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Beyond Eschatology:
A Non-Teleological Approach to Security,
Peace and Justice

Adrian Hyde-Price

Department of Politics, Languages and International Studies (POLIS)
University of Bath
agvhp20@bath.ac.uk

Introduction

For the real difference between man and other animals is that humans alone have perception of good and evil, right and wrong, just and unjust. And it is the sharing of a common view in these matters that makes a household or a city (Aristotle 1962: 28-29)

No political realism which emphasises the inevitability and necessity of a social struggle, can absolve individuals of the obligation to check their own egoism, to comprehend the interests of others and thus to enlarge the areas of cooperation (Niebuhr 2005: 180)

For those concerned with conflict resolution and peacebuilding, the “Holy Grail” is a “just peace”. A just peace has been defined as “a process whereby peace and justice are reached together by two or more parties recognising each other”s identities, each renouncing
some central demands, and each accepting to abide by common rules jointly developed” (Allan and Keller 2006: vii). The quest for a just peace is, however, often elusive, and at times can seem Quixotic. This is because there are evident tensions between achieving peace, security and justice. In the contemporary international system, security and justice both remain relatively scarce commodities. Security is scarce in an international system that is pluralist, diverse and – in terms of its fundamental ordering principal – anarchic. Justice is scarce on a global level because of the pronounced inequalities in wealth, power and influence that create multiple cleavages between and within discrete political communities.

Consequently, peace is inherent fragile in the face of a complex and evolving security agenda global risks and uncertainties, and justice remains an aspiration which inspires a constant struggle to address the worst excesses of an unequal international society. Thucydides depressing observation that “[T]he strong do what they want, the weak do what they must”, remains as true today as when he penned these lines. Many conflicts in the world today are rooted in poverty, underdevelopment and acute socio-economic inequalities, but these conflicts can also develop symbolic dimensions and become freighted with emotional and psychological significance. What Robert Gilpin termed “conflict groups” continue to form at all levels of human interaction, generating their own group loyalties and identities, often in relation to other, rival, conflict groups. In the face of intractable conflicts such as those in the Western Balkans or the Middle East, conflicts can also shape identities creating a strong and deeply-rooted sense of “victimhood”.

In this context, not all parties to a conflict will see the attainment of “peace” as a central and overriding priority. Some might prefer to continue the struggle to achieve “justice” (if necessary, by waging a “just war”); others, particularly in the context of marked power asymmetries, might prefer relying on their own coercive capabilities rather than engaging in a risky and uncertain “peace process”. In Bosnia-Herzegovina in the early 1990s, for example, the predominantly Muslim Bosnian government was unwilling to accept the Vance-Owen Peace Plan because of their perception that it legitimised Serbian ethnic cleansing. Similarly, Hamas rejects the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP) because of what it perceives to be as the fundamental injustice of a Jewish state built on what they claim
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was once Muslim land. On the other hand, successive Israeli governments over the last decade have been unwilling to engage whole-heartedly in the MEPP because of the risks they perceive in accepting the creation of a Palestinian state and the intransigence of the settler and religious right. Instead, they have preferred to rely on a posture of strength and coercion – embodied in the concept of the “iron wall” (Shlaim 2000).

Nonetheless, a “just peace” remains the aspiration for peacemakers because, it is argued, only if a peace settlement addresses issues of perceived injustice will it prove stable and sustainable. As David Welch argues, all international actors are motivated not simply by strategic concerns involving self-preservation or self-aggrandisement, but also by the “justice motive”. This he defines as “the drive to correct a perceived discrepancy between entitlements and benefits”. The word “perceived” is crucial, he argues, because for “the justice motive to lead to action, it is necessary that the agent (1) believes that an entitlement exists, and (2) believes that that entitlement is not being fulfilled or respected”. Rectifying perceived injustice can be done in one of two ways, he notes: “by providing the agent with the benefits to which she feels entitled; or by convincing her that she has misconceived the scope or content or her entitlements” (Welch 1993: 19-20). The latter requires a legitimate procedure for resolving conflicting claims. In domestic political communities, these procedures are institutionalised in historically evolved legal and judicial frameworks. Given the underdeveloped character and contested legitimacy of such institutionalised procedures in the international system, however, conflict over competing justice claims may lead to violent conflict and a debilitating sense of insecurity.

There is, therefore, a clear link between security, peace and justice: the problem, however, is that the precise contours and nature of the linkages between them are poorly understood (Allan & Keller 2006). Perceptions of injustice are likely to generate powerful passions and emotionally-charged responses that “have the effect of increasing the stridency of demands, amplifying intransigence, reducing sensitivity to threats and values trade-offs, increasingly the willingness to run risks, and increasingly the likelihood of violent behaviour” (Welch 1993: 20). Thus as Allan and Keller note, “the more ambitious goal of peace with justice can lead to smaller chances of success. Indeed, it
may derail the search for “justice” – alas it is not the same on both sides of the fence!” (Allan & Keller 2006: 2).

