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Perpetual Peace?

Critical Remarks on Mortimer J. Adler's Book

By *Waldemar Gurian*

I

MORTIMER J. Adler's much quoted address in which he castigated American professors has been widely misunderstood. When he declared that their errors were more dangerous than the threat from Hitler, he did not intend to discount them. On the contrary, he was paying a most impressive compliment to the importance and effect of their writings and other activities. Adler is professor of the philosophy of law in the University of Chicago, and his yardstick must be applied to himself. It would be inappropriate to pass over his *How to Think About War and Peace*¹ in silence or to regard it as an unimportant and unimportant work. This new book, praised as a product of hard thinking, will be read only by few, even though it will be bought by many in response to the intense propaganda of the publisher.

Adler claims that he describes the necessary approach to a most urgent problem. It is true that he modestly abstains from presenting any blueprints for the postwar world. He humbly abandons to Prime Minister Churchill and President Roosevelt a concern with such matters of immediate practical importance as relations with the Soviet Union or the fate of Germany. But on the other hand, he is more ambitious than those who are preoccupied with planning for our generation. He is trying not only to find principles of thought about peace and war but also to circumscribe the realm and the direction of practical, meaningful work in behalf of a truly lasting, and therefore universal and perpetual, peace.

His subject matter makes it necessary to take his analysis and proposals seriously. This must be the attitude, in any case, of those who regard Adler as a stimulating lecturer and challenging educator, as a man who dares to speak out and who can claim to have been for many

¹ (Simon and Schuster, New York, 1944). Cf. also Adler's lecture "War and the Rule of Law" in *War and the Law*, edited by Ernst W. Puttkammer. (University of Chicago Press (1944).

their guide to philosophy. It would be unjust to Adler's intellectual honesty, if his new book were viewed either as a skillful exercise of conceptual constructions or as a somewhat sensational display of the art of persuasion. Plato is a great friend, but truth is a greater one—this sentence must serve as a motto for the critical analysis of Adler's book. I am sure that Adler would resent mere non-committal praise, half-hearted recognition, polite evasion which would not face the real issue.

II

The fundamental thesis of Adler's book may be summarized in two sentences: "There will be wars as long as there are several sovereign states. Perpetual peace is only possible if there is one world state." Adler himself proposes to express his thesis by resolving a famous disagreement between Kant and Hegel.² Kant believed that a curtailment of national sovereignty by a perpetual pact excluding war would make lasting peace possible. Hegel rejected this belief, emphasizing that sovereignty of states cannot be bound and limited: "There is no praetor above states," he wrote. Adler accepts Kant's ideal of perpetual peace as well as Hegel's criticism. Hegel is right: so long as sovereignties are not replaced by one sovereignty, by one world state, there can be no peace. Kant also is right concerning his ideal of perpetual peace—but this peace can be achieved only if there is one world state. A league, a federation, an alliance system are completely insufficient. For Adler, perpetual peace is not, as for Kant, a regulative idea but a practicable objective. This world state will be realized, not at once, not after this war, but in a few hundred years, around, as Adler says, five hundred years. Therefore, Adler claims to be a pessimist in the short run—there will be another world war after World War II³—but an optimist in the long run. The one world state will come and with it real peace, universal and perpetual, not the pseudo-peace of peace treaties, which is in reality only a truce, an armistice between wars. This world state, first imperfectly organized in a federal way, will be perfected by becoming a world community under a government that is not federal in structure. "Our posterity will see other goals beyond perpetual peace, goals of which we cannot dream." (p.177)

² About this discussion cf. *The Review of Politics*, vol. 1, (1939), p. 371 ff.

³ He says in his lecture (*loc. cit.* p. 198) "... peace will not be made at the end of this war. . . . That means another war at a not too distant future."

Adler applies to humanity the same principle which has worked in the rise of the different political communities: No order and peace without governments. Therefore, no world order and no world peace without world government. He opposes "internationalism," for it does not face the decisive issue. As long as there are various sovereignties there is a continual threat of war. Self-determination of sovereignty is no help, because the sovereign himself decides about the limitation. International law is of no help, because it is a "law," a treaty between sovereign states which can discard and violate it. Therefore, "internationalism" does not abolish international anarchy, *the* cause of war, for it does not abolish sovereignties. It does not matter which approach we use, the result for Adler is always the same: One world state alone, one sovereign alone makes perpetual peace possible. This world state will be a constitutional and a democratic one. "The institution of world peace and the beginning of a world republic will come together or they will not come at all. The improvement of world peace and the democratization of that republic will follow parallel courses." "The people must become coextensive with mankind." (p.187)

III

Adler's whole system is based upon his definition of peace. Peace for him is universal and perpetual. If there are sovereign states, universal and perpetual peace is impossible—the sovereign states may go to war.

