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Thoughts on Fear in Global Society

IN A WORLD OF COMPETING STATES, FEAR IS A CONSTANT CAUSE AND effect of their contest: “What made [the Peloponnesian] war inevitable was the growth of Athenian power and the fear which this caused in Sparta” (Thucydides, 1954: 49).⁵ Hobbes, who translated Thucydides, saw in the relations among “kings and persons of sovereign authority” a concrete example of what the state of nature would be in a world of individuals without superior power: the life of man in this state is “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short”; fear of death is the first of the reasons he gives of the “passions that encline men to peace.” When war prevails, in the absence of common power, there is no law, there is neither justice nor injustice, no property, “no mine and thine distinct”: the two cardinal virtues are Force and Fraud (Hobbes, [year]:1 64-65). It is the domination of fear that drives men out of the state of nature, into the Leviathan. But there is no global Leviathan.

If I may jump from the political thinkers to my own memories, it is in order to show that fear in the global state of nature is not only what grips abstractions such as Athens and Sparta, or their rulers. I was born at the end of 1928; my mother, a pessimistic Austrian, moved to Nice, France, the following year. My first political memory is the assassination by the Nazis of the Austrian Chancellor Dollfus in 1934; my mother read about it in a French newspaper while vacationing with me in a hotel near Nice—a place where Matisse’s chapel was built 10 years later. I remember her reaction: this means the end of Austria, and a step toward a new war. Indeed, we saw her brothers flee from Vienna to

France in the following years, full of fear about their present and their future. My second memory is also one of fear. This time, it was the spring of 1936; we had just moved to Paris, I was on the Champs-Élysées in a bus, and I saw huge headlines in the newspapers: “*la guerre pour demain?*” “ This was the fear provoked by the Rhineland crisis, by Hitler’s destruction of the Versailles Treaty. In the next big crises, over the “Anschluss” of Austria and the Sudetenland, fear took a very precise and unforgettable form: the voice of Hitler on the radio, threatening his enemies, screaming his grievances, mixing poisonous cocktails of savage warnings and fake promises, the voice of a demonic *Erlkönig* that injected terror into the minds and hearts of his listeners. The two voices that are still with me, in me, are those of Hitler (I am forever grateful to Charlie Chaplin for having defanged it by derision in *The Great Dictator*) and Charles de Gaulle, which called for courage and resistance, promised a great future, and provided hope without concealing the monumental difficulties ahead. Fear and hope; the threat of horror and brutality, and the appeal to freedom and pride—this was going to be the fundamental struggle between 1940 and 1945.

THERE ARE MANY KINDS OF FEARS IN THE RELATIONS AMONG PEOPLES and states. More (or more sharply) than in domestic politics, these relations are manifestations of either friendship or hostility. And the consequence of hostility in a world without a central power is the state of war, which, as Hobbes put it (and Rousseau and Kant after him) “consists not in battle only, or the act of fighting, but in a tract of time wherein the will to contend by battle is sufficiently known, and therefore the notion of Time is to be considered in the nature of war, as it is in the nature of weather. . . . So the nature of war consists not in actual fighting, but in the known disposition thereto, during all the time there is no assurance to the contrary. All other time is peace.” War, thus very broadly defined, is the domain of fear. There is the fear of war, which was so prevalent in France, Britain, and an isolationist United States in the 1930s: a revulsion from what had been, if not enthusiastically, at least wholeheartedly accepted in 1914 and 1917. The fear of nuclear war, during

the cold war, inspired strategies of deterrence rather than offense and defense, and was as salutary as the policies of appeasement of Hitler had been disastrous. The behavior of both the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cuban missile crisis showed that Khrushchev was right when he said that no state would want to risk total destruction. But a state doctrine of preventive war makes fear more pervasive and permanent.

