

Human Nature vs. World Peace

By: Grace Huang

The streets of New York City hustle and bustle about, emitting its honks and shouts, its nonchalant cab drivers and jaded people go about their business. Someone sets up a wooden stand on the sidewalk there, with a giant poster atop, with the words, “Why Haven’t We Achieved World Peace?” What would people write? People might mill by and scribble, “terrorists,” “economy,” “government conspiracies,” “religion.” The stand goes to Hong Kong. People might write, “retaliation,” “restrictions,” “misunderstandings.” Go to Berlin or San Paulo. “Power struggles,” “war,” “grudges.” The aforementioned hypothetical scenario is just a small glimpse into possible different answers. It does not really matter what geographical region one goes to, even Jerusalem or Johannesburg: many obstacles occlude the way to world peace. Before possible solutions can be mentioned, it is important to look at the foundational reason for why there is no world peace: humankind and their human nature. True, this pith of the reasons for the lack of world peace is not tortuous, yet utterly recalcitrant. People can claim that they are civilized, not barbaric; and yet, it seems that some people resort to base behaviors in their hedonistic pursuits. If this language is too strong for some, then perhaps it can be written that people are easily led astray into self-promoting agendas in “the pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness.” So, realizing the hegemony of this internal struggle, how can world peace be brought about socially, politically, and environmentally? This is an age-old question that will be poked and prodded at using the approach of trying to counteract humankind’s uglier side.

To begin with, social struggles abound in the world though they only make it into the public news if enough are slaughtered or if there is enough collateral damage. Take Darfur for example: neighbors slaughtering one another for water, for land. Or take the situation in Kyrgyzstan, between the Uzbeks and Kyrgyz. Does Person B deserve to die so Person A can live comfortably, or to promote Person A’s nationality? We are all Persons, “we bleed the same

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red blood,” a Thrice® song writes. To bring initial peace to this area, we need to respect the sanctity of life and put others above ourselves. But human nature says, “My survival is contingent upon relying on myself and what I can do. Whoever gets in the way is an obstacle to be overcome, no matter the means, though preferably socially acceptable means.” And as long as this selfish behavior is not stopped or realized as the worse option between a good and bad one, it is, sadly, socially acceptable. Some even have the inclination to call this the human “instinct,” as though a more neutral, less negative connotation will make the situation socially acceptable and justifiable. Don’t even try to suggest, “Oh, all this happened because they never learned to share in kindergarten.” One-year-olds do not take each others’ toys because they were taught, like they saw parents fighting over the remote control. Something clicks inside, proclaiming self-dominance. We are all born with potential to do some great good, and potential to do some great evil. Instead, a suggestion for world peace: when we have, we give. When we lack, we receive.

What if tension concerning social aspects beyond basic living necessities is addressed, such as religion? Some terrorists act because they believe fervently in the Islamic religion, giving up their lives to take the lives of the unbelievers in the 9/11 incidences, in the bombings in the Middle East, and so many other incidences. In another instance, the holy war between Palestinians and the Jews in the Gaza Strip has a history going back, seemingly, to the beginning of time, because they believe the land belongs to them by religious rights. How do we bring peace to such volatile situations? Is what post-modernism preaches the perfect, end-all solution, that, “what is good for you really is good for you, and what is good for me really is good for me, let us be tolerant of one another and live in peace?” Regardless of beliefs, resolving another age-old question of “what is truth?” by answering with postmodernism’s cry,

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“truth is relative to each person,” diverts the attention away from that answer’s implication: there is no truth. But that reply does not solve the problem. If what works for you means that you think I deserve to die, but I think that I deserve to live, then there must be a logical fallacy somewhere. But since there is no truth, there is no definite way to correctly/rightfully say that killing people is wrong. What guidelines can persons live by? Without them, any depth of human nature’s ugliness is allowed to ruin the way to world peace. For example, selfishness and envy can lead to murder and betrayal. This has been acknowledged even before Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. Through religion, or the lack of it, guidelines are set to prevent or allow the human nature’s reign. Correct principles need to be established. So, another suggestion to world peace: the truth needs to be found.

Turn the attention towards political world peace. One political matter that lacks peace is the relationship between a government and its people. Common people do not breed unrest amongst themselves because they have time on their hands and feel like starting an uprising. There must be some cogent motivation, specious or not. The hoi polloi usually have some sort of plea for saving justice (whether concerning wages or injustice). For example, when actions concerning the overthrow of governments are not spurious, it is usually because corruption made it valid. Our fallen human nature tends to put ourselves first and foremost. And for some, once unessential comforts proliferate, it is difficult to give up that lifestyle, and then avarice for money, material comforts, and success sets in. And if it is in the government, corruption multiplies like rabbits as bribes are taken, faces look the other way, etc. And when those actions finally make life miserable enough for the common people, uprisings occur. So, what if it was written that the solution is to get rid of all corruption? Would it truly help? And yet, sadly, it cannot even be said that there never has been, and probably will never be, a government

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overthrown because it was too kind to its political opponents; in our fallen state, there is always someone who feels cheated out of something. As an alternative, let us consider a broader solution: let us learn to act with justice. What is true justice? Not utilitarianism, not cost-benefit analysis. True justice can begin to be defined as what is good for everyone and for everything, including the environment.

So finally, then, the environment and world peace is discussed. What is the connection? World peace is needed in terms of common global consensus on environmental issues. Natural disasters affect anybody who lives and air pollution affects anybody who breathes, regardless of race, sex, or political affiliation. Therefore, there are only two sides to take: working for world peace in terms of environmental stability or working against it. And if the actions are not for world peace, then all other actions would be against it. The most recent UN Climate Change Conference (2009) in Copenhagen failed in part because there were multiple countries doing back-room deals and intentionally making negotiations difficult because of political relations. Many of the developed countries were putting the protection of economic growth ahead of the actual priority of the conference: environmental protection. And those who could were setting up climate terms that pushed other less developed countries into more dramatic climate changes than they themselves were going to comply with. Whether or not the environment survives has nothing to do with which country is better. Hence, human nature is seen again at its malicious work, the promotion of a bigger self, though still a promotion of self. So, a suggestion towards world peace: don't bring politics to the table. As mentioned previously: here there is no racial or political bias. And politics was discussed previously: justice, in terms of people and the environment is to be stressed. For example, what is not good for people, such as polluting the

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Everglades, should not be encouraged. And certainly, neither is polluting the Everglades good for the environment.

In conclusion, there has been much hullabaloo going on in both the scientific and cinematic world about Mayan prophecies, especially the one predicting that the world ends in 2012. Will we wait to pardon our differences and work as a world towards peace only when we think the end is near? Will we only reorganize our priorities when we think that we are soon to be judged as a world for our actions? Sadly, this seems to be so. The points discussed previously may be the beginning to a permanent solution for world peace; but, at best, these points can only be followed as guidelines due to human nature. I do not believe that world peace, the absolute end of all strife amongst humans and between humans and their surroundings, is achievable. Nevertheless, just because a flower will always wilt does not mean flowers should never be given the chance to live. Just because humans are incapable of unconditional love does not mean we should not strive towards loving our fellow man. And just because world peace may not be perfectly attained does not mean that not every single effort should be made to provide the best world to live in, now and in the future. When we have, we give. When we lack, we receive. Let us love mercy. Let us find truth. Let us walk humbly and act justly, together.