In the absent of legitimate and effective institutionalised procedures for reconciling competing justice claims in the international system, justice is more likely to be a zero-sum game. As Reinhold Niebuhr argued in his 1942 essay “Jews After the War”, justice for the Jewish nation meant injustice for the Arab peoples. He noted that however the international community might try to sweeten the deal for the Arabs, “it is absurd to expect any people to regard the restriction of their sovereignty over a traditional possession as “just” no matter how many other benefits accrue from that abridgement”. Consequently, he argued, justice for the Jews depended on what he termed “imperialistic realism”: “The Anglo-Saxon hegemony that is bound to exist in the event of an Axis defeat will be in a position to see to it that Palestine is set aside for the Jews” (Niebuhr quoted in Fox 1996: 210). Justice for the Jews in the 1930s and 1940s, thus generated a new and deeply entrenched sense of injustice for Palestinians, for whom the 1948 *Naqba* (“calamity”) has central to defining their identity and sense of “victimhood” (Bar-Siman-Tov 2007: 55). Since 1967, therefore, the focus of the international community has been on how to foster and support a peace process that provides security for the Israelis and justice for the Palestinians.

Peacebuilding thus involves an intractable conundrum. If peace is to prevail, it must provide all parties to the conflict with security; at the same time, if this peace is to prove durable, it must satisfy the claims of all parties to “justice”. The conundrum, however, is whether the search for peace and justice can be combined, and if so how. It raises the question of whether one of these two “essentially contested concepts” needs to be privileged and sequenced, at least in the short and medium term. The pursuit of justice claims can lead to a “just peace”, but it might also provide justification for a “just war”. *Fiat iustitia, et pereat mundus* (“Let there be justice, though the world perish”), is a recipe for endless strife and insecurity in a world in which power, wealth and privilege are unequally distributed. The quest for a just and durable peace is thus a central puzzle for both academics engaged in the study of peace, conflict and international security, and – more importantly – for policy-makers seeking to resolve intractable conflicts.
Towards a Problem-Solving Approach to Just Peace Building

This chapter explores this conceptual and practical puzzle, focusing on the dilemmas and paradoxes facing policy-makers as they seek to foster a “just peace” in conflict-wrecked regions such as the Western Balkans and the Middle East. The central argument advanced here is that in an international system characterised by both a diversity of discrete political communities and acute inequalities of wealth, power and influence, there are significant structural impediments that severely complicate the search for a just and durable peace. Negotiating a “just peace” involves skilful diplomacy and a careful calibration of carrots and sticks. In developing practical proposals for building a just peace, academics and policy-makers should focus on what is realistic given the domestic and external constraints facing the parties to a conflict. There is a temptation to seek to a short-cut to complex crisis situation by adopting grand visions that embody utopian notions of peace and justice based on the far-reaching transcendence of the existing international political and economic order. Visions of a global order based on perpetual peace and perfect justice are grounded in eschatological perspectives – both religious and secular – that seek to transcend these structural constraints via some form of “emancipation” and/or the establishment of a cosmopolitan world order. Such millenarian approaches to complex conflict situations, however, offer little practical guidance and risk generating unintended consequences that can exacerbate the problems at hand, regardless of the noble intentions of their would-be “emancipators”.

Consequently, this chapter argues that eschatological and teleological approaches implicit in much normative international relations theory (notably in liberal-idealism and “Critical theory”) need to viewed critically, and that a praxis-orientated “problem-solving” approach that focuses on addressing the concrete and specific dilemmas inherent in conflict management and resolution offers an alternative for addressing the conundrum of a just and durable peace. The chapter begins with a critique of liberal-idealist understandings of security and justice that conceive of peace as the transcendence of the anarchic structure of international order. This form of liberal-idealist thinking about peace is rooted in a teleological conception of international politics derived from Christian-Judeo eschatology, which
equates a just peace with the transcendence of state sovereignty and international anarchy through “emancipation” and cosmopolitanism. The chapter moves on to outline a non-teleological approach to the study of just peace, which takes as its central premise the existence of a pluralist and diverse world of discrete political communities, each of which has its own conception of the sumnum bonum and how to attain it. The problematique of “security, peace and justice” is thus about how to establish a stable order in an anarchic world of sovereign states, characterised by security competition and acute inequalities of wealth and power. The chapter concludes by arguing that the utopian goal of establishing a stable peace order that is grounded on social justice can serve to provide what Reinhold Niebuhr termed the “regulative principles” of political and strategic choices, establishing a predisposition to address concrete and visible manifestations of injustice and insecurity. However, as Niebuhr argued, the aspiration for a stable peace that provides both security and justice is “possible of approximation but not of realisation in actual history”. For some time to come, therefore, the concern of “collective man” cannot be “the creation of an ideal society in which there will be uncoerced and perfect peace and justice, but a society in which there will be enough justice, and in which coercion will be sufficiently non-violent to prevent his common enterprise from issuing into complete disaster” (Niebuhr 2005: 16).

