

# Peace: what's it good for?

by Hart Feuer

*“Peace is an armistice in a war that is continuously going on.”* - Thucydides

“Since 1000 BC there have been more than 8,000 peace treaties, and each one lasted on average for no more than 9 years.” – The TM Bulletin

*Absolute peace in the world*—it sounds real nice theoretically, but it is actually the last thing anyone would want if they understood the reality of it. Yes, some relief from war in the world would be refreshing; some peace of mind would help; but absolute peace is something stronger, and could only truly be sustained by forgoing many freedoms and pleasures that we, as people, dearly covet. To make absolute peace possible, for example, people would not be allowed to choose whether they like their neighbors or not; they would not be allowed to make art or to hate their rival teams (hear me: Lafayette/Lehigh—gone for disturbing the peace); everyone's middle finger would be cut off as a preventive measure and people would be obliged to howl *only* polite words when they stub their toe. Although we do dearly want “peace,” let us agree to settle on an inferior form of peace—one that is, shall we say, not so... absolute.

Only through peace in body and mind by each and every participating individual organism and force in the world community, might the ideal of absolute peace be manifested. From a less theoretical perspective, absolute peace is the utterly perfect and harmonious interactions of everyone in the world. Even a simple act like harboring a negative thought or inadvertently causing someone to take offense would shatter this ideal. Absolute peace, for all it is worth, is too fragile to be of much use to a world that is so prone to randomness and mistake. Our world, inherently, cannot achieve or sustain absolute peace. Furthermore, it may not even want to reach a *very* high level of peace. Such a condition would almost certainly be disliked—perhaps almost as much as the extreme opposite: a situation where almost no peace exists.

With a model and a set of assumptions, I will try to show just why this may be the case. I will also attempt to determine what factors cause people to gravitate away from these two extremes (*complete freedom and less peace* and *a whole lot of peace and very little freedom*). These factors are, naturally, dependent on the people or organisms involved and on the individual decision of the radical individuals (the leaders or the rebels) within a community. Our goal, for the sake of simplicity, will be to maximize *happiness of the individual* as a function of the relative degree of peace present in the world. Happiness is itself dependent on other corollary functions, such as prosperity, stability, and welfare—which will lightly be taken into consideration. Moreover, we will limit our participation in this analysis to non-genetically-engineered humans so as to afford the most relevance possible. (Huxley, intro.) Peace will be defined as the lack of crime, war, and other threats to mind, body, or associations. The condition for obtaining more peace is this: freedoms that jeopardize the level of peace we are trying to achieve must be sacrificed or restricted. Basically, we would like to find out how much peace in the world would serve to make humans the happiest, constrained by the fact that freedoms do not want to be relinquished in the process.

## **Freedom for the People**

In a situation in which we have complete freedom, we could potentially act on any impulse we choose to, remembering that we are ultimately responsible for our personal well-being. We would be at liberty to say what we want, do what we want, and work when and where we want to. We could also choose to be hostile or choose not to be. The possibility exists at this stage to either coexist harmoniously or to behave in ways that decrease the peace.

If every member of the community independently decided not to be hostile, it would be feasible that harmonious coexistence could persist. But there is, unfortunately, a weakness inherent to this situation. There exists the temptation for the individual to undermine the peace by committing a selfish and personally advantageous act against another individual (i.e. stealing, murder). Given the option to work honestly for one month or steal for one single day without definite consequences, and reap the same benefits, there will be a strong compulsion to steal. Similarly, if faced with a desperate situation (i.e. hunger, lack of shelter), there exists a compelling motivation to commit a grievous and remedying act. For example: if given the option to freeze to death during the winter or to simply kill a neighbor, take his or her shelter, and suffer no official consequences, the choice of action is almost clear.

An additional weakness against harmonious coexistence with complete freedom is that very few hostile individuals are required to break down the system. The influence of these choice individuals is compounded when others (i.e. imitators or victims) respond in the same way due to any number of emotions, including anger, desperation, and selfishness. The farmer whose wheat was stolen in the night has a choice to ignore it, retaliate, or simply steal wheat from another farmer to replace her stolen wheat. If an idealistic minority of the humans chooses to resist the temptation to steal, they will, in all probability, simply be stolen from at some point. Since survival depends on retaining one's possessions (i.e. food, shelter, clothing), these victims cannot allow such theft to continue. This minority may then either be provoked into the same unlawful behavior as the majority.

It follows that, if people are stealing instead of working, the competition for the resources of the honest workers will intensify—as will the violence. At this point, individuals may realize that they have the option to band together in order to more effectively compete for resources and safeguard what they have. By banding together, they are obliged to give up a few of their coveted freedoms so that they may meet the collective demands of the group (no stealing from other members, forced to work nights, etc). We come to see that, individually, each of us prefers a state where our freedom is maximized, but, if forced to become a member of a group for survival purposes, necessary sacrifices of freedom can be made to that end. Arguably, in the development of our own history, we have shown that, as humans, we are incapable of coexisting peacefully without some structure (government or otherwise) in our lives. Although often overlooked, the most basic unit of group survival is the blood-related family, upon which various limitations of freedom are generally imposed on its members. With the advent of these groups and the development of government, we are no longer in the “*complete freedom and less peace*” condition.

