**Deeper Meanings in The War in Ukraine:**

**Adding to the Complexity of It’s Understanding**

**Gerald Gutenschwager**

We have many excellent analyses of the war in the Ukraine, analyses based on geopolitics, economics, sociology, ideology, etc. The question is: are their causes hidden beneath the surface that might be important for understanding and possibly preventing such wars in the future? Is there more complexity to this war than is appreciated by many commentators? (Alverez-Pereira 2022) Many, if not most people, would probably agree that the war in the Ukraine is in large part a war between Russia and the West, especially the United States. Perhaps if Russia had been able to find a Pinochet willing to betray his country for a few pieces of silver, the war could have been avoided altogether. In any case, if this be the true nature of the conflict, then negotiations to end the war must be between Russia and the United States. If Russia’s claim that the United States has violated the agreement not to place guided missiles at its borders, then this must be, throughout all of Eastern Europe, the issue to be resolved by the negotiations. If the Ukraine is of secondary importance in these negotiations, its role would be no different than that of Cuba in the 1962 missile crisis.

The Ukraine war is a war centered on the broader question of who will control the world. Who will control nature and its resources, who will control society, who will control their fellow human beings and their labor? It is not a new question; it has plagued human beings for thousands of years. In a world characterized by constant change, as claimed by Heraclitus a couple of thousand years ago, this question changes its form and manifestation continuously. How this changes (or not) can be seen in the preface to Thomas Paine’s French edition of his *Rights of Man,* published over 200 years ago:

The English government presents, just now, a curious phenomenon. Seeing that the French and English nations are getting rid of the prejudices and false notions formerly entertained against each other, and which have cost them so much money, that government seems to be placarding its need of a foe; for unless it finds one somewhere, no pretext exists for the enormous revenue and taxation now deemed necessary.

Therefore, it seeks in Russia the enemy it has lost in France, and appears to say to the universe, or to say to itself. "If nobody will be so kind as to become my foe, I shall need no more fleets nor armies, and shall be forced to reduce my taxes. The American war enabled me to double the taxes; the Dutch business to add more; the Nootka humbug gave me a pretext for raising three millions sterling more; but unless I can make an enemy of Russia the harvest from wars will end. I was the first to incite Turk against Russian, and now I hope to reap a fresh crop of taxes."

If we believe that this mentality has changed over the past 200 plus years, we should remember how quickly the worst enemy of the United States in the Second World, Germany, became almost immediately its best ally, thanks to the Marshall Plan, designed to prevent Germany from becoming “communist”. Accompanying this, the U.S.’s best ally in that war, Russia, which alone suffered half the 50,000,000 casualties in WWII, became almost immediately its worst enemy, thanks to the McCarthy “Witch Hunt”, in the early 1950s. Add to this the 200,000 plus civilians wasted at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which bombings, according to Gar Alperovitz (2009), were caried out in an attempt to intimidate Russia at that time, because Japan had already indicated its willingness to surrender in December, 1944, apparently through the Swedish Embassy. This surrender was ignored because the U.S. theoretically refused to allow the continuation of the Emperor in Japan, something which they did allow ultimately, in any case.

Meanwhile, societies and their wars have been and still are accompanied by a number of important metaphysical assumptions, which also change over time. It’s good to keep in mind that assumptions are not examined empirically; they are simply taken for granted to be true, usually universally and for all time. They constitute what Kuhn has called a paradigm and it changes only with great difficulty and usually over a great period of time.

For example, the role of women has been changing over the past century, after great effort by women and after some unintended consequences of the wars created by this abiding need for control, this need for power, especially by men. Women have been considered inferior to men during most of human history (Kuenkel 2022). Democracies since ancient time have been established for men only, indeed, and mostly for propertied men. In the 1880s women in the U.K. and North America began struggling for the right to vote. During that time, they were imprisoned and tortured in various ways, in order to discourage them in their efforts for reform. It was only after their importance in industry during the First World War that they were able to cast off the imprisoning corset, which they had been wearing for four hundred years, cut their mountain of hair, wear loose clothing and dance the quick-step Charleston. They then, in the 1920s, actually attained the right to vote in the UK and the USA, and subsequently in most of the developed countries. The Second World War brought similar results, allowing women to enter occupations hitherto forbidden to them. Then in the 1960s they, supported by more enlightened young men, continued their struggle for equality, a struggle that continues even today. They have come a long way from the time when they were a trophy of war, because of their short supply, owing to a combination of female infanticide and polygamy, hopefully now absent in most of the world.

We now confront some equally, if not more important, hidden metaphysical assumptions, not about women, but about society and nature in general. Both capitalist oligarchy and communist central planning, the two ideological systems that confront each other in the world today, along with some scientists and many engineers, believe that nature is an endless source of resources, especially energy resources, that will allow economic growth and development to continue indefinitely into the future. Hence there is an emphasis on growth expressed by economists and businessmen, as well as government officials, in capitalist and communist countries alike. These assumptions guide the thoughts of those few power-hungry men who control the world today, men who use their wealth and power to determine government policies about how our money should be invested in relation to nature and society.

