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Why conflict, war and revolution?

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All books are the outcomes of choices made by authors who could say much more if they were aware of the interests of individual readers or had unlimited space and time. A book that draws together a number of different thinkers from different historical periods, chosen to illustrate and inform some of the ways in which contemporary discussions are orientated is always likely to attract criticism and objection on the basis of exclusions and omissions. Confronting a symposium of other authors with different interests and perspectives is a challenge but also a privilege as one sees how one's work is read and responded to even if that response is critical. I am grateful to each of the contributors for their engagement as well as their fascinating and provocative responses, all of which place my book in different debates and paradigms or traditions, in order to build more complex and nuanced interpretations of how political theory and ideas can engage with the complexities of the modern world and all of its disorder.

Conflict, War and Revolution was written in a time of relative peace – peace is only ever relative and often only in the eye of the beholder and even then, only in particular places – where the conversation about war was mostly domestic, cultural and theoretical. Indeed, one of my concerns was the ease with which the term and reality of war are transposed into the characterisation of other political and rhetorical phenomena. Every disagreement has the potential to be reduced to 'war' but not all conflicts are wars in the same way. A war on crime or on 'litter' or a 'culture war' is not helpfully identified by the term, so I wanted to return to the way in which it is linked to conflict and especially organised violent conflict.

However, the publication of the book coincided with the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the return of a relatively traditional land war to Europe. This obviously had an impact on the way in which the book was regarded that was beyond my intention when I began writing or thinking about the respective thinkers covered in the book, and the themes I wished to derive from them. That war continues, but I write this on the weekend of the Hamas attack on Israel and the horrendous massacre of civilians that followed. At this moment, the terrorist assault is still being suppressed and the consequent (inevitable) military response in Gaza is only beginning. War is no longer outsourced to remote parts of the world 'about which we know little' and carried out by proxies as the 'new wars' discussed by Mary Kaldor (2012) assumes, nor is it transformed or even 'humanised' to use Samuel Moyn's (2021) term, whatever commentators may claim about Hamas being the puppets of Iran in a regional struggle with Saudi Arabia, or a Moscow initiated distraction from its failure in Ukraine. Similarly, the war we see, especially now, is visceral and the violence is dehumanising of the perpetrators, yes, but also of the victims, whose interests and status as non-combatants, women, children and elderly are overlooked, and whose very bodies are denied respect with ritualised humiliation and degradation including the timeless and ineradicable scourge of sexual violation.

The phenomenon of violence and its ubiquity in ways of conceptualising and conducting politics is the central theme of the book and the primary point of debate with three of the four contributors. My interest in this is partly as a response to my default liberal intuitions with their surface ambition to contain violence and coercion and discipline them by reason and justice. It is also motivated by the ghost of Hannah Arendt, who is not directly covered in the book, but whose ambition to conceptualise politics without recourse to violence (in direct contrast to Schmitt, her unfortunate contemporary) remains a constant challenge if not the solution to contemporary political and international thought.

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In writing the book, I chose a series of thinkers who reject liberal moralism as the normative basis of politics on the grounds of its utopianism and who focus on the ways in which violence is not just a tool to deploy or a problem to be contained through Hobbesian or Weberian state monopolisation, but is central to the very conception of political community and of politics itself – although I am clear that this is not quite what Clausewitz meant with his claim that 'war is politics by other means'. I am interested in examining the elision of politics and war and reject, for the purposes of this study, the cosmopolitan presupposition of much contemporary normative political theory. Most cosmopolitans claim that war is a failure of a cosmopolitan order and consequently that we need to create such an order if we are to overcome war. To her credit, one of the most instructive cosmopolitan theorists, Cecile Fabre, does not do this but instead offers us an account of a cosmopolitan theory of war, which I discuss briefly in the chapter on Locke (pp. 208–10) (Fabre, 2012). Too often the easy default to Kant and ideas of the democratic peace thesis are taken as the primary focus of international political theory, in the same way that the problem of justice was thought to be determinative of much modern political theory. As theorists have pushed back against a knee-jerk default to liberalism there is a legitimate challenge to the presuppositions of democratic peace.