Regulating Violence

If the discipline of International Relations has any core concern, it is the regulation of violence in the international system. “Regulating violence”, Alexander Wendt has written, “is one of the most fundamental problems of order in social life, because the nature of violent technology, who controls it, and how it is used deeply affect all other social relations”. Other social relations – economic or family, for example – are not reducible to the structures by which violence is regulated, he argues, but

… other social relations could not exist in the forms they do unless they are compatible with the “forces” and especially “relations of destruction”. If people are determined to kill or conquer each other they will not cooperate on trade or human
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rights. Power may be everywhere these days, but its forms vary in importance, and the power to engage in organized violence is one of the most basic. How it is distributed and regulated is a crucial problem (Wendt 1999: 8).

It was this concern with “regulating violence” that constituted the “foundational question” for the discipline when it was established as a distinct academic field of enquiry in the wake of the Great War, and it remains at the heart of the sub-field of International Security Studies. Unfortunately, in the course of the “great debates” that have engaged the attention of IR scholars over past decade, the centrality and continuing pertinence of the problem of regulating violence in international politics has been lost sight of (Smith 1995). The endeavours of some to shift the focus of International Relations away from issues of war and peace, along with obtuse debates on epistemology, ontology and methodology, have left the discipline less equipped to address what remains the most pressing issue on the contemporary international agenda – understanding the causes of violent conflict and the conditions of peace.¹

"Beating Swords into Plowshares:" Eschatological Visions of Just Peace

The continuing prevalence of war, conflict and injustice in the world today reflects the perennial element of “tragedy” of international politics (Lebow 2003; Mearsheimer 2001). John Keegan has argued that since the early twentieth century, war “has overtaken disease and famine in the hierarchy of threats this world offers to human life, liberty and happiness” (Keegan 1998: 17). At the same time, the aspiration for peace with justice and security for all also has a long pedigree. Western political thought is replete with utopian and reformist schemes for taming war and building a just and durable peace order. In Medieval Christendom, the Christian Just War tradition sought to constrain and “civilise” the conduct of warfare; at a time when the modern states’ system was still in its infancy, Grotius

¹ “Rather than creating understanding of “what is going on”, as students often put it”, Kalevi Holsti wrote in the early 1990s, “the field may be verging towards scholasticism and making itself inaccessible to those to whom it should be addressed, namely students and policy-makers” (Holsti 1993: 408).
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looked to international law as the foundation of an international society of states; in the Eighteenth Century “Age of Reason”, a veritable profusion of schemes for perpetual peace were advanced, most notably Kant’s advocacy of a foedus pacificum; the nineteenth century saw a number of attempts to establish a Concert of the great powers and to curb the arms race; and in the twentieth century, ambitious proposals for a cooperative international order based on law and institutions were drawn up after both world wars.

None of these schemes for perpetual peace and international cooperation, however, can rival the poetic power and breath-taking scope of Isaiah’s irenic vision. The Book of Isaiah is one of the foundational texts of Western civilisation, whose influence on thinking about peace has been profound. Isaiah’s vision of a world in which, “in the days to come”, nations and peoples shall “beat their swords into plowshares” and their “spears into pruning hooks” has both inspired and unsettled generations of Jews and Christians. Its poetic imagery is so powerful and effective because “it is totally out of harmony with the reality of our world, yet fully in harmony with what we would like the world to be” (Craigie 1985: 32). Erich Fromm, a leading member of the Frankfurt School who sought to integrate Freudianism and Marxism, wrote that he had been deeply touched by the Jewish messianic traditions of the “end of days” he had grown up with. “The vision of universal peace and harmony between nations touched me deeply when I was twelve or thirteen years old” (Bentley 1982: 85).

The prophecy of Isaiah is clearly rooted in the eschatology that is inherent in the Judeo-Christian tradition, which conceives of history as a process leading inexorably to a specific end “in the days to come”. In Isaiah’s irenic vision, the agency for this eschatological dénouement was not to be humankind, but God. In the days to come, “the mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills”. The vision is thus of the Kingdom of God on earth, resulting in the transcendence of established structures and procedures of global political order. God shall “judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples”, and a deep and pervasive peace will spread over the earth;

they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
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and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more (Isaiah 2: 4).

Isaiah”s irenic vision is not simply of the emergence of a negative peace, in the sense of the mere absence of war, but of a positive, perpetual and stable peace based on justice for all. In Micah, the identical passage “nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more”, is followed by the promise that all will be able to enjoy the benefits of a just and durable peace;

… they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees,
and no one shall make them afraid;
for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken
(Micah 4: 4).

The Secular Eschatology of Liberal-Idealism

Isaiah”s vision of a positive peace based on social justice, a cosmopolitan order, world government and omnilateral disarmament is based on a religious eschatology in which the transcendence of conflict, war and injustice comes through divine intervention. As late as the seventeenth century, such Biblical prophecies were used in England and in Europe more widely to diagnose – and more importantly, prescribe solutions to the ills of the world (Hill 1993).

