necessary for others to gain full insight into the premises that once led to that conclusion.

However, generally speaking encounters in the field of politics are not that dramatic; strong words, positive or negative, may not necessarily express any psychological depth in emotions. Hence, the benefits deriving from making the interaction public seem by far to outweigh the costs.

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THIRD RULE: Be careful with institutionalized links! Here a distinction is drawn between ad hoc and institutionalized interaction, the latter requiring particular initiatives to be broken off, the latter particular initiatives in order to be resumed. To continue with the metaphor chosen above of the two lovers: it is the (rather important) difference between a meeting "every Monday" or "whenever you are in town" and having a date without any assumption whatsoever as to when the next date might be, if at all. As the example indicates this by no means is tantamount to a norm against institutionalization; after all, if the pattern of interaction is right institutionalization is what makes it solid, builds it into a structure that potentially would be an adequate structure.

But the norm serves as a warning: you are dealing with "the other side", the relationship is not unproblematic, see to it that the freedom to opt out is retained at every single point in time unless you are reasonably certain that the pattern emerging is the right one. Thus, it should be noted that the standard way of catching somebody for a spy operation, whether initiated by one or the other of the famous agencies of the two super-powers, is exactly to set up a meeting, have some communication with total freedom of speech (otherwise it would be useless, this is the only condition under which information might be forthcoming), but then under a cloak of secrecy and at the same time trying to obtain institutionalization of the encounters ("if you also think this was an interesting conversation, why don't we continue next week?!" --as the present author has been told, by both of them. There was no meeting "next week").

And that concludes this short list of rules. Their efforts to steer clear of the Scylla of no contact at all, with no possibility of influencing or being influenced and more significantly, of changing the relation in general, and the Charybdis of being exploited, used, or finding oneself serving the other side rather than the party, interests and values one wants to serve. These are efforts to steer a course between neurotic polarization and encapsulation in self-righteousness on the one hand and what could very easily be a submissiveness serving anybody's interests on the other.

Actually, submissiveness may also be a cloak for serving one's own self-interest in the name of contact and interaction, particularly with the strong on "the other side". For the strong usually have resources: in addition to the obvious funds facilitating contacts, such as travel and "per diems" covered there may also be honoraria more or less disguised as gifts. There may be research funds, access to information. There may be some of the glory stemming from basking in the sun of the big and the strong, even if at the same time they are somewhat evil. The leftist intellectual despising businessmen who agree to unsavory deals because that is "the nature of the game" easily becomes quite willing to accept such deals himself when his own research funds, access to information, salary, position are at stake. Not a very edifying sight to observe, that one--but very often "the nature of the game". And in that game rules such as those presented here may perhaps be useful.