

PEACE BY OTHER MEANS

Symposium on the Role of Ethnography
and the Humanities in the Understanding,
Prevention, and Resolution of Enmity
Part 4

*Jeffrey M. Perl, Christian B. N. Gade, Rane Willerslev, Lotte Meinert,
Beverly Haviland, Nancy Scheper-Hughes, Daniel Grausam,
Daniel McKay, Michiko Urita*

Introduction: A Caveat on Caveats

In Erasmus's *Querela Pacis* (1521), a text that I doubt appears on many syllabi in political theory, "Peace speaks in her own person" after having sustained "ill treatment," "insults," and "unmerited indignities" in silence for eons at the hands of nations, churches, and individuals. The insight of Erasmus that goes untaught in conflict-resolution programs is that, far from trying and failing to make peace, human beings fail to try and, even more so, try to fail. "It is certain," Peace ventures, "that if they did not delight in war, they would not be constantly engaged in its conflicts."¹ "The first and most important step towards peace," she instructs the reader, "is sincerely to desire it," but instead humans "go out of their way to

1. Desiderius Erasmus, *The Complaint of Peace, Translated from the "Querela Pacis" (A.D. 1521) of Erasmus* (1917; New York: Cosimo Classics, 2004), 20. Subsequent citations have been made parenthetically in the text.

seek occasions of war; and whatever makes for peace, they run down in their sophisticated speeches” (56–57). Likewise with individuals and their smaller-scale conflicts: addressing the human race as “lovers of discord” (60), Peace asks:

Why are you always fixing your attention upon the sore place, where the insult of injury received from a fellow-creature festers and rankles? . . . As, in the poet Homer, the persons who seek to effect a reconciliation between Agamemnon and Achilles throw all the blame of their quarrel on the Goddess Atè; so in real life, offenses that cannot be excused consistently with strict veracity should, good-naturedly, be imputed to ill-fortune, or, if you please, to a man’s evil-genius; that the resentment may be transferred from men to those imaginary beings, who can bear the load, however great, without the slightest inconvenience. (61–62)

Peace is blithe about the “injury” that provokes conflict and resentment because, in most cases, she believes, the “alleged trespass” proves to be “but imaginary” (41). Even in cases where the wrong is “in strict veracity” real, and even “if the preservation of peace is attended with the necessity of submitting to some circumstances rather disadvantageous, and perhaps unjust,” she counsels humanity: “Do not say to yourself, that you incur such a loss by resolving on peace instead of war, but that you purchase the inestimable benefit of peace at such a price. You could not get it cheaper; but the consolation is that it cannot be bought too dearly” (69).

If Peace is anything like Erasmus’s portrayal of her, then, she is every bit as insufferable as she complains that human beings have always found her.

I

In act 2, scene 1, of Shakespeare’s *Comedy of Errors*, Adriana calls her unwed sister Luciana to account for daring to advise that she come down from a futile rage about Antipholus, her husband, returning inexcusably late for supper:

Patience unmoved! No marvel though she pause:
They can be meek that have no other cause.
A wretched soul, bruised with adversity,
We bid be quiet when we hear it cry.
But were we burdened with the like weight of pain,
As much or more we should ourselves complain.
So thou, that has no unkind mate to grieve thee,
With urging helpless patience would relieve me.
But if thou live to see the right bereft,
This fool-begged patience in thee will be left. (lines 32–41)

We nod in agreement—we all know the feeling—but the irony is on us for approving of Adriana’s attitude. Her husband, Antipholus of Ephesus, it turns

out, has an identical twin, also called Antipholus. And it is Antipholus of Syracuse about whose behavior Adriana is unawares resentful. In her plaint she silences not only Luciana, who seems a likely reader of Erasmus, but also the insufferable voice of Jesus on the Mount: “They can be *meek*,” Adriana chastens her unmarried sister, “that have no other cause.” But did Jesus have “no other cause” as he faced torture and crucifixion meekly? In any case, the moral that I take from Shakespeare’s *Comedy* is that each of us has an identical twin who shows up late for supper, makes hurtful remarks, and on occasion is undeniably insane. Yet all one has to do for normality to resume is wait for the twin whom one prefers to return inevitably home.

II

In this issue of *Common Knowledge*, a trio of social scientists describes a relationship of East African cultures in which a comedy of errors—a tragicomedy, actually, complete with assault rifles—plays out annually along the border between Kenya and northern Uganda. Individuals among the Ik and Turkana peoples profess friendship with one another and yet, sometimes, in the rainy season, the Turkana turn their AK-47s on the Ik. The moral that the Ik have drawn from this behavior differs from the irenic one that I draw from Shakespeare’s play. The Ik apparently regard the Turkana with what an Ik interlocutor has termed “half-trust.” Another essay in this issue explores personal relations between wary individuals from now-friendly societies, Japanese and Anglo-American, who fought each other in World War II. A term parallel to “half-trust” emerges in this context to define what such individuals on their best behavior are capable of: “contingent forgiveness.” Shakespeare’s Adriana does not half-trust or contingently forgive her husband upon discovering that Antipholus I and II are not the same man and that neither, understood in proper context, is a madman or a bad man. In *The Comedy of Errors*—whose plot and characters I find entirely consonant with what I know of human life—madness, crime, and mayhem are affairs of mistaken identity. No one is to blame. Adriana herself comes gratefully to this same deduction.