Frankel and Nederman are surprised that I do not discuss the democratic peace thesis in a book on war as this is the most popular response to theories of war in contemporary international political theory and that this is a failure of imagination and the conception of the book. I in turn find this puzzling as it suggests an unfamiliarity with the argument of the book and why I selected the canon I did. Of course, one could claim I should have written a different book and discussed a different canon but that is not an engagement with the book I did write. A cursory familiarity with the book would suggest that contrary to their claim the democratic peace thesis gets a lot of indirect attention in the book from Thucydides onwards. In many respects the presuppositions of a democratic, or as Frankel and Nederman suggest, the republican peace thesis does get extensive discussion. In particular, I would suggest a careful re-reading of the chapter on Rousseau as well as the chapters on Lenin and Mao and Carl Schmitt all of whom reject the idea that commerce leads to peace.

Frankel and Nederman claim not only that I ignore the importance of the democratic peace thesis but that even democratic peace theorists such as Michael Doyle ignore the claims of Thomas Paine as its key theorist and mistakenly focus on the lesser contribution of Immanuel Kant. So, their argument is one against my ignorance and oversight but also the preoccupation of democratic peace theory with Kant, when the major thinker is really Paine. Consequently, I should have included a chapter on Paine in my book. I find this argument puzzling. Firstly, as I have indicated the challenge of the republican peace theory is discussed extensively by proxy in the book. Frankel and Nederman dismiss Kant's argument as undeveloped and simplistic, which seems to me a rather hasty position. Kant's view of the state as a juridical order draws heavily on the earlier republican tradition of Machiavelli and Rousseau, which have institutional arguments for a republican peace that are considerably superior to those offered by Paine. Frankel and Nederman speculate that Kant might have known of Paine's argument, but even if he did, I would seriously doubt whether he would have ranked it alongside those of Machiavelli, Adam Smith (whom Kant had read and been influenced by) and Rousseau, whose social contract theory and views on Abbe St. Pierre's theory of perpetual peace was a major influence. The five provisions of Kant's plan for perpetual peace are only one small part of his larger juridical theory of international order spelled out in the Metaphysics of Morals.

In contrast to the sophisticated juridical discussion of Kant, what does Paine contribute? The claim is that non-republican states are aggressive, that there needs to be a democratic or republican revolution and that once achieved, the mutual benefits of trade will then prevent war. His argument is at best a conjecture. What is more surprising given Frankel and Nederman's advocacy for Paine, is the absence of any attempt to address Rousseau's challenge which has two parts: first, that the modern state system creates and sustains war; but second, that the solution is not an international order of free states but a rejection of commercial society and trade, which itself creates factions within republics that in turn results in international conflict. The republican tradition from the Greeks and Romans, through Machiavelli to moderns such as Rousseau had warned of the corrupting and destabilising effect of commerce and luxury: a theme that reappears in the arguments of Paine's revolutionary contemporaries in the Federalist. Rousseau is of course also addressing Smith's view that the problem of the modern state system is mercantilism and economic imperialism which in the long run is destabilising but in the short run is of benefit to the respective trading blocks and individual traders. What Rousseau and subsequent critics of economic imperialism such as Lenin and Mao, or economic power blocks such as Schmitt focus on, is the social and historical conditions of commerce in a world of unequal power. Paine's discussion, at least as summarised by Frankel and Nederman is remarkably thin, and I am left surprised at the 'scant attention' they have paid to Rousseau's challenge to Paine's commercial optimism, a topic that was widely discussed in the period in which he was writing.

To conclude this discussion, I could have included Kant and Smith[1] as both can be given a 'realist' reading that arguably links to other discussions in my book

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but it is hard to see from Frankel and Nederman what, if anything, Paine adds to the debate and how he is anything other than a footnote to Rousseau and Kant.