There is also fear *in* war, which takes many forms. There is the fear of the civilians exposed to invasion or to aerial warfare—a fear that drove 10 million people to the roads in western Europe in May–June 1940 (I was among them and it was the most traumatic experience of my life; when the war began, in September 1939, hundreds of thousands of Parisians—I among them—had, much more comfortably, left Paris because they thought of Guernica). There is the fear experienced by soldiers, those who were in the trenches of the Great War and risked death whenever they were (mostly foolishly) ordered to run toward the enemy’s positions (there is a great Italian film too few people know, Rosi’s *Uomini contra*); or those soldiers who fight guerrillas in countries in which they cannot distinguish who is the friend, who is an innocent and terrified civilian, and who is an enemy, a situation which, as we know from Vietnam and now from Iraq, leads to atrocities. There are, in the Israeli-Palestinian tragedy, the combined fears of civilian Palestinians occupied by Israel and exposed to Israeli raids, destruction of houses, and multiple vexations and restrictions, and of Israeli soldiers and civilians exposed to suicide bombings in buses or cafés—a situation that had been impressively described in *The Battle of Algiers* .

Fear can be fear of the known, when one is facing an enemy whose cruelties have been demonstrated before or whose intentions had been well publicized (think of Poland in 1939), or risking a war whose destructiveness had been demonstrated before (nuclear war, after Hiroshima and Nagasaki). But there is also fear of the unknown, so pervasive in guerrilla wars, or in a world where terrorists can strike, seemingly, any time and any place.

A French proverb tells us that “fear is a bad adviser.” At the state level, it can lead to war (see the quote from Thucydides, earlier, or evidence about Germany’s fear before 1914 of the growing power of its enemies that led its leaders to adopt, in the summer of 1914, the stance that made war inevitable) (see Fromkin, 2004). At the level of the soldier lost in hostile territory, it leads to My Lai. But violence is not the only effect. Fear can lead, as one saw in occupied Europe, to reprehensible and often criminal collaboration, and to countless forms of “accommodation” that are easy to explain but morally dubious (I think of Mr. Papon). It can lead to excessive restrictions on public liberties or to harebrained schemes that waste the nation’s money (I think of the internment of Japanese Americans in World War Two and of Guantánamo today, as well as of anti-ballistic missiles and of the latest surrealist invention, a “virtual border” for tracking foreign visitors).

What interests me most is another set of categories. It is a distinction among three kinds of fears. The first I will call abstract or impersonal, the second concrete and localized, the third concrete and global. Abstract fears, while characteristic of the monarchies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, are in fact those of leaders through the ages. I refer to the fear of a potentially hostile, and expansionist, other power, capable of upsetting a more or less stable equilibrium, and of pushing its way to domination. It animated Sparta, as well as the much later British policy of balance, or the anxious cold warriors in Washington from the late 1940s to the 1980s. There is also the fear of losing this intangible asset, credibility, or that of losing one’s rank and one’s glory—a frequent concern of modern France. What is behind all those fears of the statesmen is the internalized image of the competition, the view of interstate affairs as a never-ending race whose stakes are power, reputation, and perhaps survival.

Concrete fears correspond to the rise of democracy that fascinated Tocqueville—the entry of “the public” into the arena, with its passions, hopes, and envies, and especially with its fears of other nations that could disrupt their lives, or of immigrants who would come and threaten their identities, or of alien cultures that could poison their own, or of

savages who might kill their missionaries or their merchants, or of ethnic or religious minorities in their midst whom they see as inassimilable and in need of extirpation, so that their own society could become or remain integrated and cohesive. This adds a vast realm of fears to the abstract ones, and a huge escalation of the category of the threatening other: not just a rival state, but concrete groups of human beings whose humanity one often refuses to acknowledge. Abstract fears are based on calculations (of relative power or wealth) and on rational projections and extrapolations; concrete fears are often based on irrational or nonrational prejudices and phantasms (again, these are ideal-types: the calculations of statesmen are not always rational—cf. the Bush invasion of Iraq—and the public's fears and passions often have roots in painful experiences). When abstract and concrete goals fuse, much of the world may turn into hell: think of the combination of anti-Semitic, anti-Slav, and eugenic fears, with the revanchist goals of the Nazi leadership eager to regain lost territory and lost power, and to return on a colossal scale to the old quest for preeminence that had fueled the competition with Britain and the fear of Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century. The traditional abstract fears were essentially aimed at other states. The concrete, "populist" ones often transgressed the border between hostilities among nations and civil wars, as in the twentieth-century Balkans from the beginning to the end, as well as in Nazi-occupied Europe, where the lines of national fears and passions and those of ideological alignments interfered with each other, multiplied atrocities, and exacerbated desires for revenge.