But is perpetual peace secured if there is a world state? Adler apparently overlooks this question although in his lecture he mentions that a world state based upon conquest cannot have a perpetual character.⁴ What gives the true world state its perpetual character? Adler identifies the function of world government—which according to him must be a world state that takes away external sovereignty from all states—with the function of governments in the various political communities. I think that this approach is erroneous: the fact that a government maintains peace in its community and enforces law does not guarantee its perpetual character. Frontiers change; states disappear. Why is it impossible that a world state, after having become a reality, should break up again?

⁴ *Loc. cit.* p. 196. He has also said, "it is true to say that military conquest does reduce the extent of anarchy in the world."

This possibility is in no way refuted by Dr. Adler's discussion of civil war, in which he argues that "civil war is truly a breach of the peace . . . war between nations does not breach a peace, because none exists," and concludes that "civil war . . . may be the inevitable expedient by which a community . . . perfects its government, and so achieves a more nearly perfect peace." (p. 125) Adler manifestly assumes that after a world state based upon a progression to democracy via constitutionalism has arisen, it will endure despite civil wars and will become perpetual. No proof is offered for this assumption, although this assumption is decisive in Adler's fundamental dilemma: either world state or no world peace. For if the world state does not make world peace perpetual, then the whole argumentation against systems based upon the existence of several states collapses. These systems cannot ensure "perpetual" peace, but they can ensure peace for some time, and in this would not be different from a world state whose peace also would not be a perpetual one.

The notion of perpetual peace—not as a regulative idea, but as a practicable objective—puts Adler in further trouble. By war he means whatever is not perpetual peace. It does not matter whether this war is an actual or a potential one. The sovereign states can transform potential tensions into actual wars. Only the world state cannot do that—for by definition it cannot wage war against itself. Its existence has ended the international anarchy, *the* cause of war, for, again by definition, anarchy presumes the existence of several independent sovereign states.

This "either-or" between perpetual peace and war is of no help for the understanding of history and of international relations. The term "potential war" covers situations much too varied to be of any use. It hides the necessary distinctions in the same way as the statement that wine, beer and water are liquids fails to settle a dispute about prohibition. Potential war can mean the fact that war remains a possibility—and that, unfortunately, would be true also after the rise of the world state. (I refrain, at this point, from expressing any doubt that this world state will ever come into being.) Potential war can mean many degrees of probability of actual war. But these differences of degrees are of the utmost importance. It is true that, abstractly speaking, all states as sovereign states are potentially at war—or potentially at peace

with each other—but these statements are meaningless for the analysis of political situations. According to Adler's views there would be no essential difference between the relations of the United States and England, and the United States and Nazi Germany, before actual war was declared by Hitler in 1941. Adler's definitions are too abstract-static; they are not able to cover the concrete historical situations and their dynamics.

War to Adler is simply a social disease which can be cured, that is abolished, if the conditions of its definition change. War is the systematic use of violence between political groups. Manifestly it will disappear if there is only one organized political group, the world state. Even Kant, who regarded war as something irrational, as a proof of the imperfection of society, raised and tried to answer the question: What were the functions of war in human history? This question does not occur to Adler for whom war is a negative term, the absence of perpetual peace, the result of the non-existence of a world state.

This approach to history from abstract static definitions is not compensated for by remarks about the necessity of taking growth into consideration. These remarks do not remove the error of believing that history can be stopped, or at least, completely rearranged by setting up institutions which, by definition, have perfect effects. Federations, league of nations, etc., by definition do not abolish sovereignty. Therefore, they are rejected by Adler as insufficient though perhaps somewhat useful as transitory means. By definition the world state—a democratic world republic based upon justice—excludes war. Therefore it is proclaimed as a goal, as a practicable objective. Nor does Adler consider how it will maintain itself. Apparently its coming into existence and perpetual character are necessary because they are reasonable.

IV

The fundamental terms—"world peace," "potential war," "anarchy" as the cause of war—are insufficiently analyzed by Adler. But his defenders may object: "His theoretical analysis may be insufficient; perhaps he does not make enough distinctions. But why struggle about definitions? Is his book not full of most useful and wise considerations, on the trends of political and historical developments?" Unfortunately,

the fundamental weakness of Dr. Adler's book reappears also in his discussions of probabilities.

After having proclaimed that without the world state no peace is possible, Adler announces that this world state will not rise before our eyes or even before the eyes of Adler's "sons and theirs" to whom the book is dedicated. The world state will come in about five hundred years. Of course, Adler does not mean exactly in 2444. Five hundred years are put down as a figure to express his belief that it will come at some specific, not too remote, time. (For instance, not in fifty thousand years.) The world state is not only a possibility, but a probability, dependent upon the maturation of historical and social trends, upon the advance of education, etc.