III

I sometimes feel, in editing this journal, like Luciana advising Adriana ineffectually. Organizing the present symposium has been especially awkward in that distinctive way. Invited to write on successful means that have been used in the past, or are used in the present by disregarded cultures, to recover from the experience of enmity and of its effects and causes, one admired scholar after another has produced material consisting of caveats about how justice and truth must take precedence over peace, how recovery from various forms of ill treatment may

be impossible, how quietism is not a principled moral option, and how realism demands, even at its most altruistic, a national policy and a personal strategy of “half-trust” and “contingent forgiveness.” From this circumstance I arrive at two provisional conclusions. The first is that the postwar “resistance to recovery” and “opposition to renewal” about which I wrote in the 1980s—our “determination to get even by the refusal to get well”—is a problem that, thirty years later, is still unresolved.² My second conclusion is that Peace, the insufferable voice of Erasmus, is right to say that, of all human wants, the desire to impute and avenge wrongs against oneself is the least likely ever to be sated or relinquished.

IV

On the other hand, there is Pope Francis. To the Extraordinary Synod that he summoned to Rome last year, he invited every apostolic obstacle to the reforms that he hoped to see enacted, and in the process he became an inspiration to journal editors everywhere. Speaking briefly only at the opening and closing sessions of the synod, in between them he listened attentively to each objection raised, for example, against readmitting divorced Catholics to communion. Asked why he did not, as it were, edit out views in conflict with his own, as previous popes had done, Francis responded jesuitically: “Changes are made either with time or with blood, and I choose peace.”³ His rationale, in other words, is that the pope is not himself the church, that even when he speaks *ex cathedra* for the whole church, he does so only after decades or centuries of discussion among prelates and theologians reaching for consensus. To be *true*, in the relevant sense, a new development of doctrine must, on this view, take on board the barque every defensible argument against its adoption.

V

“In the world of ideas, no individual, no small group, is ever good enough or wise enough to deserve [the] license” to speak for all: T. S. Eliot in these words declined to speak even for a community as small as the one composed of *The Criterion*’s readership and contributors.⁴ He added that he would not publish arguments that he found actually abhorrent—no essay by a Nazi or Soviet ideologist ever appeared in *The Criterion*—but there are Western Marxists, sympathizers with Italian or Spanish fascism, and many atheists, as well as “free-thinking Jews,” to

2. Jeffrey M. Perl, *Skepticism and Modern Enmity: Before and after Eliot* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 151.

3. As quoted in Liz Dodd and Abigail Frymann Rouch, “Francis Hints at Short Papacy,” *The Tablet: The Interna-*

tional Catholic News Weekly online, March 13, 2015, www.thetablet.co.uk/news/1861/francis-was-praying-the-rosary.

4. T. S. Eliot, “The Idea of a Literary Review,” *New Criterion* 4, no. 1 (January 1926): 1–6.

be found regularly among its contributors. We must assume that Eliot profited by his own exchanges with such writers and that he believed his journal's readers would do so as well. He defined heresy and provincialism and, by implication, also neurosis as mistaking one part of a complex truth for the complete truth. While I may think as an editor that quietism (in the voluble mode it has assumed in these pages) is important as a counterbalance to the judgmentalism of others, no quietist of whom I am aware has ever been regarded as wholly orthodox.⁵ It is those who find quietism craven as a response to bad behavior whose viewpoint is considered salutary and normative. The attitudes of those opposed to moral and political quietism are healthy. Yet, while it would be absurd to argue against health, the question remains if there are goods worthier than health of human devotion.

VI

Still, why the gap between the tenor of my call for papers and that of the papers duly received and published in this symposium? The gap does not, I believe, signal differences in affect, temperament, or experience. It is safe to say that all of us have our causes for complaint and our fantasies about evening the score. Peace, in the *Querela Pacis*, attributes the difference between judgmentalists and irenicists to the “vanity and self-liking” of the former, which I take to mean that the difference between the two is in their instinctive anthropology and metaphysics (54). Judgmentalists and irenicists do not mean the same thing when using adjectives like *real* and *true* or *human*. In the next installment of this symposium, the anthropology and metaphysics of peaceable Amerindian cultures will be treated in articles by Carlos Fausto, Caco Xavier, and Elena Welper, on the eastern Parakanã, and by Marina Vanzolini, on the Upper Xingu “pacifist regime.” What I am referring to as metaphysics Vanzolini terms “knowledge politics” and argues that “the mechanism that controls violence in the Xinguan context is probably less the result of an applied pacifist ideology—that is, the rejection of war as the *socius*'s generative matrix—than the effect of a specific conception of knowledge: it is through its refusal of a single truth, not its rejection of war, that their logic is ‘good to think’ through the question of peace.”