In our overwhelmingly secular age, such religiously inspired conceptions of peace in international relations are rare – although not completely absent. Nonetheless, a teleological and eschatological vision of the transcendence of contemporary political ills is still much in evidence in the secular eschatology of more radical and idealist strands of Western political thought. It may be, as Nietzsche claimed, that “God is dead”, but the eschatological structure of religious prophecy has been transmuted into a secular teleology that regards peace as the transcendence of the anarchy of international politics.
This “rationalist” (in Oakeshottian terms\(^2\)) approach to politics is clearly evident in Marxist thinking, which contains an eschatological vision of the transcendence of class struggle and the subsequent “end of history” through the agency of the revolutionary working class and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat (Bentley 1982). Not surprising, giving its roots in the Western Marxist tradition (more specifically, Gramsci and the Frankfurt School), the same structure of thought is evident in more “Critical” thinking\(^\). This is evident from both Critical Security Studies which regards the solution to war, conflict, oppression and injustice as lying in a vaguely-defined process of “emancipation” (Booth 2005), and Critical Social Theory, with its explicit normative and political commitment to “liberation” (Calhoun 1995: xvi).

The same teleological and eschatological assumptions are also manifest in other forms of liberal-idealistic thought. For liberals, the solution to the problem of war and security competition lies in a mix of robust international institutions (underpinned by international law), complex economic interdependence (subsumed more recently into the broader notion of globalisation), transnational societal integration and the spread of democratic systems of government. Different schools of thought within liberalism – namely institutional liberalism, economic liberalism, sociological liberalism and republican liberalism – lay different emphasis on the precise agency or mechanism by which the logic of security competition and power maximisation in a self-help system can be overcome. Nonetheless, most liberals envisage the gradual transformation of international anarchy into a more hierarchical and cosmopolitan global order (in either its “thin” or “thick” versions). An example is François Duchêne’s with his notion of the “civilianisation” of relations between states, involving the “joint management of shared problems” (Duchêne 1994: 401). This notion is typical of liberal-idealistic thinking which assumes the existence of an underlying harmony of interests between discrete political communities, and thus the absence of intractable sources of conflict and tragedy in international politics.

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\(^2\) Oakeshott defines “rational” activity as “behaviour in which an independently premeditated end is pursued and which is determined solely by that end” (Oakeshott 1991: 102).
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The eschatological and teleological structure of liberal-idealist thinking about peace in the international system can be seen in Mervyn Frost’s reflections on tragedy (2003; For a response, see Mayall 2003). Frost acknowledges that the structure of international politics is such that tragedy – in the sense of situations in which moral choices are difficult if not impossible to make – is an ever-present problem, but argues that the solution lies in the transformation of the material conditions that generate tragic situations. “Tragedy asks us to consider the possible transformation of the social formations that provided the agon that produced the tragedy” (Frost 2003: 494; see also Mayall 2003). He illustrates his argument by reference to the tragic conflicts inherent in apartheid South Africa.

The problem with Frost’s argument, however, is that it conflates domestic political regimes (structured on a hierarchical basis) with international political orders, which are inherently pluralistic and diverse, and which lack legitimate institutionalised procedures for resolving justice claims, or a central decision-making body able to ensure compliance. Whilst unjust and oppressive domestic political structures can and have been transformed, the task overcoming the competitive and anarchic nature of international politics is qualitatively more difficult. Consequently, if one is interested in developing a more pragmatic, problem-solving approach rather than a cosmopolitan political order, it would be more productive to focus on thinking through the problems of war, peace and justice in the context of the existing anarchic international domain. Similarly, rather than pursuing Mervyn Frost’s call for “detailed normative theorizing about what ought to be done”, particularly “on the most important question of all: in what would a just world order consist?” (Frost 1998: 129), the cause of building a just and durable peace would be better served by developing analytical tools which can help identify the structural constraints on political agency in international relations, that is, to explore the range of possibilities and potentialities open to collective political actors in complex conflict situations.

A pertinent example is the controversies surrounding the Vance-Owen Peace Plan (VOPP) for Bosnia-Herzegovina. Presented in January 1993, this involved the Bosniaks accepting the results of “ethnic cleansing” and Serbian battlefield successes and acquiescing to a division of Bosnia into different ethnic communities. This would have brought “peace” (in the sense of a negative peace, that is, ending
the fighting), but at the expense of accepting the injustice of rewarding Serbian military aggression. The VOPP, which went through a number of iterations between January and May 1993, awarded 40% of the territory to the Serbs, who constituted approximately 30% of the population, whilst giving the Bosnians (with 40% of the population) only 30% of the land. The publication of the VOPP stimulated another round of ethnic cleansing as the parties sought to create “facts on the ground”, and also led to the all-out Bosnian-Croat war that witnessed widespread Croat atrocities and ethnic cleansing. The Bosnians rejected the VOPP and were encouraged in this by the Clinton Administration, which advocated a policy of “lift and strike”.

The case of the VOPP demonstrates the difficulties and dilemmas facing peace-makers as the grapple with the problem of weighing peace, justice and security. Clearly the VOPP had many limitations. However, as David Owen noted, these reflected the unwillingness of the international community to engage in effective coercive diplomacy and military intervention. “The daunting challenge for the ICFY in November 1992 was whether, armed only with moral authority and weak economic sanctions, and with no credible threat of selective counter-force, we could roll back the Serb confrontation lines and create a new map” (Simms 149). International, strategic and political constraints made the search for just peace extremely difficult.

