

CONFLICT CARE: PREVENTIVE-CURATIVE-RECUPERATIVE DIMENSIONS

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Summary

As someone said, "peace comes not from the absence of conflict in life but from the ability to cope with it." Understanding the Generator-Operator-Destroyer (GOD) aspects of conflicts, we can discern similar patterns between health and peace, and disease and conflict. An isomorphic analysis of these pairs elucidates several precepts and practices that need to be understood and assimilated in our study of conflicts. The "coping" with conflicts should involve violence prevention, intervention in case of occurrence of violence and the facilitation of resolution, reconciliation and reconstruction in the post-violence phase. Although conflicts are necessary and even important part of life on the Earth, destructive ones with incidence of violence are better prevented rather than dealt with later with all its ugliness and complexities. Focusing on how to boost the conflict immune system, we should also consider the curative and recuperative aspects of handling socioeconomic-political conflicts. When the exposure to the dis-ease couldn't actually be prevented, we think about interventional care such as military intervention, humanitarian intervention and other ways and means that are available for us to deal with the 'live' and violent conflict. To transform a violent conflict successfully into an opportunity of growth, the violence has to stop and all the ugliness has to be washed away permanently. Forgiveness, reconciliation, restorative justice and other cultural reconstruction strategies need to be understood deeply.

1. Introduction

If there is one thing that is permanent about human life on the Earth, it is conflict.

Although health can be a contender, there are many people who scrape along on the Earth without good health. But there can be none without any conflict in life whatsoever. Building anything meaningful in human society is bound to lead to differences of opinion, clashes of viewpoint, and conflicts of interest. It is these healthy conflicts that connect humans and life together and make living sustainable, meaningful and indeed enjoyable. Too many or too much of healthy conflicts could also become unhealthy and equally debilitating for any individual or a society to build a better life on the Earth.

So, as some wise person said, "peace comes not from the absence of conflict in life but from the ability to cope with it." If we think in terms of an isomorphic analysis, health comes not from the absence of dis-eases (causing pathogens) in life but from the ability to cope with them. The "coping" with dis-eases often takes three forms: preventing dis-eases, intervening efficiently and effectively in case of an occurrence of a dis-ease, and recuperating adeptly after the dis-ease has been competently dealt with. This comprehensive handling of before-during-after dimensions of dis-ease is often referred to as health care. Health care is not all about eradicating all the disease-causing germs and viruses, and avoiding attacks and accidents but safeguarding, saving and salvaging human lives.

"Coping" with conflicts would also mean not eradicating all kinds and forms of conflicts in life but safeguarding humans from violence and destruction, saving human lives from raging violence and mayhem, and salvaging human beings from the damages of violence and devastation. Here also, "coping" with conflicts takes three forms: preventing violence, intervening efficiently and effectively in case of occurrence of violence, and recuperating adeptly after the violence has been competently dealt with. This comprehensive handling of before-during-after dimensions of violence can be referred to as peace care. In order not to lose track of our focus on conflicts and violence, we can refer to it as conflict care. This holistic approach to conflict lets us deal with its past, the present and the future. Just as health care of an individual or a community is quite comprehensive and we are always mindful of the entity's past, present situation, background information (such as ailments in the family, food habits, sleep patterns etc. in the case of an individual) and possible future scope of health that comprises of constant monitoring, periodic checks, early warning and so forth, conflict care of a society should also be comprehensive.

2. Conflict as GOD

A conflict, defined here as an incompatibility of goals coupled with unfavorable attitude and behavior (Johan Galtung), is traditionally understood as a dichotomy between opportunity and danger, as the Chinese characters for conflict famously signify. If we look closely, this dichotomy only relates to the 'before' (being an opportunity) and 'after' (being a danger) dynamics of a conflict and does not say anything about the 'during' phase of it. Conflict is a destroyer if it is dragged along with the existing conflictual Attitude-Behavior-Contradiction (ABC) combination. And it can be the generator of opportunities if transcended with Empathy, Nonviolence and Creativity (Galtung). Conflict is also something different. The above binary view does not actually

help much if we hold that conflict is indeed an essential part of life that motivates growth and progress.

There is an important gray zone in between the black and the white, the opportunity and the danger zones of a conflict. This is the actual operational phase of a conflict and this dynamic stage is often left out in the conventional understanding of conflicts. After all, we are not seeking a conflict-free still time that is so serene, peaceful and quiet. Neither are we trying to be overwhelmed by its vehemence and violence. Where we are struggling with a conflict before it degenerates into an ugly beast or evolves into a stunning beauty is the operator stage. How we understand a conflict as an operator is very crucial since conflict is a process we are living with; it is not an aberration but a rule of life. So conflict should be seen as the Generator, Operator and Destroyer (GOD).

We can use a kitchen knife to cut a fruit as this sharp weapon can slice through the fruit better than human fingers or teeth. This is the generator side of it. If not handled with care, the same knife can slice our fingers and that is the destroyer part of it. What we often fail to see is the process of cutting the fruit itself, which is delicately positioned between the above opportunity and danger aspects.

The operational phase is the arena where the whole conflict is played out. This is the wide-open area covering the social, the economic and the political. The operating phase of a conflict is the space where the conflict draws its sustenance and energy from and does its maximum damage; and hence this is where the conflict transcendence should focus on.