We are now in a third universe of fears: universal, all-pervasive, globalized. The progress of technology, the ease of communications, the shrinking of distances, result in fears not only of weapons of mass destruction that even small states can produce and export throughout the globe, but also of world scourges such as epidemics, drugs and arms trafficking, and, of course, terrorists. The latter signify the entry of "civil society" into the already vast domain of war making, hitherto reserved to states and their armies, or to forces of resistance against invaders, that is, to actors with, and within, borders. "Private" terrorism used to

be largely contained within borders and concerned with local causes, as in West Germany and Italy in the 1970s, as in the case of Palestinian suicide bombers now. Al Qaeda, with its mix of Islamic fundamentalism and political hatred of the West, is something new under the sun.

As a result, global society resembles the state of nature that Hobbes described as a state of war of each against all, “where every man is enemy to every man.” He had thought that the state of war among states was less lethal, even though most of them are in a “posture of war,” because they are able to uphold thereby the industry of their subjects and thus save these from “that misery that accompanies the liberty of particular men” (Hobbes, 2: 65).² This is clearly not a valid view anymore, in an age of both weapons of mass destruction at the service of states, and of ubiquitous terrorism, trafficking, and diseases. But the way of escaping from the fears of the state of nature—the establishment of a world Leviathan caused by both the passion to survive (or the fear of death and destruction) and human reason—is not a solution.

Partly this is because of one vast difference between the individuals in the state of nature, and the states: individuals are equally weak and in “danger of violent death”; the bigger states are not, and their leaders still prefer to protect their own security, rather than to entrust it to a world government that could be impotent, or else tyrannical. Moreover, the multiple “private actors” that add to the miseries of the world have as few incentives to submit themselves to a macro-Leviathan as they do to give up their arms to various states’ polices. Most important, one of the major contributors to the universalization of fear is the very state that was supposed to protect the lives and industry of its subjects. The modern Leviathan, whether democratic or tyrannical, is fanning the flames and the fears. Instead of safeguarding its subjects, it acts as a frequent pyromaniac. The champions of the notion of the “democratic peace”—the “law” according to which liberal democracies do not fight each other—have adopted Kant’s belief that in such nations the people will be reluctant to go to war, and the deliberations of the governing elites will ensure the triumph of reason. But one of the

conclusions that evidence suggests is that the people are quite susceptible to the bellicose or chauvinistic arguments of some groups or of the media, and that the governing elites can be brilliant at nourishing and manipulating prejudices and fears.

We all know about the manipulation of anti-Semitism by the Nazis, who exploited old resentments of Jews—Catholic as well as anti-capitalist ones—and primitive fears of defilement and corruption of blood, in a way that gave to irrational hatred a pseudo-scientific cast (See Koonz, 2003). The fear of Bolshevism was equally well manipulated by the Nazis, and by governing conservatives in many parts of pre-1939 Europe. Alas, what we have been submitted to in this country by an administration that sees and proclaims itself in charge of bringing democracy to the whole world has been a cunning orchestration of the fear caused by September 11, 2001, a fear of invisible and untrackable terrorists destroying Americans' security. Instead of a leader who proclaims that "we have nothing to fear but fear itself," we have had a doctor who, instead of curing his charges of their fears or at least showing them ways of coping with these, has regularly injected an anxiety-inducing serum into them: differently colored alerts, the Patriot Act, ethnic profiling, the amalgamation of Saddam Hussein, a barbaric possessor of weapons of mass destruction, with Al Qaeda. Far from working, and standing, for the public good, the contemporary Leviathans, from Mugabe to Sharon, from Saddam to the North Korean dynasty, from Pinochet to Milosevic, have exacerbated the fears of their subjects, and the United States has not been immune. The purpose of these manipulations has been double: to instill hostility, bellicosity, a fervor for revenge and violent self-protection against external enemies (or "alien" ethnic, religious or political groups at home), and to get citizens, properly scared, to accept, in the name of national and personal security, invasions of privacy and reductions of liberties they would not have tolerated if they had not been conditioned to fear. This is certainly not what Hobbes had in mind in describing the Leviathan, or what theorists of liberal democracy expected from the restricted and representative state.