This prediction of Adler—a world state not now, but in five hundred years—calls for some remarks on the predictability of events in history. That something is fundamentally wrong in the attitude of Dr. Adler, who claims to know, some centuries ahead, the basic changes that will happen, is shown at once by the question: Was any man of the fifteenth century able to predict the events of the twentieth or even of the eighteenth or seventeenth centuries? According to Adler the knowledge of the past was in previous epochs less developed than in ours, and correspondingly also the capacity to anticipate the future was less developed; therefore I assume a range of predictability for the men of the fifteenth century which was shorter than Adler's five hundred years. Were the men living in the fifteenth century able to predict even in the most general way the rise of absolute monarchies, the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, the influence of the Discoveries, the consequences of the American and French Revolutions? Some general trends can be predicted, and the developments of certain movements, their interior logic, can be anticipated. Several famous examples are: Bossuet's prediction that Protestantism would produce more and more variations and not bring about more or a new religious unity; or Burke's realization—despite all his historical errors—that the abstract spirit of the French revolutionaries would result in a terroristic regime; certain views of Karl Marx—despite all his mistakes in detail and his wrong interpretation of human nature as well as of the aims of social life and history—on imminent contradictions in the Capitalist system and epoch. These predictions of the future can be based either on a knowledge of human

nature and therefore the general spiritual and moral trends of human history, or if they are less general but on the other hand more limited, more short termed, they can be based on the study of concrete historical and social trends, on an insight into the spirit of an epoch or a particular human activity.

But it is impossible to make meaningful predictions (or announcements of probabilities) about the rise of a political institution such as the world state more than fifteen generations ahead. There are so many contingent factors involved as to destroy the possibility of any reasonable forecast. The same may be said not only against Adler's predictions, but even against predictions more sophisticated than such as are based upon the immanent logic of the spirit working in history (Hegelian type) or on attempts to compare civilizations with each other and thereby to find out the degree of progress or decay of the various epochs (Spengler). The vagueness of the prediction about future history increases with the distance in time. It was, e. g., possible to assume that Mussolini's attempt to militarize the Italian nation would end in failure—though of course it was unpredictable that this attempt would be challenged by a serious test of war. But a prediction concerning Italy's status after five hundred years would have to be very general.

There are relations between the duration of human life and the predictability of political, social and economic changes. Adler overlooks them in assuming that men can be interested in the world order which will exist in five hundred years—whereas he grants that fifty thousand years are too long a time. Insurance companies can build their business on an interest for children and perhaps grandchildren. But what would happen to an insurance company which would promise to pay the insurance in five hundred years? This company would not get many patrons, even if the premiums were extremely low. Everybody would ask: What will happen to the company during the five hundred years and why should I be interested in my heirs living after five hundred years (although, of course, I am interested in the continuation of my family?) Man can be interested in a future directly related to him, or in a future from which he is not separated by a specific number of years. But to suppose his interest for a very definite but at the same time very distant point in the future is an absurdity. Men may be interested in the continuation of their family; they are interested in their sons, their

grandsons, but they are surely not interested in their heirs of the fifteenth or twentieth generation.

Adler's prediction of the world state's advent in five hundred years is therefore a purely intellectual construction, not the expression of a belief in a coming world, represented today in the enthusiasm of those who are united and inspired for action by this belief. Its justification—progress from despotism to constitutionalism and democracy, and quantitative increase of the size of states—is a product of a somewhat naïve philosophy of Enlightenment. What was impressive in the formula of Hegel who characterized the epochs of world history by the progress of liberty—first one is free, then some, finally all are free—appears in Adler's book as a glittering generality.

That is the consequence of Adler's mechanical concept of sovereignty. Despite verbal concessions the state for Adler is an exterior unification of individuals. Neither the importance of pre-political groups (though of course Adler quotes Aristotle's description of the various kinds of communities), nor the shaping forces of concrete traditions, historical experiences and ideals are taken into account. The world state is simply a problem of quantity and education: it swallows up all states and is prepared as well as maintained by a universal education which will destroy all prejudices and sources of difficulties from racialism to economic social injustices. This education will make a citizenship possible which is directly related to the world state and therefore to humanity as such. The individual, subordinating all particular qualities to his pure human nature and liberated from all determination by a specific national or social background, becomes the citizen of the world state.