## **A Whole Lot of Peace for the People**

Conflict has ceased to exist. We are living in a very polite world with almost no threat to our security in any way. In arriving to this state, we have been obliged to develop a society in

which we are extremely productive and can collectively provide for each individual so that he or she is at least satisfied with his or her lot in life. Unsatisfied individuals in the society would be potential threats since, like the situation described above, their desperation may result in crime. Realizing that prosperity is only a part of overall satisfaction, a very strict governmental body has been imposed to prevent potential deviants from exhibiting behavior that might jeopardize the integrity of the society. Offensive behavior, divorce, and competitive sports, creative expression, as well as open displays of aggression and sexual desire have been outlawed, among other things, because each of these items has the potential to cause a human to harbor negative feelings (i.e. anger, jealousy, offense) toward another or to cause a human to experience negative emotions internally (i.e. sadness, disappointment, anxiety). (*Demolition Man*) The danger of these feelings is that they could contribute to an outburst of deviant behavior or a loss in productivity. If this occurred too often, the function and purpose of the society would be undermined.

Due to the tight control on behavior, this way of life persists for an arbitrary period of time. Abruptly, the society collapses. Why? It began with one deviant, who we will name Edgar. He was no different from any other deviant that the government had subdued. Furthermore, he had no special talent for leadership, and was, in fact, a very average human being. The only difference that separates Edgar from others of his ilk is that his period of delinquency coincided with a period in time when the fundamental desires of his fellow humans began to affect their judgments. Inspired by the emergence of Edgar and his radical behavior, the humans suddenly could not contain the need to act upon the basic human needs they had suppressed for so long in their restrictive society. Neighbors begin to lash out at one another, unsatisfactory wives and husbands are suddenly unwanted by their spouses, a football is once again put to use, and people quit their monotonous occupations. The government of the land attempts to maintain its traditional values, but soon it is swept up itself by the revolution. In fact, elected government officials are some of the first to defect because they quickly recognize the inevitable shift in mentality and probably experienced and wanted it themselves.

For years, the humans in this society were fighting the urges of the basic chemicals of their nervous and reproductive system (especially the neurotransmitter serotonin and the sex hormones, testosterone and estrogen). (Feuer, 5-6) The implementation of a restrictive government could help the people control their potentially destructive thoughts and behaviors, but could not have inhibited the production of these chemicals, which were continually and quietly influencing the humans.

Supported by strong conscious, communal, and authoritarian pressures, it is conceivable that individuals could master such hormone-induced urges. But the existence of the *possibility* of future deviant behavior as a result of these biological influences is an undeniable and perhaps uncontrollable (the exception being genetic engineering, which is not considered in this scenario) threat. (Huxley, introduction) The weakness, like the other extreme, is that very few effective deviants are required to cause a breakdown. The Seville Statement, issued and accepted by UNESCO in 1986 by many renowned academics, rejects the idea that humans are biologically predisposed to *violence*. Nevertheless, it states that humans have a “neural apparatus” for violence, which can be invoked if the body does not hinder it. Living in a manner that restricts all aggressive impulses (even those that may not be labeled “violent”) may only be a temporary condition for some individuals, who will “succumb” to their bodily pressures at some arbitrary point in time. While people living in such a society may not have to fight others, they will continually be fighting their own bodies and may eventually sacrifice some of their enjoyed

security and tranquility for some biologically necessary freedoms. When this occurs, the “*whole lot of peace and very little freedom*” situation has come to an end.

### **Diminishing Marginal Return on Peace – A Simple Model**

On a hot summer day, a taste of ice cream can be one of the most welcome experiences available. Increase the amount of ice cream consumed to a single scoop, and the happiness derived from that dessert would continue to increase. Although each bite will become less and less desirable, the same positive gain on enjoyment of the ice cream would continue in to the second and possibly the third scoop. After the third scoop (depending on the individual), each extra bite of ice cream would become painful to swallow. If the individual continued to eat ice cream, he or she would eventually become sluggish and soon would be unable to continue eating. As economists would say, the marginal return on ice cream decreases with each bite until it actually became negative. (Mankiw, 48) Although seemingly unrelated, *peace* follows the same formula as ice cream.

Some slight increase in security (e.g. a few policemen) for people in a world filled with war and crime would be far more rewarding than that same increase for people who already feel safe (e.g. already have sufficient policemen). This theory, when applied to the situations described above, can help further describe how people may continue to react to changes under various conditions.

People living in the “*less peace and complete freedom*” situation would, by this theory, readily adopt government and structure and not begrudge the loss of a few freedoms, because the rewarded safety would outweigh the displeasure caused by the loss of freedoms. As the amount of safety (and governmental control) increases and more freedoms are lost, people will become less and less likely to continue. As long as the perceived benefit of their safety increases more than the perceived harm incurred by losing their freedoms, people will continue to choose in favor of government. The logical result of this arrangement is that people will arrive at some combination of government and freedom that satisfies the people involved.