When America finally engaged in the Balkans by arming the Croats and subsequently negotiating the Dayton peace accords, the final map looked very similar to the VOPP, despite the considerable shedding of blood and further ethnic cleansing that occurred between 1993-95 (Ashbrook and Bakick 2010).

Thinking through the conundrums and dilemmas of building a just peace thus involves a praxis-orientated problem-solving approach to conflict situations rather than abstract musings on a “cosmopolitical” world order and the transcendence of the existing international order. For some “radical” normative theorists, however, this is not the case: Steve Smith (1995: 28), for example, argued in 1995 that to expect a postmodernist to “list his or her policies for the Bosnian crisis is to allocate disciplinary power in a most effective way”!

**Beyond Liberal-Idealist Eschatology**
Despite the hopes of many normative political theorists, the strategic and diplomatic realities of contemporary international politics makes it very difficult to achieve a just and durable peace by transcending the structural limits of a pluralist and competitive international system. Some have suggested that this could be achieved by one state emerging as a global Leviathan (Craig 2003), but as Reinhold Niebuhr argued, although powerful nations at times could “prevent anarchy by effective imperialism”, the peace so gained “is always an uneasy and an unjust one”. Powerful nations might also be able to “organise a crude society of nations”, in the same way that “powerful classes organise a nation”, but in each case, “the peace is a tentative one because it is unjust”. The conclusion he drew from this analysis was bleak: society, he argued, “is in a perpetual state of war”, and no amount of “moral goodwill” or rational “social intelligence” could bring about peace with justice (Niebuhr 2005: 14). Consequently,

... it is safe to hazard the prophecy that the dream of perpetual peace and brotherhood for human society is one which will never be fully realised. It is a vision prompted by the conscience and insight of individual man, but incapable of fulfilment by collective man. It is like all true religious visions, possible of approximation but not of realisation in actual history (Niebuhr 2005: 16)

As American power wanes and new great powers emerge (notably the BRIC countries – Brazil, Russia, India and China), it seems evident that states are not withering away or being transcended in a new cosmopolitan global order. States, it seems, are likely to remain the primary actors in the multi-actor international system for the foreseeable future. Consequently, anarchy not hierarchy will remain the dominant ordering principle of the international system. Anarchy and pronounced socio-economic inequalities in the global system place significant constraints on projects to achieve perpetual peace, international harmony and institutionalised cooperation (Waltz 1979: 111). For this reason, therefore, it seems prudent to approach ambitious projects for large-scale social and political engineering with a healthy dose of scepticism, and to be suspicious of “rationalist” schemes to establish utopian peace orders designed without reference to the structural dynamics of the international system (Oakeshott 1991: 113).
This is because there is a very real danger that noble intentions can generate unintended outcomes, given the inherent tragedy of international politics. “How often have statesmen been motivated by the desire to improve the world”, Hans Morgenthau argued, “and ended up by making it worse? And how often have they sought one goal, and ended by achieving something they neither expected nor desired?” (Morgenthau 1993: 6). The quest for a just and durable peace should focus on more of a praxis-orientated, problem-solving approach (Niebuhr 2005: 16). “Policy”, in Michael Oakeshott’s words, “will not the imagination of some new sort of society, or the transformation of an existing society so as to make it correspond with an abstract ideal; it will be the perception of what needs doing now in order to realize more fully the intimations of our existing society” (Oakeshott 1991: 397).

Non-Teleological Praxis

Given that anarchy seems likely to remain the dominant ordering principle of global politics for some time to come, and that tragedy is inherent in the structure of the international system, it is unhelpful to adopt an approach towards peacebuilding and conflict resolution that aspires to achieve a transcendental or eschatological telos (a “single substantive purpose”) – whether rationally determined or revealed by religious prophecy (Oakeshott 1991: 358) A problem-orientated approach, by contrast, follows Michael Oakeshott in rejecting “the illusion that in politics there is anywhere a safe harbour, a destination to be reached or even a detectable strand of progress” (Oakeshott 1991: 66) This praxis-orientated and non-teleological theoretical perspective implies a distinctive approach to peacebuilding: one that seeks to navigate the shifting tides of regional and international politics, conscious of the ebb and flow of systemic forces, and sensitive towards the precariousness of peace in a self-help domain;

In political activity, then, men sail a boundless and bottomless sea; there is neither harbour for shelter nor floor for anchorage, neither starting-place nor appointed destination. The enterprise

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3 One immediately thinks of Tony Blair’s protestations that his intentions in joining the US invasion of Iraq of motivated by the highest principles.
is to keep afloat on an even keel; the sea is both friend and enemy; and the seamanship consists in using the resources of a traditional manner of behaviour in order to make a friend of every hostile occasion” (Oakeshott 1991: 60).