Of course, exclusions of one's favoured thinker is a familiar response to any attempt to construct a canon. I make clear in the introduction that I do not claim to identify a definitive realist canon in political philosophy or international political theory or offer its history. Of course, there will be explicit and unconscious criteria of inclusion but the choice to avoid Kant, Smith or similar nineteenth-century liberals such as David Ricardo or J.S. Mill, was deliberately to reject the idea of a Whig history of international theory leading to the modern liberal democratic state. In so far as there is a narrative theme, it is that from Rousseau to Lenin, Mao and Schmitt where the state is itself implicated in the threat of war and violence as we saw with the crude deployment of a simplistic account of the democratic peace thesis by neo-conservatives advocating the forceful extension of liberal democracy during the second Gulf War. Commercial society in its current form of neoliberal globalisation is hardly an example of the effective delivery of peace and order. To be fair to Kant, the reliance on the contingency of historical development was never sufficient to bring about the right kind of international order, as '…out of the crooked timber of humanity no straight thing can be made'. In this, he follows the ever-pessimistic optimist Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who often teaches us far more about ourselves than we are comfortable to learn.

The other three contributors acknowledge the general point I make about the connection between the state and the idea of a political community with the centrality of violence and use this discussion of violence and its place in politics to develop aspects of the arguments covered or to suggest ways in which the focus on violence and conflict amongst the chosen thinkers, obscures avenues of inquiry that can advance international political thought beyond the preoccupations with what Foucault describes as a sovereign power (Foucault, 2003).

Lin provides an alternative genealogy of war and conflict using the idea of technology interpreted through a Heideggerian lens. Lin is interested in how technology shapes successive modes of being in the world without lapsing into a simplistic materialist progressive history. Technology enables different conceptions of how war and conflict are constituted and in turn how those modes reflect on the constitution of social relations, conceptions of personality and roles, or the way in which we 'construct subjectivity'. Through a series of successive paradigms Lin explores how technology constitutes war and the social relations that go with it or are required by it. This enables Lin to provide a nuanced reading that advances beyond Van Creveld's famous account of the history of ways of making war. Yet, Lin seems to overlook the important way in which the same argument is actually trailed in book VIII of Clausewitz's On War, where he provides a non-teleological account of state development driven by technological changes including bureaucratic and administrative technology. Clausewitz's account is non-teleological, unlike his Berlin contemporary Hegel, because he does not assume that the direction of history is inevitable or unidirectional. Of course, Clausewitz does not develop an account of personality and subjectivity from this history, except perhaps in the case of military figures such as the General, who is presented as having a peculiar 'genius' and a more political role in the exercise of state/military power.

The discussion of Clausewitz is also of interest in that he derives his concept of war from an extension of the simple idea of the duel. At the heart of Lin's exemplary distinction of the different technological paradigms, the concept of the duel remains constant, albeit the context and extension of the idea are challenged. Throughout the examples of the first and second paradigms, the conflict albeit mediated by technology is still in the form of a duel – a struggle for dominance between two powers. Phalanxes confronting each other in the Greek world or Machiavellian armies in the Middle Ages are still generalised aggregations of individual duels. Even marine warfare for the Greeks and the early moderns is a form of duellist land warfare on a floating platform. It is much later that the idea of maritime warfare overcomes that helpful analogy with the sort of complex maritime warfare theorised by Clausewitz's only rival as the pre-eminent nineteenth-century theorist of war, the U.S. naval strategist and historian Alfred Thayer-Mahan. Thayer-Mahan not only shifts the idea of agency in conflict from the soldier or general to the larger entity of a fleet but also rejects the idea that engagement is central. Much modern naval warfare is patrolling, blockading and often merely existing as a threat even if largely in confined to port. This model of warfare is most prevalent in the context of nuclear confrontation where the possession and persistence of offensive capacity is often all that is necessary to ensure victory. How far these issues of the identity of the agent of technology mark a distinction between Lin's and my approach is a moot point. I can concede much in his narrative as a helpful supplement or parallel narrative to my own. As I am more concerned about the way in which these paradigms of war spill over into the way politics is conceptualised, I perhaps give less appropriate attention to the way in which paradigms of technology help explain ways of organising and pursuing conflict.