There has been another form of state-sponsored manipulation—

this time not *of* fear, but *against* the fear of war that animated pacifists, or peace-oriented parts of the public, at a time when war or its preparation was the policy the government deemed just or necessary. State propaganda came to the rescue of such a policy by exaggerating, so to speak, the perils of peace or of accommodation (Giradoux's *Tiger at the Gates* is a fine satire of bellicism), or by celebrating on the heroic mode the glories of military valor. During the cold war, the fear of communism and of Soviet expansionism was used at times by the American government to erase the bad effects that the fear of a nuclear war might have had among many citizens, or to smother the protests of part of the public against American interventions in Latin America.

CONTEMPORARY MEN AND WOMEN ARE IN A SITUATION COMPARABLE TO the beast in the burrow, immortalized in Kafka's short story. It hears ominous noises, knocks, and movements, and runs from one place in the burrow to another in order to find where the threat is located—an exhausting life of fear. We know, today, that the threat can be almost anything: the acts of another state, the protests or uprisings of a religious or ethnic or political minority, domestic or foreign terrorists, or the repressive moves of one's own state. Given the means easily at the disposal of all the threateners, there isn't even safety in ignorance. As Judith Shklar put it, "systematic fear is the condition that makes freedom impossible." What she wanted to diminish, or if at all possible to eliminate, was the fear of systematic cruelty, "of pain inflicted by others to kill and maim us, not the natural and healthy fear that merely warns us of avoidable pain. And when we think politically, we are afraid not only for ourselves but for our fellow citizens as well. We fear a society of fearful people." The liberalism she called for required "the possibility of making the evil of cruelty and fear the basic norm of political practices and prescriptions" (Shklar, 1998: 11). She was primarily concerned with domestic cruelty and evils, and did not extensively apply her conception of liberalism to global society. Let us try here, however sketchily.

There is never any way, as she warned us, of eliminating fear ("to be alive is to be afraid and much to our advantage in many cases, since

alarm often preserves us from danger”). We will never chase away the fear of death or disease, or the loss of those we love. Someone who fears nothing is all too likely to lack not only prudence but compassion—just as the current celebration of trust and of societies of trust forgets that a democracy requires a healthy dose of distrust of those who rule it, in politics, economics, and society. What needs to be reduced, if not eliminated, is the kind of fear that breeds hatred, dehumanization, and destruction.

For better or worse, I am a child of the Enlightenment, minus the illusion of continuous progress, as was my friend Shklar, and a product of the French Republican ideology that pervaded its educational system. I believe passionately that nothing is more important than the education of the democratic public, in two forms. One consists in providing each person with adequate information about the world in which we live, and where this world comes from (since one cannot begin to understand it without some knowledge of its past—a point that American schools all too often seem to restrict to the history of the United States). The other form consists in training decent citizens, an even more difficult task: that of fighting, head on, widespread or recurrent prejudices such as anti-Semitism, anti-Arab clichés, all forms of sexism, or prejudices against Blacks, or Latino-Americans. Those who, in this country, deem Mexicans or Cubans to be unassimilable, and those who, in France or Germany, assert that Arabs or Turks cannot be integrated, are people who do not want such integration, or the institutional accommodation and social assistance needed to make it successful. This is, of course, a huge task, and a Sisyphean one, but it is essential, and it requires special attention to resources for the training of teachers. With special reference to international affairs and history, patriotism must be made compatible with a cosmopolitanism that begins with empathy for the victims (whose point of view was that which both Simone Weil and Judith Shklar wanted us to adopt).