This does not, however, mean that one expects political actors to remain passive in the face of conflict, war and injustice. Niebuhr’s admonition concerning the implications of political realism for individual moral behaviour is equally applicable for collective ethical choices: “No political realism which emphasises the inevitability and necessity of a social struggle, can absolve individuals of the obligation to check their own egoism, to comprehend the interests of others and thus to enlarge the areas of cooperation” (Niebuhr 2005: 180).

**Peacebuilding and the “Strategic Selectivity of Structure”**

Developing effective conflict resolution and peacebuilding strategies involves identifying the scope for agential power, and the constraints and opportunities generated by the structural context. This brings us to the perennial problem of the social sciences – the agent-structure problematic. In contemporary international society, the range of alternative peacebuilding strategies is constrained by the structural dynamics of the global economic and political system. “Men make their own history”, Marx famously argued in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, “but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past” (Marx and Engels 1973: 96). Much the same can be said for international actors such as negotiators or diplomats, who make their own history “under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past”. In this sense, political actors can be understood conceptually as “situated actors” located within distinct structural contexts that define the range of potential strategies and opportunities available to them (Hay 2002: 116-17, 122-26). This approach, which draws on the work of Critical Realists like Colin Hay and Bob Jessop, recognises that there are limits to political agency imposed by the “strategic selectivity of structure”, and seeks to identify the extent to which systemic factors either enable or constrain political choices in international politics,
thereby “shaping and shoving” – but not determining – political and diplomatic behaviour.

This means that strategies to regulate violence and address the causes of conflict and injustice in the international system must be based on a clear analysis of the “strategic selectivity of structure”. Consequently, a non-eschatological approach to understanding the dilemmas and paradoxes of building a just and durable peace recognises “the extent to which moral behaviour is heavily constrained by the dynamics of political life” (Hurrell 2002: 137).

The example of Sudan and the indictment of President Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir of the International Criminal Court (ICC) on ten charges of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity is a case in point. The ICC was established in 2002 to provide what Kofi Annan called “the promise of justice” and a potential “deterrent” (Annan 2009). In July 2008 ICC prosecutor Luis Moreno-Ocampo issued an arrest warrant for Bashir – the first Head of State to be indicted. The charges relate to the conflict in Darfur since 2003, in which 300,000 have died and 2.7m individuals been displaced. The indictment is a laudable attempt to achieve justice for the victims of conflict, in which President Bashir’s security forces have been heavily implicated. However, the indictment has led African Union members to denounce the ICC as a “western court”, and has threatened to exacerbate the violence and suffering of the Sudanese by making the Bashir government more intractable and less amenable to international pressure for a negotiated settlement to the conflicts in both Darfur and southern Sudan. As this case makes clear therefore, effective strategies for building a just and durable peace must eschew normative absolutes, and be tailored to the political dynamics and structural context of the conflict in question.

Three Idioms of Moral Conduct

Drawing on a non-teleological understanding of international politics and a recognition of the structural constraints on states as “situated actors”, a problem-solving approach to the dilemmas of ethical statecraft and effective peacebuilding in the context of an enduring anarchical international order can be developed. In contrast to the teleological and “rationalist” approach of liberal-idealism to the problem of regulating international violence, this approach is based on
what Michael Oakeshott (on the basis of his reading of Hobbes) defined as the “morality of individuality”. Oakeshott argues that there are three “idioms of moral conduct”: a morality of communal ties; the morality of the common good; and the morality of individuality.

In the first, “good conduct is understood as appropriate participation in the unvarying activities of a community”. Such a “morality of communal ties” implies the existence of deeply-rooted social conventions of various kinds defining a complex pattern of mutual obligations – a Gemeinschaft, to use the language of Max Weber and classical German sociology. The idiom of a “morality of communal ties” is implicit in cosmopolitan conceptions of world order, which posit the emergence of a moral community of humankind. This idiom of morality, however, is inappropriate for international politics because the international system is composed of sovereign political communities, each with their own national interests and diverging conceptions of the sumnum bonum (the “good life”). Given the existence of manifold political communities with different conceptions of justice and morality, it is unconvincing to argue there is a “moral community of humankind” based on a shared identity and shared values (Buzan and Gonzalez-Pelaez 2005: 35; see also Nardin 1983: 19).

The second idiom of morality – which underpins much of the thinking about “Liberal Peace” building – envisages the existence of a socially constituted “common good”. It envisages the existence of a “society” (Gesellschaft) composed of independent actors, but believes that all are “engaged in a single, common enterprise” and consequently share a common understanding of “the good of all”, or the “social good”. It assumes that there are shared normative values such as democracy and “human rights” that should be available to all. This “morality of the common good” corresponds to Max Weber’s “ethic of ultimate ends”, which decrees absolute and unconditional fidelity to principle.4