People living under the “*whole lot of peace and very little freedom*” situation would, under these same conditions and assumptions, be willing to, with the advent of Edgar, give up certain governmental safety measures in order to gain some freedoms back. This would persist until the same socially accepted *equilibrium* of safety and freedom is reached. Although this equilibrium describes a situation where happiness derived from peace and freedom is maximized, there may yet exist a few reasons why people may not be quite satisfied.

### **Complicating Variables**

There unfortunately exist numerous external effects that can upset the endurance of the equilibrium described above. Since maximizing communal happiness is the central goal of our exercise, we have to attempt to find a way to reconcile how these external variables can influence happiness and the level of safety/freedom chosen by the people.

The most inscrutable variable is that the qualifications of an individual for his or her own equilibrium can be—and often are—different. This would mean that the peace/freedom equilibrium reached before describes only the average preferences of the individuals and is forced to leave some people unsatisfied. Wherever unsatisfied individuals exist, there exists a threat to stability and happiness. People’s preferences can also include more nebulous things,

such as the need for political power or the intellectual desire to defend one's ideals. If these qualifications for satisfaction, as diverse as they are among the world, are not met, dissatisfaction-induced violence can persist.

There are also a number of externalities that can cause sudden and tremendous fluctuations in happiness on both an individual and societal basis. For many, the unrequited needs for adequate food, water, and shelter (as a result of crop failure, draught, and earthquake, for instance) can reduce the immediate level of happiness in a community enough to trigger tremendous social upheaval. There are many similar externalities that can cause the same instability, but I believe it is sufficient to say that people and nature can do enough unexpected things to keep the world unstable.

### **An Unhealthy Proposition**

"Nothing is worse than war? Dishonor is worse than war. Slavery is worse than war."  
– Winston Churchill

Within that artificial model, I have attempted to show that, as humans, we tend to gravitate away from the extreme societal states (anarchy and utopia, roughly speaking) and find ourselves somewhere in between. Although I described this using a model above, I believe intuitively that the results are generally true. Happiness is, in one way or another, the proverbial "holy grail" of our existence, we do cherish and protect our freedoms dearly, and we are, due to minority and external influences, continually vulnerable to change. Safety from violence can be met by governmental influence, but will require an unfavorable loss of personal freedom, and the other qualification for peace—satisfaction—is too diverse to be met universally.

Does that mean that, as humans, we have to settle for hostile conflict resolution? We can surely attempt to wage war "humanely"—through economic or other means, but the fact is that the loss of life remains the most effective incentive for ending—and for starting—conflict. How do we reconcile the fact that war may be, due to the dissatisfaction, almost inevitable?

### **A Healthy Proposition**

In order to resolve this dilemma, I believe we have to allow the natural equilibrium of government control and freedom to be established, but then move quickly to the next alternatives. The logical alternative, from my point of view, is the creation of widespread satisfaction in order to lessen our dependency on government regulation of violent behavior. Having to force ourselves into peace or war through our own governing bodies displays a frightening weakness in the moral and spiritual well-being of humans. With satisfaction, people's needs are more or less met and they have little or no need to resort to anything such as war. Saying that widespread satisfaction would eliminate violence is incorrect, but it is a promising step. But, being that it is difficult or impossible to satisfy the current wants and needs of everyone in the world (from a welfare and ideological standpoint), I believe people must sacrifice the extraneous qualifications for satisfaction in favor of a global conscience. This does not entail sacrificing quality of life if a basic shift in ones requirements for satisfaction occurs simultaneously. If we can simplify and reorganize what it means to be content, the world can structure itself to more efficiently to satisfy each of us. Spiritual revolutions aimed at this type of goal are already underway and have been gaining followers every day (the Maharishi, to name

one). Only time will tell whether people are capable of the compromise necessary to achieve a basic level of peace in the world. Until then, war will persist as the unavoidable solution to dissatisfaction in the world.

## Bibliography

*Demolition Man*. Dir. Marco Brambilla. Perf. Sandra Bullock, Wesley Snipes, Sylvester Stallone. Warner Brothers, 1993.

Feuer, Hart N. (2002). Serotonin and Saline Chemical Influences on Crayfish Confrontational Behavior. Psychology Department, Lafayette College: Easton, PA.

Huxley, Aldous. *Brave New World*. Chatto and Windus Ltd: 1932.

Mankiw, N. Gregory. *Macroeconomics, fifth edition*. Worth: New York, NY, 2002.

*Seville Statement On Violence*. 16 November 1989. United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). 26 May 2003  
<[http://www.unesco.org/human\\_rights/hrfv.htm](http://www.unesco.org/human_rights/hrfv.htm)>

*The TM Bulletin*. 26 January 2002. The Maharishi Health Education Center. 26 May 2003  
<<http://www.tmbulletin.net/TMBulletinV2I2.htm>>