The final section of Lin's story is especially interesting as it moves beyond the dominance of nuclear weapons towards smart warfare based on AI and drones: technologies that have accompanied the return of traditional land war on the European continent, and I am happy to concede the insightful discussion that Lin offers. The Russian/Ukraine war has returned with trenches, infantry battles and tank warfare, but it has

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also been accompanied by drones, and AI targeting and real-time battlefield analysis. What is especially interesting in Lin's account is the way that these new technologies link to, what are too often considered marginal discussions about embodiment, gender and invisibility of women in the context of engagement in conflict and the practice of war. Of course, too much of the women's experience of war and conflict is tied up with the ways in which violence is inflicted on women's bodies and new technologies will always exacerbate those old forms of domination, exploitation and violence. But these technologies, which are only beginning to dominate the conduct of the war in Ukraine or Gaza and Israel, are already starting to change the ways in which we conceptualise violence and war and how the embodied subjectivity of opponents and combatants are conceived. This will have a necessary impact on how laws of war and their connection to, and source in, the practice of conflict develop. Lin offers an important insight that can return to questions about partisan and irregular warfare and the actual site of violence which does challenge the presuppositions of the Clausewitzian model of war and conflict – a model that not only shapes the way in which irregular combatants such as Hamas conceive of and present themselves but also the way in which opponents such as the IDF have to conceive of their adversaries. Identifying the enemy combatant and conceiving of the appropriate response in the face of remote and disembodied adversaries is a new and deeply pressing challenge to the way in which the politics of war is understood.

The place of the laws of war and the regulation of conflict as a major element of conceptualising a global order is the perspective of Hauke Brunkhorst. Brunkhorst is an eminent historical sociologist of the evolution of constitutional schemes, and he uses his short essay to assess the extent to which the current global legal order is threatened by the weakening of the international institutional architecture of global politics. He tells a similarly non-teleogical developmental story of progress towards global order and its linkage to the consequences of war and conflict, and in particular the post conflict situation following the great wars of the twentieth century. The story is interesting and important as it builds upon the idea of a world society, which is itself categorically distinct from the fact of economic globalisation. World society develops out of the social, military and economic consequences of the transformation of Europe and its imperial reach in the consolidation of the western state system and the ideological or symbolic forms that emerge from that. One consequence of the world society is that it makes all subsequent wars, world wars in their reach, ferocity and technological sophistication. However, Brunkhorst's main interest is the way in which this conception of world society leads to a new global constitutional order. This is the order of the UN and other major international institutions which have tempered great power conflict but also provided the social context from which a new legal constitutional order may be conceived. He describes this constitutional evolution but without relying on the idea that there is a unilinear logic to history. Indeed, Brunkhorst picks up on my discussion of Augustine's separation between the logic of redemption in history and history as redemption or progress as it is picked up in the great nineteenth-century meta-narratives of Hegel, Marx and their followers. For Augustine, the history of secular time is simply a world of temporal succession with no necessary order. That does not mean that we cannot improve things but it does mean we cannot assume that the improvements we have built will persist. His concern is that the rise of what he calls world law, – or a move to international order that might lead to the overcoming of interstate war and large-scale military violence – is precarious, especially in the light of the Ukraine war and its consequences. The optimism of the peaceful transformation of Europe in 1989 was perhaps the high point of an order that ever since has lost its way and its legitimacy as it retreats from the idea of legal resolution and compromise in opposition to war are conflict. The lessons of the Ukraine war are still to be drawn as the 'owl of Minerva' has yet to spread her wings, but a world in which the Russian incursion into Ukraine could happen is potentially lethal to the idea of a global legal order and requires a response, according to Brunkhorst, that is not just a victory for one party, but is a reconciliation with a world constitutional order.