At the other extreme, so to speak, there is the need to address the two fears characteristic of, indeed inherent in, international relations and global society. One is the fear of anarchy—of a world without norms in which states are too weak to protect, or all too willing to terrorize,

their subjects, and in which hard power is the only coin of exchanges and “games.” The other is the fear of unfettered superior power, that is, of imperial domination presenting itself as the only alternative to chaos. Those who, today, celebrate the virtues of imperialism forget the cost of the kind of order it imposes; they are blind to the point of view of its victims and to the psychological sequels of submission and humiliation. Both chaos and imperialism breed violence and war (think of how many wars the imposition of an American empire would require, and its preservation would dictate). And war, today, in all its forms—with or without weapons of mass destruction, war among states, or within pseudo-states and repressive states, or by private groups that resort to terror—is the greatest source of fear in global society.

There is no simple “remedy” against, or cure for war or the “state of war.” But there are ways of reducing the fears they provoke. States should respect the restrictions the UN charter puts on the use and threat of force, and be sanctioned if they do not. These restrictions are close to the conditions just-war theory puts on resort to the *jus ad bellum*. The *jus in bello*, both in that theory and in many twentieth-century conventions, needs just as much to be observed, in order to protect noncombatants as well as prisoners, the occupied and the wounded. Above all, war needs to be treated as a last resort—unlike what the United States did in Iraq. The enforcement of these norms and restraints requires a revival (or resurrection) of those provisions of the UN charter that aimed at allowing the Security Council to conduct military operations against aggressors, and a realization of former UN Undersecretary-General³ Brian Urquhart’s project of a UN force at the disposal of the Security Council. An understanding among its permanent members defining the conditions in which they would use their right of veto in the realm of international security would have to be negotiated. A standing UN force would be essential both for peacemaking—getting the combatants to stop fighting—and for peacekeeping afterward. Also, in addition to the international conventions that aim at protecting the inhabitants of occupied territories, one needs an extensive codification of the measures that the occupier would not be authorized to take.

All these restrictions and regulations addressed to states would not be of much help in curbing the violence of nonstate actors, the fears they inspire, the domestic repressive measures they provoke or “justify.” The only way of dealing with terrorism—besides repression—is to address the many causes for its appearance and development. There are three evident categories. One is state collapse (or the collapse of pseudo-states). This would require, under the aegis of the UN and regional organizations, major resources for state building and in extreme cases temporary trusteeships. A second category is that of tyrannical states. As I have written elsewhere (Hoffman, 2003), the UN has too many of these states in its midst to be a likely engine of regime change, and unilateral change by great powers is unacceptable; and yet the problem will not go away. For extreme cases (such as Saddam’s Iraq) I have suggested an association of (real) democracies authorizing regime change when the UN is paralyzed, but only if there are plausible plans for the aftermath of the change (the United States had none in Iraq). In less acute cases, active support of democratic oppositions and sanctions against violations of human rights would be necessary. The third category is probably the biggest: massive social and political injustices that foster terrorist reactions in which despair and revenge are blended; I am thinking of Palestine and of Chechnya particularly. Sometimes these injustices are the result of government policies—in which case we are back in our second category. If they result from festering interstate conflicts (Palestine, Kashmir, until recently Cyprus), energetic and persistent (not sputtering and desultory) mediation by the UN, regional agencies, and states needs to be organized and provided with incentives and penalties to be used toward a settlement. If they result from miserable economic circumstances, what one needs is a worldwide program of economic development aimed, in Shklarian fashion, at helping in priority the most miserable and disadvantaged. This would require nothing less than a revolutionary shift in state budgets: large cuts in military expenditures (what *can* the United States actually do, with \$500 billion for “defense” each year?), huge increases for “development as freedom,” the kind Amartya Sen has described. One of the major causes

of terrorism is humiliation, particularly strong in the Muslim world and among the oppressed and those who see themselves as victims of globalization, attributed to the West and especially to the United States. There are no decisive institutional remedies, but there are politico-psychological ones⁴ that should be studied in another essay.