As for the difference in anthropology between judgmental and irenic regimes, I would say that the former talk about human beings as moral and rational agents who thus can be held responsible for lapses in morality and rationality. In irenic regimes, this judgmentalist understanding of how human beings func-

5. See “Apology for Quietism: A *Sotto Voce* Symposium,” *Common Knowledge* 15, no. 1 (Winter 2009); 15, no. 2 (Spring 2009); 15, no. 3 (Fall 2009); 16, no. 1 (Winter 2010); 16, no. 2 (Spring 2010); 16, no. 3 (Fall 2010).

tion would be regarded as delusional. The relatively peaceable and undemanding may regard themselves less as irenic by nature than as disillusioned through experience. The disillusioned talk about human beings as living near the edge of madness and despair because of the knowledge that they will die; as driven by conflicting urges (call them Antipholus I and II) that they do not understand; and as able, but barely, to reason about anything that matters or to determine what those anythings may be. Fausto argues that

native politics demands the mobilization of creative capacities that are not “naturally” available to humans *as* human. People need to be more than human, or not just human, if they are to be able to establish relations with extrahuman beings and thereby produce any kind of transformation. If one may suspect that a past religious discourse is merely a varnish hiding more fundamental motivations of power, one equally may suspect that our present-day political vocabulary is no more than a varnish hiding more fundamental conceptions about being and agency (which is to say, an ontology).⁶

VII

Something like this position of Fausto’s underlies the *envoi*, contributed by Michiko Urita, to the current phase of this symposium. Urita’s essay concerns historians whose “misrepresentation of the enemy” is, as Erasmus informs us, among the worst results of major conflicts (57). These judgmentalist historians of Japanese religion have labored since the 1970s to make Shinto virtually disappear, as if in reparation for the violence of Japanese judgmentalism during the era of World War II. I have no trouble believing Urita’s argument, because it completes one that I have made, on the basis of much research, about the parallel situation in postwar Europe, where the “denazification” that began at Nuremberg has been carried over into the work of scholars in the humanities and social sciences, from the 1950s to the present day.⁷

Urita gives us a view into how it feels to be on the wrong side of the judgmentalist’s pointed finger. She has written of her hope to “have more people understand what jewel Shinto has maintained,” and her depiction of a serenade

6. Carlos Fausto, Caco Xavier, and Elena Welper, “Conflict, Peace, and Social Reform in Indigenous Amazonia: A Deflationary Account,” trans. David Rodgers, *Common Knowledge* 22, no. 1 (forthcoming).

7. See Perl, *Skepticism and Modern Enmity*, 134–53, and Jeffrey M. Perl, “Postmodern Disarmament,” in *Weakening Philosophy: Essays in Honour of Gianni Vattimo*, ed. Santiago Zabala (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2007), 326–34. Actually, the denazification of literary culture began even before the war began; witness this

passage from “A Commentary” by Eliot in the April 1936 issue of *The Criterion*: “As for the positive accomplishment of Europe in the past, Mr. Krutch admits that ‘one cannot buy exactly what Europe bought at any price except the one paid. You could not, for example, have Dante without his bigotry.’ It is interesting that he should single out ‘bigotry’ as the price paid for Dante; he does not, however, tell us, as I think he should, whether Dante was worth the price.”

by musicians making no sound in a ceremony performed for no human audience bears a weight of hurt and a poignancy no less than the accounts we read of the abuse of captured soldiers in Japanese prisoner-of-war camps.⁸ Revisionist historians no doubt believe that their interpretation of Japanese religious experience is both just and objectively true. The judgmentalist frame of mind depends, as I have suggested, on an anthropology that allows for punitive action and a metaphysics entailing the delusion of objectivity. There are many ways of getting even for harms sustained, and it is unclear why scholars in both the European and Pacific theaters have felt called upon to retaliate by means of cultural deconstruction. Rather than raise that question, however, Urita relieves the urgency of doing so by way of documentary research. The revisionist image of Shinto, Urita shows, is more phantasmagorical than one in which the sun goddess shifts back and forth between a pair of shrines that, for convenience, those raised on Shakespeare may think of as Antipholus I and Antipholus II.

—*Jeffrey M. Perl*

8. Michiko Urita, e-mail to author, March 18, 2015.