The grand theory of a world society and a world constitutional order is rooted in political and philosophical developments that can be traced to great European philosophers such as Kant, Fichte and Hegel and through them to Luhmann and Habermas in the twentieth century. That said, in terms of the arguments in my book the ambition of Brunkhorst's project is a refutation and alternative to the international theory of Carl Schmitt and his followers, especially in the US academy such as Eric Posner and Adrian Vermeule. Both of these US scholars contribute to the rejection of global legalism and reassert the importance of law as a particular and municipal system, as opposed to a universal or global practice. Schmitt's international theory was concerned to challenge and precisely undermine the ideas of a global society as a source of what he calls a single global nomos or legal order. As the idea of the sovereign national state was transformed by the social and juridical forces that Brunkhorst describes, Schmitt sought a new conception of a plural global order in the idea of *Grossraum* or dominant territorial powers in competition. His intention was to undermine the argument for a single global hegemon such as the US, whereas Posner and Vermeule are keen to undermine the idea of a global dyarchy or multi-polar world order that recognised the claims of the EU, China and at least

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before the Ukraine/Russian war, maybe even Russia. Schmitt's thinking is always a little elusive and his reputation is compromised by his political choices but his position as an opponent to the idea of a global legal order of a single unified world society is the source of a pluralist or multipolar legal order. Brunkhorst does not directly engage with Schmitt's arguments, and instead presents his position in the short space provided with its implications for the current situation of war between Ukraine and Russia, indeed he may not be particularly sympathetic to Schmitt. That said and as noted above, Schmitt's ideas have gained support from those who are particularly keen to reject the idea of world society and constitutional order as constraints on American power. For Schmitt, political conflict is always zero-sum with a world of confronting friends and enemies although he argues this is preferable to the coercion of modern international liberalism as a mask for US commercial and military power. The presence of Schmitt in the academy and international politics and theory is an interesting issue in its own right, but it is clear that there are significant constituencies in the academy that want to reject the idea of an international constitutional order and who will reach for many tools or weapons to confront and contradict the urgent arguments of the likes of Brunkhorst.

Perhaps the ambition of global constitutionalism was always optimistic, however much intimations of it were to be found in international institutions, and the return to something like a state-based order or even an order of regional hegemons was inevitable as the anti-globalisation populists in Europe and the US are happy to claim. It is not my intention to endorse that argument but only to challenge the overhasty enthusiasm for a type of cosmopolitan order that overlooks the complex political challenges transition from an incomplete state system to a new cosmopolitan utopia entails.

Yet before one returns to the advocacy of a state-based order as a precursor of peace or the rightful monopolist of violence, we need to confront and learn from Desiree Poets' striking challenge to the democratic peace argument. Where Lin and Brunkhorst develop distinct and parallel historical narratives that extend and expand my own argument about the place of war in the formation of politics or the limitations of international law and cosmopolitanism, Poets' contribution expands and develops my canon by suggesting ways in which it could include post-colonial thinkers.

