

Partial Attainment of Peace, Prosperity and Happiness Is Non-Attainment

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Today it is almost universally recognized that peace, prosperity, and happiness are desirable goals towards which we must strive. It is increasingly apparent that partial attainment of these goals is the same as non-attainment, for the peace and security established by certain nations or peoples is in constant danger of being upset by other nations and peoples who are still struggling to attain them. There is an ever-present element of tension and insecurity in the relationships between nations as long as inequality in standards of living exists. Tension is maintained and even escalated by feelings of resentment on the part of developing nations as their awareness of the world situation increases, and the vast differences in living standards becomes jarringly obvious. Where there is tension, there is potential conflict, and there is no true peace. I wish to propose a definition of world peace as a condition not only free from violent conflict, but free from national feelings of resentment, antagonism, and injustice which have the potential to erupt into violence and thereby destroy what is only an illusory peace. The ideal of world peace, therefore, can only be realized by a systematic easing of the present sources of tension, by finding real solutions to both parties where any given dispute exists. Peace must be universal to be real.

Prosperity and happiness, likewise, cannot be insured to continue even where they currently exist, unless they are shared globally. The only way to achieve a prosperity that will be vital and growing, and free from threatened destruction, is to involve everyone in it.

There has been a lot of discussions recently about a new international economic order. The United Nations has devoted time and money to special sessions and research projects on the subject, especially in the past three years. The report presented to the United Nations in October, 1976 by a team of economists from Harvard and Brandeis Universities, entitled "The Future of the World Economy", draws the following significant conclusions: "No insurmountable physical barriers exist within this century to accelerated development of the developing regions." Existing barriers, it states, "are political, social, and institutional in character, rather than physical."

This is interesting. First, the fact that we are seeking a new order in economics implies that order is both desirable and possible. It is clear that such an order would approach greater equality of living standard among people of all nations, and that the first step is to pour energy into the developing nations to elevate the present standards found there. If it is true that the only barriers to this process are man-made rather than natural, what changes must we initiate in our political and social thinking in order to remove such obstacles and proceed with the task at hand?

Let us look backwards over our social evolution in the century just behind us: we have witnessed the processes of colonization and decolonization; we have seen new nations emerge, most recently in Africa but also in other regions, and establish their own identities. Some of these changes have occurred peacefully, others by violent means. The search for national identity and a sense of unique value is certainly essential. However, the sense of identity found in the struggle for and attainment of national independence is as yet incomplete. We are, or should be, more than a group of nations struggling to maintain our own existences.

Perhaps independence has not yet been achieved by every nation which desires it. Yet beyond independence lies the concept of interdependence of nations. Beyond nationalism lies internationalism. These are great concepts, and they require an objective and expansive consideration if we are going to deal with them responsibly.

An important question which, rises here is that of determining the proper relationship between a nation and an international community. With the evolution of collective consciousness comes an awareness of the need to define various roles within a unified structure.

In approaching this problem, some ideas may be drawn from an examination of the basic relationship between a society and the individuals which comprise it. Society cannot be structured without individuals, and without society individuals lack direction, fulfillment, and identity with one another. Any contradiction between individuals and society in terms of goals or values leads to frustration, creating on a local scale the same tensions mentioned earlier in a global context. Both individualism and collectivism are partial concepts, and the two must be synthesized if order and harmony are to be established. A reciprocal relationship of interdependence is the only one which allows two entities to benefit mutually and progress simultaneously towards fulfillment of their respective purposes.

The purpose of society is to provide a structure in which individuals can express their unique abilities and talents, contributing them towards the evolution and elevation of life quality for all. The purpose of an individual is to fulfill his potential as a rational, emotional, physical, and creative being. Neither can exist meaningfully without the other. If this organic relationship between an individual and society is realized, individual endeavors in every field become components contributing to collective prosperity.

There is a major cultural division in the world today based on two diverse views of the interrelationship discussed above. One, practiced in the socialist communist societies, emphasizes collectivism as the means to a prosperous society; the other, prevalent in the democratic world, emphasizes individualism. Both tend to over-emphasize their own view, failing to realize that a balanced interrelationship is most productive. The weakness of the first view is its tendency to deny the value of the individual, and to suppress his unique creative aspirations. The weakness of the second is its failure to provide a cohesive consciousness whereby each individual feels his own responsibility in relation to his society and nation. The public minded individual seems to be an exception to the general tendency today in most of the "free" societies. Relations between individuals suffer under both systems as well. In the first, they become mechanical, especially when human value is determined in terms of labor and productivity. In the second, they tend to be competitive, which ideally would stimulate development for everyone, except for the tendency toward selfish aspiration and greediness which allows suppression of one individual by another and thus corrupts the system.

Perhaps the first change we need to bring about in our social consciousness is a more balanced concept of the relative role of the individual and society, an awareness of the complimentary purposes of the whole and the individual, and of the responsibilities each must assume towards each other. Secondly, a recognition of the unique value and creative potential of each individual would allow for inter-personal relationships based on mutual respect and dignity. Unless we take a higher view of the value of each individual, we cannot overcome the degradation of character and exploitation of one another which are prevalent today.

Let us consider the application of these principles in an international context. Our goal is a unified world, an international society of which each nation becomes a valuable, contributing part. Can the same organic relationship described between an individual and his society exist between a nation and an international community?

If our answer is yes, then the first assumption we make is that each nation has a valuable role to play, which must be acknowledged and respected by the international community. A nation's primary value might be determined in terms of its resources, both natural and acquired. Some have an abundance of raw materials, such as the Arab lands with their wealth of oil deposits. Others have developed technology and skilled labor. Japan is an outstanding example of a nation which has very little in the way of natural resources, yet has developed a healthy economy and high living standard based on her technical and mechanical skills, and trade with others. Both kinds of resources are of little value in themselves, after the need for them in their own country has been met, but they attain value due to the demand of the international community.

