

An overview of peace and conflict

[Experience](#), [Peace](#)



DEFINITIONS

Peace is often seen as the converse of war. i. e. peace and war as two sides of the same coin. Hence the definition of peace as the absence of war, and that of war as the absence of peace. The problem with this definition is that it does not explain everything about peace and war. For example even in situations of war, some conditions of peace still prevail. E. g. in spite the long years of hostilities between the Israelis and Palestinians, both have been able to reach a peaceful agreement on the use of their water resources.

Secondly, the definition does not take into account the issue of structural violence, in the words of John Galtung. According to Galtung, war represents only one form of violence, which is physical, open and direct. The others form of violence has to do with social conditions of life. This consists of

- Poverty
 - Exclusion
 - Intimidation
 - Oppression
 - Want
 - Fear and
 - Other forms of psychological pressure
- So from this analysis, it is possible not to have peace even where there is no war.

This is the situation in countries where there is acute poverty, police brutality, oppression of the poor by the rich, use of power to intimidate

people by those in power. Even where there is no war in such societies, they may not experience peace (Ibeanu)

OTHER VIEW OF CONFLICT

- Conflict as the pursuit of incompatible interests and goals by different groups
- Conflict occurs as a struggle over values. The values may be in terms of physical or material possessions or resources, status or power. (Louise Coser)
- Central to conflict is the issue of perception.

When one party perceives the action of another as preventing or blocking the attainment of a goal, conflict is said to occur. Therefore the two ingredients necessary for conflict to occur are: Perceived goal incompatibility ? Perceived opportunity for interference or blocking. In other words, conflict occurs when an intended action is perceived to be inimical or detrimental to the realization of one's objective. Generally perception is a product of man's physiological, cognitive and cultural dispositions which of course differ from person to persons, and from one environment to another.

Therefore, we can say that conflict is inevitable to the extent that it is fundamental to the existence of any institution, body or society. It is inevitable because human beings are naturally different from one another in their attitude, perception and orientation. But conflicts could be destructive if not properly handled. Hence we often say that the way and manner conflicts are resolved differentiates one organization or society from another.

VARIOUS PERSPECTIVE OF PEACE

1. To the Instrumentalists: Peace is a means to an end. Here the absence of war serves the objective of social progress and development. In other words, where there is peace, society will experience positive transformation in all facets of life.
2. TO THE FUNCTIONALISTS: Peace has a social function of integration and order. That peace is fundamental if society is to function properly. If not the social and political system will experience stress, and then break down.
3. TO THE PHILOSOPHERS: Many philosophers interpret peace as a natural, original, God-given state of human existence. i. e. , the pre-corruption state of man in society, as God established it. This is the God's created state of perfection.

EXAMPLES OF PHILOSOPHER

- St. Augustine of Hippo: He distinguished between “ two cities”, namely; The city of God, founded on perfect heavenly peace and spiritual salvation; and the Earthly city of man, founded on acquisition and possessive mentality of man, but corrupt and always in conflict.
- John Rousseau: He sees from the angle of a state of nature, the original state of existence of man where there are no desires, where men were naturally good, free and enjoy tranquility. But this atmosphere was corrupted by human desire and greed for private property
- THOMAS HOBBS His argument was that peace is a product of the state of nature where life was poor nasty, brutish and short, and where society was in a state of perpetual war. For men to overcome this sorry

state, they resolved to establish a social contract in which each gave up his/her right to self defiance to powerful force (what he called the leviathan) above all to which all were subject, thus creating a more peaceful and orderly life

- THE HEDONISTS AND UTILITARIANS Argue that human beings naturally seek happiness and avoid pain, and consequently prefer peace to war and violence. PLATO: He addresses the social context of peace. He sees justice as the most fundamental basis of ordered social life. For him, justice is the basis of peaceful social life. Justice is given to each his or her life. Plato defines society in terms of three classes of people:
 - Workers – engaged in production – men of appetite
 - Soldiers – defend the society – men of courage
 - Rulers – Govern the society – Men of KnowledgeEach must operate within his area of competence, and where this does not operate, he sees injustice

SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE OF PEACE

- The Sociologist also addresses the social context of peace
- The Sociologist sees peace as a condition of social harmony, the absence of social antagonisms
- Peace to the sociologist, is a condition in which there is no social conflict and individuals and groups are able to meet their needs and expectations This is achieved through the establishment of structures to perform certain basic functions of society; for example a society must service, it must educate its citizens, produce goods government and its often provide security for its members.

- To achieve these structures such as schools, industries, parliaments, courts and armed forces are established.
- Therefore to the sociologists, peace is achieved where these structures perform their functions adequately

TO THE MARXISTS:

- Conflict is a product of dialectical materialism
- It is a product of the structure of rewards in the society
- It is a reflection of the nature of class and class struggle
- This breeds a struggle for the control of the means of production in the society
- The result of the attendant inequality is in two folds; Violence perpetrated by the upper class on the oppressed - Violence engineered by the oppressed against the ruling class - revolutionary violence. Hence the phrase “ Those who make peaceful change impossible make violent change inevitable”
- Political Perspective of Peace
- Politically peace is synonymous with political order when the political structures are stable, we talk of peace in the society: •Peace is also seen as a political condition that makes justice possible.

The collapse of the political structures lead men to seek other route to enforce their will. These may be in the form of Mob action, demonstration, strikes or even military coups To ensure peace therefore the political structures must be stable and effective to extent that they perform their role. Politically, these must guarantee citizens participation in the political

process; ensures tolerance of opposing views; and encourage bargaining and negotiation.

Also politically speaking, peace suggests that government does not rely on coercion and the instruments of force (such as army, police) in dealing with citizens. Instead, people willingly accept and obey the dictates of government. Peace in this sense connotes mutual consent and agreement to respect the rules governing a society, whether locally or internationally. But the question is whose order? Must every political order be sustained just to ensure peace (e. g. The Nazis, Mobutu, Abacha)?