There is no discussion about how this world state will come into being. Conquest is of course rejected, the world state as a universalized *pax romana* is of course not Adler's world state. Will the world state rise by voluntary unions? But if some states resist? And what will happen if the abstract pure citizenship of the world state is regarded by some only as a masked expression of very concrete particular interests? These questions are not answered by remarks hinting that the world state must not be based upon a common religious belief. Dr. Adler grants that recognition of "the fatherhood of one God is necessary" . . . "for the deepest spiritual brotherhood . . . among all men," and he

says: "For the peace of God nothing less than the theological virtue of charity will do" (p. 237). "But," he continues, "justice—political and economic—is sufficient for civil peace." Can this justice be realized as pure abstract justice which disregards the factual conditions, e. g., traditions of communities, religious backgrounds? And why can this justice not be realized in several states? Why only by and in one world state? Can world government not work through different sovereign communities which act, not only for their common good, but at the same time for the common good of the whole world? Adler's demand for the one world state reveals itself as not based upon the requirements for justice, but on the belief that an ultimate decision by one sovereign is required in world affairs, although he tries to combine this attitude with a belief in the inevitable removal of political, economic and social injustices. These imperfections and prejudices he regards as the only causes for the existence of several states.

V

Adler's book provides an insufficient analysis of its fundamental terms. It is inadequate in describing general trends and making predictions. But perhaps, the admirer of Adler will remark, it offers some help for practical work in behalf of peace in our time, and, after all, that is valuable enough.

Adler really gives some advice about what ought to be done now. Though he rejects internationalism, federations, systems of compulsory arbitrations—as proposed e. g., by Kelsen—as insufficient because they do not abolish sovereignties, he advises men to do everything that makes new wars at least more remote and moves in the direction of the ultimate aim. On p. 290ff, he enumerates the conditions required for maintaining peace in our time. They are so vague that most of them can be accepted by Marshall Stalin and the Polish Government in Exile without changing their policies and demands. Only conditions 5 and 6 are somewhat more concrete, for they stress the encouragement and institutions of international agencies such as the League of Nations, World Court, International Office of Education, etc. But condition one is typical of the character of the first four: "That they [powers] commit no political or economic injustice by way of inequitable distributions or unfair discriminations."

Not more precise are the actions which are proposed on p. 292. There he says: "Every citizen who has a voice in the matter (in any country where men are citizens) should support a settlement of this war which tends to facilitate, not merely the postponement of the next war, but the advent of peace. He should oppose any arrangements by treaty or alliance which, through their intrinsic injustice, impede the world's progress toward peace." I would not mention these general statements—which are as excellent as they are vague—if they did not contradict other fundamental theses of the book. On the one hand, Dr. Adler opposes all solutions which do not bring about the world state and therefore the possibility of world peace, and on the other hand he offers for today the same program as the "internationalists," as those who regard perpetual peace as a "regulative idea." How does he know that the new coming war period will result in a situation closer to world government, to his own world state? First he undermines the belief in the appropriate character of the proceedings which he then advocates. Kelsen is much more reasonable, for he too believes in the necessity of a world state, but realising that this world state is not rising now, he centers his book, *Law and Peace*, around the recommendation of obligatory arbitration and judicial settlement of international disputes.

Adler's expectation of continual war in our time and a world peace possible in five hundred years makes his book really dangerous, at least for those who want to promote peace in our time. Adler's prognosis will, if taken seriously, provoke on the one hand despair and, on the other, indifference. Some will despair because war cannot be avoided except by the world state which can come only fifteen generations after us. Others will believe that everything is permitted today because the far distant future is bright anyhow and the present necessarily dark. Adler's long-term optimism and his short-term pessimism illustrate the connection between a perfectionism without responsibility for what is going on in our actual imperfect world and a cynicism which results from despair about the impossibility of being perfect now.

Adler's book is satisfactory neither for the philosopher nor for the man interested in the question: What can be done today? It is the result of a lack of patience, of a looking for perfect solutions which are apparently deductions from self-evident definitions, and of an intellectual-

ism less interested in the complex and many-sided realities than in the imposition of its concepts. It is not the product of hard thinking, as some claim, but of a thinking which only appears as hard, of a thinking dominated by a will to power—by presenting bold constructions—but surely not by love of its objects. It is no accident that Dr. Adler claims calmly that for sixteen hundred years nobody has asked for perpetual peace and that the various peace proposals were all insufficient. He does not even suspect that his apparently bold originality may be the result of certain assumptions which he accepts without any attempt to analyze them. It is also not by chance that he is unable to understand positions which are not in agreement with his thesis. The papal peace program is rejected as insufficient because it is not based upon Adler's assumption that the world state is the necessary instrument for world peace. Adler does not ask the question: Why do the Popes not demand a world state? What is the difference between their concept of peace and the perpetual peace here on earth?

A book, written with such pretensions as *How to Think About War and Peace*, must be analyzed in the most direct way. Adler is an honest thinker, as he has proved in his public correction of the mistakes in his book on the *Problem of Species*. Also, in the preface of this new book he confesses his failure "as a teacher to give the fundamental insights which should be every one's possession" (p. xix).

If he agrees with these critical remarks—and they could be supplemented by much detailed discussion—he will, I am certain, correct his book which, in its present form, does not *really* help its readers to think about peace and war.