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4 In his lecture on “Politics as a Vocation”, Max Weber distinguished between an “ethic of ultimate ends” and an “ethic of responsibility”. The former linked ethical behaviour to a distinctive teleos, and believed that if “an action of good intent leads to bad results, then, in the actor’s eyes, not he but the world, or the stupidity of other men, or God’s will who made them thus, is responsible for the evil”. An ethic of responsibility involved the consideration “of precisely the average deficiencies of people” and an
This understanding of morality has become highly influential in the West, and is evident in much liberal-idealist thinking about building a “Liberal Peace” through spreading “universal” norms, values and institutions (Tuck 1999: 14-15, 234). The problem with it is that it can lead to a crusading, messianic and imperialist mentality, whereby one’s own understanding of justice and the “good life” – with its associated, and culturally rooted conceptions of “fairness”, “liberty”, “democracy” and “freedom” – is seen as justifying intervention in states and societies with different conceptions of the “good”. “We are all moral beings”, David Welch has argued, “and we all make moral judgements; they are almost always, however, parochial. It is disconcerting to think that projecting them into the international context may at best be inappropriate, and at worst a form of moral imperialism” (Welch 1993: 214-15). As the philosopher Michael Oakeshott notes,

> every moral ideal is potentially an obsession; the pursuit of moral ideals is an idolatry in which particular objects are recognised as “gods”. … Too often the excessive pursuit of one ideal leads to the exclusion of others, perhaps all others; in our eagerness to realize justice we come to forget charity, and a passion for righteousness has made many a man hard and merciless. There is, indeed, no ideal the pursuit of which will not lead to disillusion; chagrin waits at the end for all who take this path (Oakeshott 1991: 476)

The third idiom of moral conduct – a “morality of individuality” – is the one most appropriate to a critical realist approach that seeks to find a workable balance between justice, order and security. This involves give and take, mutual accommodation and a pursuit of “enlightened” self-interest. “In general”, Oakeshott argues, “moral activity may be said to be the observation of a balance of accommodation between the demands of desiring selves each recognized by the others to be an end and not a mere slave of somebody else’s desires” (Oakeshott 1991: 502). This “morality of
individuality” corresponds to Max Weber’s “ethic of responsibility”, which specifies that one should consider the consequences of one’s actions for others and behave accordingly. This means that claims of justice need to be tempered by recognition of the claims of others, and a willingness to engage in a process of negotiation and compromise to reach a mutual accommodation of interests and values.

Within this framework of a “morality of individuality”, three key principles of conflict resolution and peacebuilding can be identified: prudence, scepticism and reciprocity. Peacebuilding strategies need to be prudent in the sense that they should be circumspect and modest in their aspirations; they should aim not at perfection but at achieving the lesser evil, the familiar to the unknown, the tried to the untried, “present laughter to utopian bliss” (Oakeshott 1991: 408). This is the lesson to be drawn from the experience of the post-conflict stabilisation phase in Iraq and the current counter-insurgency campaign in Afghanistan. In both cases, initially ambitious aspirations to plant democracy in Mesopotamia or to build Sweden in the Hindu Kush have given way to more limited, and more achievable, political, strategic and social objectives.

Prudence in turn gives rise to a degree of scepticism about the human capacity to achieve perfect peace and justice through political action (Loriaux 1999: 375-79). Peacebuilding actors need to be sceptical about the possibilities of, and potential for, political action to produce the “good life”, and sceptical about the prospects for engineering rapid progress in the human condition. From this perspective, politics more often than not involves choosing between the lesser of two evils. In the Balkans, for example, humanitarian military intervention and the subsequent liberal peacebuilding strategies have not been able to resolve the underlying political and ethno-national tensions that brought about the conflict. Neither have they been effective in reversing the ethnic cleansing that occurred during and immediately after the conflicts in Bosnia, Croatia or Kosovo.

Finally, conflict resolution and peacebuilding strategies should be based on reciprocity in the sense of recognising the need for compromise, restraint, mutual accommodation and “give and take” between sovereign political communities, each with their own vision of the summum bonum. By emphasising the importance of reciprocity, statesmen and women “may save themselves from the temptation to
believe that they have a special commission for the reform or punishment of a recalcitrant world”. (Clinton 1994: 258). Reciprocity entails a willingness to recognise the moral motives of other actors, and to resist the temptation to make demands wrapped in the language of justice and moral entitlement. Reciprocity is also the vital first step towards a process of building a just peace, which as Allan and Keller argue, begins with “thin recognition” and moves on through “thick recognition” to “renouncement” and “rule” (in the sense of common principles, norms and accepted behaviour) (Allan and Keller 2006: 197-206).

**Conclusion**

This chapter has made the case for a non-eschatological approach to the problem of peace in international relations which seeks to balance the competing demands of justice, order and security. By way of conclusion, three points can be made. First, it is important to recognise the distinctive problematic of peace and justice in the contemporary international system: it is not a question of attempting to transcend the structural dynamics of international politics through “civilianising” or “domesticating” them, or of linking peace to a broader normative political agenda involving “emancipation” or “liberation”. Rather, peace in the international system involves seeking to regulate violence between discrete political communities, each with their own conception of the *sumnum bonum* – and thus, with their own conception of social and political justice. Regulating violence thus involves a political and diplomatic process within an institutional and legal framework that is viewed as legitimate by autonomous political communities. Creating and nurturing the institutions of “international society” is a necessary element in shaping an international order in which a balance between security and justice can be negotiated, although such an “international society” will inevitably be shaped by asymmetries of power that are an ineluctable feature of the contemporary international system.