After all, time is an important factor in conflict handling. Empathy takes a lot of patience to put oneself into the other person's shoes, engage in an inner dialogue to see things from that new vantage point, and the courage to struggle for a new perspective. Nonviolence too obliges one to be thoughtful, to be altruistic and to choose the hardest of all the available options. Similarly, creativity takes a lot of flexibility to dodge the rigidities of the reality, soulful awareness to see the other unseeable sides of things, and the initiative to bring them to life. All three processes take time.

A conflict is, to use Johan Galtung's characterization, not an either-or or neither-nor choice but a both-and transcendence. The operational phase of a conflict is not necessarily a Boolean between the opportunity and the danger circles but a delicate interplay between time, space and human ingenuity. Here conflicts are not resolved and made to disappear; neither should they be managed from top. They have to be transcended by the conflict parties through dialogue.

3. Peace – Health Isomorphism

The United Nations Secretary General, Kofi Annan wrote recently: "If I were a doctor examining the health of the world today, I would be greatly alarmed at the state of my patient" (Cahill, 2000, p. 173). Using the same medical language, John Hume, a Nobel peace prize laureate from Britain, talks of Ireland's need for a healing process and cautions against notions of instant cures. He contends: "On numerous occasions I have found myself advising people to diagnose and treat causes of our political condition

instead of scratching or picking at symptoms” (Cahill, 2000, p. 17). Dr. Scott R. Lillibridge, on the other hand, reverses the metaphors of conflict and disease to point out the threats of emerging infectious disease (EID) to global security and the need to contain it. According to him, “We must realize that our vulnerability to infectious diseases, on a global scale, is a risk that is as immediate and tangible as if we were facing an invading army. Such preventive action to control EID will require significant international cooperation and leadership, actions not unlike those taken by the international community in containing the armed conflicts in the Balkans” (Cahill, 2000, p. 298).

This isomorphic analysis helps us identify a pattern in health science, recognize the same pattern in peace science/studies/research, and make both the disciplines each other’s metaphor. Johan Galtung, in his very influential essay “Theories of Health and Theories of Peace” delineates the exposure-resistance health paradigm and the evolutionary paradigm for pathology clusters. As he clarifies, the human person, body, mind and spirit are seen as *exposed* (E) to insults from the outside (traumas, micro-organisms, pollution from air-water-food and stress and so forth). The impact depends on the resilience, or internal capacity to *resist* (R). We can delineate three scenarios:

- E<R: the person remains well, at ease; with health surplus
- E=R: the person is at the borderline
- E>R: the person gets ill, dis-ease; with health deficit

The latter scenario calls for curative medicine or therapy that will remove the exposure and undo the damage (primary and secondary therapy in clinics and hospitals). And the resistance capacity should also be restored/increased (tertiary therapy, at home, or in convalescence homes). There is a need for prophylaxis, preventive medicine, to decrease exposure (primary prophylaxis) and to increase resistance (secondary prophylaxis). This leads to the distinction between *negative health* (where E<R: the person is symptom-free even if R is low) and *positive health* with high R, withstanding high E, even if not always symptom-free.

One should also consider the outside threats, endogenous (congenital) exposure, exogenous resistance capacity that places defenses in clothing, shelter and so on. This discourse facilitates several approaches in general medicine as well as reflections on all kinds of individual careers between the regions of well-ness (health) and illness or healthlessness. All said and done, the best possible scenario is high R and E<R.

We can easily identify the homologues of E and R in peace theory. The insult would be the *destructive power*, D, of weapons systems and resilience would be the *invulnerability*, I, to the insult D. A positive peace approach should focus on building up I and not enhancing D. After all, it is unwise to “arm” human bodies with micro-organisms of the same kind that the body is afflicted with instead of strengthening the immune system. Such a negative approach may produce short-term health/peace but will be counter-productive in the medium and long-term.

According to Galtung, we can also translate cardio-vascular diseases, malignant tumors, pollution and stress to peace theory easily. The essence of cardio-vascular diseases is

blocked circulation of something life-sustaining, particularly detrimental when brain (stroke) or heart (heart attack) are impaired, but also for more peripheral parts of the body (phlebitis). The essence of a malignant tumor is imbalanced growth of one part of the body at the expense of the rest. Blocked circulation and imbalanced growth are ubiquitous in social bodies and social theory also. The circulation factor can be interpreted as information circulation, crucial for a democracy to function; or as economic circulation of goods, services and financial assets, essential for economic systems to function. The imbalanced growth factor can be interpreted as any part of society growing at the expense of other parts.

Similarly, we can also translate pollution, stress and their psycho-somatic holism to a socio-cultural holism. We can see pollution as a transfer from the outside and stress as some internal condition. The social body may be ‘polluted’ with ‘impure’ ideas and structural repression (of circulation) and exploitation (growth at the expense of others), transferred by standard imperialist mechanisms. The patterns get rooted in centers stressed by insufficient response to challenges, making the situation worse, controlling circulation of information and economic assets. All these result in the social pathology of structural violence. Using the above analysis as a metaphor for peace, we can develop interesting ideas for peace theory. It is important to explore the pathogens underlying conflict and violence.

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Biographical Sketch

Dr. S. P. Udayakumar is the director of South Asian Community Center for Education and Research (SACCER) and Transcend South Asia. The author thanks Elsevier for granting permission to use certain portions of his previously published essay “Futures of Protracted Conflicts” (*Futures* 36, 2004), and the participants in the symposium on “Reconciliation in South Asia: Exploring the Terrain” (organized by WISCOMP/IDEA on March 17-19, 2005 in New Delhi) for the discussion on reconciliation in this essay.