CHAPTER 21

Conflict and Deep Persuasion

A man believes you wronged him, and he wants to hurt you. There are three things you can do. You can take his weapon away, so that he cannot act. You can threaten or bribe him, so that attacking costs more than it gains. Or you can show him evidence that you were never involved, and the wish to hurt you goes.

The first two leave the wish where it was. It waits for the lock to fail or the price to change. The third leaves nothing waiting. Chapter 21 argues that this difference separates peace from managed conflict, and that no fourth option exists.

Most of what passes for peace is conflict held down by force, incentive or fatigue. A society whose dissenters comply because defiance costs too much is stable, and not peaceful.

The chapter does not tell you to want peace. Its claims are conditional. If aligned social peace is your goal, deep persuasion is the only route to it. Whether to adopt that goal is left open, since coming to want peace is itself deep persuasion at work. The argument builds on Chapter 15, on what reshapes a person’s wants, and on Chapter 16, on morality as empathy.

What peace actually means

Conflict has a strict shape. Two preferences bear on one piece of behaviour from contrary directions. One person wants the act done, and the other wants it left undone. Wanting it left undone is a full preference. An act either happens or it does not. So two preferences about it agree or clash, with nothing in between.

The claim is also confined. Scarcity is not conflict. Two people who both need the single kidney may each want the needy helped, and neither wants the other denied. The world frustrates them, and no opposed preference does. Shortage is handled by allocation.

Peace, strictly, is the presence of shared preferences about behaviour. A critic would prefer a looser definition: peace as stable coexistence, whatever the underlying preferences. Any such state is held in place by something contingent, and enforcement capacity erodes, incentives shift and fear fades. When the thing holding it weakens, the preference comes back as conflict, since it never changed. Only one state has nothing left to re-express. The chapter calls the state in which the preference has itself changed “the unique fixed point of conflict resolution”.

At that limit each person can act freely, because nobody’s preferences stand against her. Peace and social freedom are then one limit reached from two sides. The claim covers constraint by other agents only, since nature, scarcity

and your own body still hold you back. Much political theory assumes that harmony must be bought with liberty, and the chapter reframes that trade-off.

Peace is not everybody being made alike. Chapter 6 calls equality “the unintelligent terminus”, a state of zero distinction that can host no mind. So a peace that levelled the evaluative field would abolish the parties instead of reconciling them. Alignment removes the opposition, and two minds remain two even in perfect agreement.

Peace comes in levels

John Rawls argued that some disagreements survive ideal discussion among reasonable people, through differences of experience and weighting that no procedure removes. If that is right, a peace requiring every clashing preference to change is incoherent.

The reply is that alignment comes in levels. Call preferences about behaviour level zero, and preferences about the framework governing a dispute level one. Two communities that cannot agree about a practice may still share a preference for letting each decide locally. They must reach it by deep persuasion that the arrangement is fair. The lower dispute persists, and nothing at the higher level is held down. Accepting the arrangement only as the best deal present power allows is managed conflict, which reverts when the balance shifts.

The chapter adds a ceiling principle. The shared preference must govern the levels where the contested conduct lives. A shared horror of mutual annihilation that leaves the fighting as before “governs nothing and resolves nothing”. What marks managed conflict is that no level exists at which the parties share a preference.

Three modes, and no fourth

The three modes are derived, and not read off the cases. For a conflict to end, the clashing conduct must stop. The preference behind it then either survives or changes. If it survives, compliance has to be held from outside, and there are exactly two handles. One is what the person can do, and the other is what doing it would cost or gain her. Working on capacity is enforcement. Working on the calculation is shallow persuasion, and deception belongs here, since it corrupts the sums. A changed preference needs no handle at all, and that is deep persuasion.

The partition rests on one premise. Conduct against a standing preference is held up only by capacity or by calculation.

Enforcement changes behaviour and leaves the preference alone, and it is sometimes necessary. By itself it reaches only peace by extermination, since keeping dissenters alive and silent leaves the preference intact.

Shallow persuasion keeps the preference while another feeling temporarily outweighs it. Cold War deterrence is the chapter's case. Fear kept the nuclear powers apart for decades, and that was management.

Deep persuasion changes the ranking of what matters to a person. Information alone may not do it. What does it is input that engages her emotional response. Chapter 15 described such enrichment inside one mind, and here it runs between two.

Walking away looks like a fourth mode, since it removes the shared object a conflict needs. The chapter answers that it reduces to the other three.

The order of need, and the clock

The three modes stand in an order of dependency. Enforcement addresses survival, shallow persuasion addresses security, and deep persuasion addresses alignment. You cannot change the mind of someone who is actively killing you. The lower modes need not have run, since survival and security may hold untended.

Durability is the mark of the deep mode, and it settles only in hindsight. So the chapter offers an audit for live cases, and tests it on post-war Germany. Did the changes come by concealment or by exposure? Trials, curricula and the publicised evidence of the camps forced exposure. Did they spread beyond what was enforced? They did. Did they revert when the pressure came off? Here the answer is provisional, since other pressures remained. Still, the shift deepened over two generations, and all three answers point to the deep mode.

The closing picture is a clock of peace, each transformed preference turning the hand forward. Over time, enforcement and shallow persuasion fade as they are needed less. The clock shows a direction, and forecasts no arrival. New circumstances can bring new conflicts, so the institutions for handling them are kept in reserve.

The objections the chapter answers

Is this peace simply unreachable? The chapter does not claim that deep persuasion is always achievable. Nor does it claim that enforcement and shallow persuasion are never appropriate. The strict definition does diagnostic work. It says what peace requires, and so what the other modes cannot reach. Where two sides hold values that cannot be weighed against each other, the first resort is to climb a level and look for a shared framework. Only where that is unavailable too is sophisticated shallow persuasion the best remaining outcome.

If deep persuasion remakes what people want, how does it differ from manipulation? Deep persuasion brings someone to register the facts accurately, above all the states of those her conduct affects. Manipulation works by deception, framing or bias, and engineers a response that misreads

them. Particular cases can be unclear, the chapter grants, though the distinction is sharp. Nothing guarantees that a given manipulation will unravel.

Philip Pettit holds that freedom is the absence of domination. The contented slave of a kindly master opposes nothing and is still unfree, since the master keeps the power to interfere. The chapter replies that her contentment is a preference shaped by alternatives closed to her. A full registration of what is done to her would return the opposed preference. Pettit will not accept that account of his complaint. What the reply achieves is to locate the disagreement. Is an unused, unwanted power to interfere a constraint, or a prediction of one? The identity of peace with freedom holds on the second reading only.

What the chapter claims

All three results are graded *constructed*, the book's third rung. It sits below *established*, two rungs under the top mark, *self-vindicating*. The grade means the best positive account on offer, coherent and well motivated, with live rivals still standing.

The first result is the taxonomy of three modes. A preference can be addressed at its capacity, at its calculation, or in itself, and nowhere else. The second is their hierarchy, grounded in dependency, with no guarantee of progress. The third is that deep persuasion alone produces structural peace.

Lawmaking and law enforcement then have different requirements. Lawmaking requires persuasion, since shared standards draw their moral authority from people converging in what they value. Law enforcement may legitimately use enforcement and shallow persuasion, since its job is to maintain compliance with standards already settled.

The grades carry no further condition, though the analysis is conditional. Its claims bind whoever wants social peace, and the derivation binds nobody else. The book's register of premises adds one wager. The audit's questions carry no thresholds, and durability in hindsight should confirm their verdicts more often than not.

Chapter 22 asks what a society must satisfy for deep persuasion to be possible at all, and argues that democracy is the institutional form preserving those conditions.