Second, in pursuit of peace, political actors should eschew a strategy based on either a “morality of communal ties” or a “morality of the common good” in favour of one based on a “morality of individuality”. In other words, they should not imagine that there is an
emergent cosmopolitan *Gemeinschaft* with shared values and interests in the international system, or an international *Gesellschaft* sharing liberal notions of democracy, human rights and universal norms. Rather, they should recognise that the international system is pluralist and diverse, and that peace can only come through compromise, restraint, mutual accommodation and “give and take” between sovereign political communities. In pursuing peace, therefore, political actors should be “calculators not crusaders” (Clinton 1994: 258); they should act on the basis of enlightened self-interest, calculating their interests and the prevailing constellation of political forces, rather than succumbing to the temptations of moralism in foreign policy, demonising opponents and conflating their own interests with the universal good. “Politics”, as Reinhold Niebuhr observed, “will, to the end of history, be an area where conscience and power meet, where the ethical and coercive factors of human life will interpenetrate and work out their tentative and uneasy compromises” (Niebuhr 2005: 5).

Finally, in seeking to regulate violence in international politics, it is important to recognise that peace in a self-help system will always be fragile and vulnerable to “spoilers”, and that a just and durable peace is not an end-point to be reached, but a process of constant negotiation and compromise, involving both persuasion and coercion. Utilising coercion as an instrument for forging a just and durable peace might seem paradoxical. However, coercive military power is necessary both to create the conditions for peace and to maintain the existing peace order subsequently. “Positive peace”, Michael Howard has argued, “implies a social and political ordering of society that is generally accepted as just”. “Paradoxically”, he continues, “war may be an intrinsic part of that order”. One of the principle lessons of the Second World War, he suggests, was that “military power was necessary not only to the establishment, but also the preservation of peace” (Howard 2000: 2, 73). A similar point is made by John Keegan, who notes that international law, the UN system and other international organisations are not sufficient in themselves to ensure a just and durable peace, but require coercive military force provided by states in the international community to give them substance and impact;
For in the last resort it will not be law nor the machinery for its administration that will keep the world’s peace. And despite our best efforts, if war is to be driven to and beyond the horizon of civilisation, it will be because the United Nations retains both the will to confront unlawful force with lawful force and because the governments that lend it lawful force continue to train, pay and equip men of honour to carry out their orders (Keegan 1998: 73-74).

In the face of eschatological visions of an end to war and injustice, therefore, a degree of scepticism about the possibilities and potential for political action to produce perfect peace and justice is called for. A prudent approach to peacebuilding suggests that the aim should be not perfection but the lesser evil, and that the focus of praxis should be on pragmatic and immediate “problem solving” rather than the pursuit of untried utopian and rationalist schemes advocated by, amongst others, Critical Theorists. The emotional and political appeal of Isaiah’s irenic vision and the rational secular eschatologies that follow its discursive logic cannot be denied, but as Reinhold Niebuhr observes,

... it is safe to hazard the prophecy that the dream of perpetual peace and brotherhood for human society is one which will never be fully realised. It is a vision promoted by the conscience and insight of individual man, but incapable of fulfilment by collective man. It is like all true religious visions, possible of approximation but not of realisation in actual history.

As we have seen, Niebuhr therefore concluded that the concern of "collective man" cannot be “the creation of an ideal society in which there will be uncoerced and perfect peace and justice, but a society in which there will be enough justice, and in which coercion will be sufficiently non-violent to prevent his common enterprise from issuing into complete disaster” (Niebuhr 2005: 16).

Reflecting on Niebuhr’s warning that “social conflict is an inevitability in human history, probably to its very end”, former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright notes that “[i]f Niebuhr is right, the pursuit of peace will always be uphill”. Yet, she argues, this is no reason to give up on the search for a just peace and improve the human condition;
Decision makers can usefully search for ways to minimize the inevitable social conflicts referred to by Niebuhr – not so much with the aspiration of finding Utopia than with the goal of saving us from even greater destruction. Our inherent shortcomings notwithstanding, we can still hope to create a better future. And we know that the right kind of leadership can do much to prevent wars, rebuild devastated societies, expand freedom and assist the poor (Albright 2006: 284-85).

Niebuhr, however, leaves us with one further paradox when reflecting on the tangled relationship between peace, justice and security: in order to mobilise the energy and enthusiasm necessary to overcome entrenched vested interests and achieve the desired reforms that can approximate the vision of a just and durable peace, it is necessary to nurture and encourage a “sublime madness in the soul” that only an illusory belief in perfect justice and universal peace can ignite. “Nothing but such madness will do battle with malignant power and “spiritual wickedness in high places””. But such sublime madness generated by a visionary illusion can result in “terrible fanaticisms”. This is the paradox with which Niebuhr leaves us, a paradox with no obvious resolution, and which underscores the enduring tragedy of contemporary international politics.
Adrian Hyde-Price

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