The development of the canon in the way she suggests is something I had considered and perhaps rejected too hastily for practical as opposed to theoretical reasons. As mentioned above, one of the ghosts hovering over the work is Hannah Arendt, and especially her late attempt to provide an account of the nature of the political which is categorically distinct from the extension of violence. Her targets are clearly Weber and Schmitt, the latter in particular because of his near fetishization of violence and conflict in his conception of the political as a mortal struggle with enmity. I conclude with a mention of Arendt but perhaps a chapter might have been appropriate and would certainly have saved me from the superficial but obvious challenge that the canon is all male. Arendt is a very western-focused political thinker and a great advocate of a pretty familiar canon of great and formative thinkers; however, in her famous essay On Violence she also addresses Franz Fanon as an exemplar and challenge because of his explicit advocacy of de-colonisation as a violent act and process. Fanon, as Poets argues, was significantly influenced by Mao and, along with Foucault who Poets brings into the argument, Fanon extends the idea of revolution from the overthrow of a simple 'capitalist class' in the model of nineteenth-century European socialism, to an imperialist struggle in a context of continually developing dialectical oppositions. Much of my discussion of Mao was designed to distinguish him from the statist or imperial version of revolution that was inherited from Lenin and the Third International, which was an important concern given the way Moscow saw China as a junior partner in the world revolution. But Poets is right to point out how Mao's arguments also lead to Fanon and ultimately Foucault and their analysis of power, violence and disciplinary orders that do not follow the 'sovereign' model as Foucault suggests. Fanon in particular is the most challenging given the way he deploys the idea of violence in the way in which colonialism structures or more correctly destroys the subjectivity of the colonial subject.

Drawing on the post-colonial moment and the strategy of pacification in settler colonial contexts, Poets illustrates the ways in which violence is also constitutive of the modern liberal state even when this is not deploying colonial power against oppressed and racially subjugated people. Drawing on Foucault's critique of sovereign power, as well as the work of Fanon and Achille Mbembe, Poets explores the way in which colonial violence is not simply an occasion of state policy or the unjust application of ideology to reinforce commercial exploitation. Of course, so-called liberal states may well have pursued imperial and colonial policies and be rightly criticised for that, yet the thinkers Poets discusses see those kind of arguments as missing the point. What really matters is the way in which political, imperial and state power is constituted and reconstituted. Power is not just something that is used by dominators whether racial, patriarchal or class powers against the masses. Such relations are important but they also simplify how power and even violent power, constantly constitute subjectivity, such that simple hierarchies disguise the multiplicity of ways in which power works. She gives examples from Fanon and Mbembe to show how subjectivity and its denial are a consequence of the organisation of power. For Mbembe, colonial politics is a work of death in terms

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of its eradication of subjectivity; an eradication that is not just confined to the bodies of the subject peoples but to the very idea or possibility of their subjectivity. As such the impact of colonialism and post colonialism can manifest itself in many and various ways so that state containment or even democratic containment are themselves sources or types of violence. But pacification as a strategy of containment or transformation is also a form of power. Peace itself is a form of subjective control and discipline so that simple ideas of 'democratic peace' are themselves problematised. Of course, the idea that violence like power is everywhere can be a counsel of despair and denial of agency. This brings us to Poets' final point that this analysis can also be a way of constituting subjectivity beyond a simple dichotomy between good and bad subjectivities. For Fanon and Foucault, the criticism is always some version of 'then what?' as if the issue was one of a single final disciplining of power under an ideal just state or international order, when the reality is a world of constant change and agency without a permanent direction of order, precisely the paradoxical idea of permanent revolution that Mao raises. Poets has provided me with an opportunity to revisit aspects of the argument that remained immanent and could have been developed further, for which I am grateful. Her complex and rich summary of the challenge of post-colonial thought is a neglected but equally important correction to the simplistic politics of liberal cosmopolitanism or the democratic peace thesis which sees a model or the juridical state as the solution to the challenge of violence. She also makes an excellent case for why Franz Fanon should have been included in the canon.

All of these impressive essays illustrate the way that the central themes of the book are more relevant than I could have conceived at the time of writing and show that the interconnection of violence and political power is not only exemplified in the centrality of war which we find extraordinarily difficult to transcend but also that simplistic attempts to explain peace as the absence of war neglects much of the question that war and organised violence poses to the way we think about politics and its most pressing challenges.

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ENDNOTE

[1] See Paul Sagar's brilliant if controversial realist reading of Smith in Sagar, Adam Smith Reconsidered, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2022.

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