I recognize that all of this is both too little—and too utopian. But a world Leviathan is neither plausible, nor necessarily desirable. This world will remain one of states, with sovereignty limited both by the effects of globalization, and—one hopes—by curbs on their capacity to make war and to mistreat their subjects and foreigners on their soil. It is also a world where a global, incomplete, imperfect civil society is desperately in need of both policing and regulation. This will have to be provided by the states and by international and regional organizations. The kinds of safeguards, habits, procedures, and citizen education Judith Shklar envisaged for liberation from fear within nations would also reduce fear in relations among them. The development, through education and by agreements among states, of a cosmopolitan spirit and of cosmopolitan practices and institutions, would complement and extend the domestic agenda. It may sound too idealistic, but it is not merely a dream. For all its flaws (such as in the area of agricultural trade policies and immigration), the European Union is a remarkable achievement, even though many Americans, from Robert Kagan's criticism from the viewpoint of Mars to condescending media embedded in indifference and derision, do not like to recognize it. A zone of peace and common citizenship, with relatively democratic common institutions, a commitment to social justice, and institutions for the protection of human rights: what better way is there for reducing fear, for eliminating the international state of nature, and for replacing it with a Leviathan whose capacity for mischief is severely limited—too much so, in some respects, because of the EU's minuscule budget?

KANT'S REFLECTIONS ON PERPETUAL PEACE AND ON THE DESIGNS OF history are, in some respects, quaint. The vision of a plan of Nature bringing us all to peace through trade and enlightenment on the one

hand, and because wars would become increasingly destructive and unacceptable on the other, is still appealing but obviously flawed (it leaves no room for fanatical prejudices and passions, and for terrorists). The scheme of perpetual peace is rather timid—it is both what John Rawls would have called “ideal theory” since it requires a world of constitutional republics, and it offers us a world in which the links among states do not go very far or deep: a vaguely defined confederation, no recognition of the need for common forces, a rather strict insistence on nonintervention (which would permit more Rwandas), a “cosmopolitan law . . . limited to conditions of universal hospitality,” which only means “the right of a foreigner not to be treated with hostility when he arrives on the soil of another” (Kant, 1949: 446). But the whole essay is pervaded by a notion that is as important today as it was in the eighteenth century: that of transparency and publicity. The regimes of fear are closed regimes (Saddam’s, North Korea, Burma, much of post-Soviet Central Asia), regimes of censorship or strong and unfettered secret services, regimes that, in emergencies, remove suspects from legal protections and subject them to physical (Abu Ghraib prison) or mental (Guantánamo) torture. The freedom from fear requires, in interstate society, a network of inspections, especially in order to throw light on the development of terror weapons and on practices that violate human rights. In civil society, it requires courageous media, whose members are willing to risk their lives, if necessary, to find the 5[space left by author] hidden in jail cages.

In the never-ending battle against fear, ignorance means doom; sharp light, transparency, and publicity mean hope for the victims, worries for the victimizers, and encouragement for oppositions that fight against state or private violence. This is not the place to attack head-on those who see in modern forms of tyrannies the distorted products of the Enlightenment (what did the Inquisition, or Hitler, or Stalin, or a Pinochet or a Saddam, have to do with the Enlightenment?). When it comes to fear in global society, we can still find inspiration and guidance in philosophies that are the Enlightenment’s descendants: liberalism, social democracy, Christian democracy. We need, of course,

to remember that after a plague, a new one would come some day to “awaken its rats and send them to their death in a happy city.” But our duty remains to fight the bacillus “that never dies or disappears” with as much lucidity and ardor as we can muster.

NOTES

- *. I call global society the system constituted by interstate relations and by “private” transnational transactions undertaken by individuals and groups of the emerging world civil society. These are, of course, ideal types: many such people and groups serve, in fact, governments (think of private contractors in Iraq at present), and many states have little independence from powerful domestic pressure groups.

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