In addition to its fundamental value based on marketable resources, a nation may have potential value internationally in contributing towards a higher standard of living in a non-material way. There are vast cultural, traditional, philosophical, and intellectual resources to be tapped around the world, even in nations whose material resources may be extremely limited. History has raised and lowered civilizations, leaving in its wake what could be termed deposits of culture and thought. Scholars certainly recognize this fact; it is one which should not be overlooked in an assessment of the value of nations within a world society.

Turning to the question of relations between nations as parts of a whole, we enter the complex arena of present-day international relations. As a primary condition, we must set as our goal true peace, prosperity, and happiness for all, and assume a non-partisan, universal viewpoint.

If one analyzes the present distribution of resources, goods, and skills around the world, the need for interdependence in economic terms is clear; industrial nations are dependent upon developing nations for oil, minerals, foods, and other raw materials, while developing nations are dependent upon industrial nations for technology and manufactured goods. The main weakening factor in north-south relations today emanates from the fear of exploitations on the part of the developing nations towards the industrial nations. This fear is based, unfortunately, on past and present experience, which could have been avoided over the past few decades had the western world approached the third world with greater wisdom and foresight. For example, in their hurry to gain profit from foreign ventures, western investors do not

always recognize that their own long-term interests might be better served by helping to develop and stabilize the economy within a developing nation, thereby creating a stronger partner with whom to cooperate for mutual benefit. Given an imbalance in material advantage, the terms of agreement between two parties are very important. Whether one will be considered a benefactor or an exploiter is a matter of attitude and approach, and it is quite foolish to fail to realize, in initiating relations, the historical significance such differences of approach will attain... To create a sound relationship based on mutual benefit and mutual respect is to sow a seed of peace for the future, whereas to create one wrought with mistrust and resentment is to nurture a seed of violence, for these are the roots from which wars grow.

There is always a human aspect involved as well, which influences tremendously the quality of relations, and is based on the degree of sincerity, goodwill, and empathy expressed for each other's situation. Particularly, respect for national customs and traditions is essential on the part of any visitor to a foreign land. The concept of the "ugly American," for example, grew out of the shocking disregard of local sensibilities Americans have tended to exhibit in their global escapades, as tourists, businessmen, perhaps even as politicians. This is a mistake which the Chinese, for example, do not make when they wish to operate in a foreign land. Their life-style is simple, usually not higher than that of the native population, and their approach is one of humble camaraderie; this has been one factor in their ability to gain trust and influence in certain African and Latin American nations.

There seems to be great hope for improved north-south relations, especially in the key area of economics, given the present seriousness with which this matter is being considered in world forums, and the optimism of such experts as the previously mentioned United Nations research team. What, then, about the improvement of east-west relations, which until recently have slumbered under the sedative of "detente," and which must be considered in any discussion of a unified world? This problem is actually deeper and more radical than the north-south question, although less immediately pressing as a current world concern. Interdependence in terms of east and west today is based on mutual mistrust, and focuses on the need to avoid nuclear conflict. Relations are cautious: on the surface peace is maintained, yet a deep underlying tension continues.

The root of the difference between east and west lies in contradicting views of man himself, his value, his purpose, his potential. This difference was touched upon earlier, in the section dealing with the relationship of an individual to society. To propose a solution to the conflict between east and west, or communist versus democratic ideas, from a philosophical standpoint, is to confront the most basic ideological question for modern man. It requires a re-assessment of the fundamental value and nature of man, his role in society, and in history. Perhaps the time has come for such an assessment, in light of the new international consciousness and order we hope to attain. A thorough analysis of this subject would be quite complex. However, I would like to touch upon a few key points.

Foremost is a recognition of the dignity of the individual, as a being with natural rights and tremendous potential. If man is regarded as nothing more than an educated animal, or a being whose value is determined by his labor, there is no inspiration to elevate him to high accomplishment and great deeds. Likewise, in either interpersonal or international relations, for two entities to regard each other in economic terms, ignoring character and culture, is to remove the dignity, beauty, and quality of relationships which make them truly fulfilling and enduring.

Secondly, the true relationship of responsibility between an individual and his nation must lead to mutual fulfillment. When a man takes a vital and creative role in building his nation, he receives great stimulation and satisfaction from the task, and also insures that the national structure is relevant to his needs. Internationally, the role of nations as contributors to a world society must emphasize relations based on a give-and-take relationship of mutual respect, rather than exploitation and domination. This points out the need for public-minded individuals in leadership positions, for only with such a broad and objective mind can the dual aspects of national and international purpose be fulfilled.

The time has come to realize that we are headed towards a common goal, a world of true peace and prosperity, and to dedicate ourselves to the task of elevating man's standard of living, both materially and in terms of life quality, involving freedom and full personal and social development. We have enough materials, enough resources. Our problems are political and institutional. If we utilize our rational and creative minds we can create a system of fair distribution globally, taking into account both the equality of men's basic needs and the inequality of men's efforts, fulfilling the needs and rewarding the efforts.

In a sense, the world view presented here is over-simplified. Yet the real roots of our problems are very simple. We often evade them quite successfully by clouding them in complicated sociological, psychological, and political terminology. The function of philosophy is to outline basic principles and human considerations as a foundation upon which complex systems can be built. Without an underlying, guiding philosophy, systems are built at random and inevitably come into conflict with one another.

Interdependence, then, becomes a broadly applicable principle, relevant to relationships between man, man and society, nation and nation, nation and international community. Based on harmonious relationships on all these levels, and with a universal goal of peace and prosperity, the way becomes clear to proceed forward to the practical task of constructing a unified world.