This is not to underestimate the progress in some communist and social welfare-oriented countries to lessen the inequalities and injustices inherited from the past, or the success of industrialization and technology generally to ease the burden of physical labor during this growth process. But the growing danger of a polluted environment and a potential climate change, is calling into question the price that may have to be paid for this “progress”. Nor is this to underestimate the difficulty of working out the relationship between the individual and the group (family, clan, tribe, or nation and now the world), the underlying issue represented by the conflict between capitalism and socialism. If the group is overemphasized individual incentive may be depressed, as it was under feudalism, whereas if the individual is overemphasized, many members of the group, including the very group itself, may suffer extinction, as we see with modern capitalism.

One of the metaphysical assumptions that obstructs the need to examine these “costs”, and the possible need to change these assumptions, is the belief that nature, society and the human body are composed of (Newtonian) mechanisms, and that our task as human beings is simply to discover the universal laws that govern these amoral and impersonal mechanisms. This has been the guiding light of much of science and technology, at least until relativity theory, quantum physics, and chaos theory came along to “muddy the waters”, so to speak. The outdated mechanistic worldview, especially in the human and social context does not allow us to see the true folly of war, nor the immanent dangers of a continuous growth mania. See for example Gare (1996), who discusses these assumptions and their effect on both natural and social science, as well as on the humanities. There is a growing awareness of the dangers of environmental destruction, including climate change, throughout the world, as evidenced by the droughts, floods, typhoons, and other extreme climatic events that are being reported in the mass media. Neither corporate executives nor central planners, nor even many economists wish to recognize these issues because of the profound changes that will be required to confront them. Nothing short of a metaphysical paradigm change will be required, making events such as the Ukraine war seem idiotic in this context.

This leaves one metaphysical issue to be addressed. This has to do with the profound need for power among certain (especially) men. The character of power and its exercise has been analyzed in great detail by Steven Lukes (2021). What is missing from his analysis is the psychological dimension. It now appears to be related to the consciousness of death and the inability to deal with this existential problem (Solomon, et. al. 2015). Epicurus addressed this problem 2000 years ago in relation to the question of human happiness. His ideas have been so distorted over the years that we must first be aware of what he actually was proposing. First of all, it has nothing to do with hedonism, the gross mistranslation of his term, “ηδονισμός”. For Epicurus, “idonismos”, was the search for happiness by **simplifying** one’s needs, not through excessive indulgence in food, drink and sex, but by finding pleasure in the simple things of life through love and friendship, exactly the opposite of what hedonism has come to mean.

Who distorted this meaning is anybody’s guess. Perhaps it was religion, since Epicurus did not believe in life after death, thus extracting an important source of control over living people’s thoughts and actions. The threat of an eternity in Hell was and is a powerful means of controlling people, quite apart from any solace people might find in the company of fellow religious believers on Sundays or Saturdays or whenever were the holy days. Or it might be the spirit of consumerism, so important in capitalist society: simplifying one’s needs is exactly the opposite of what food, real estate, automobile, etc., advertisers and market researchers are seeking. Or it might simply be the strange reality of a vibrant life being followed by death and nothingness.

In any case, recent research on the question of death seems to indicate that the need for power may be related to the fear of death and the belief that power to control the world would somehow lead to immortality. This is what Solomon, Greenberg and Pyszczynski (2015) argue in their book. Should this be true, then this is an additional metaphysical problem that must be dealt with if we are ever to attain a peaceful society populated by happy people. I don’t think anyone feels that the power-hungry men in the Pentagon, the White House or Downing Street are happy beings as they try to conjure up ever-changing methods and technologies for controlling all of nature and humanity, in the futile effort to attain immortality. The same applies to the Russian and Chinese leaders, as well as the leaders of the many lesser countries in the world, to say nothing of the billions of men who are trying to come to terms with the new status of women (and perhaps now growing beards to assert their masculinity in the process).

Yet, there were millions of men and women who tried to confront this metaphysical issue in the 1960s, irrespective of the ideological frameworks provided by their respective societies. They were hounded by the police and castigated for their slogan “Make love not war”! John Lennon, the musician who popularized this term was even assassinated, showing the emotional immaturity and insecurity of these power-hungry men.

Those young people have been followed by a new phenomenon; the “cultural creatives”. These are millions of adults found primarily throughout North America, Western Europe and Japan. They do not constitute an organized movement. They were discovered quite by chance and reported on in a book by Paul H. Ray and Sherry Ruth Anderson (2000). Their web page now reports the current number to be 200 million adults. They have abandoned the predatory mechanistic worldview and are seeking ways to live harmoniously with more humane forms of dialectical conflict resolution and without the need to hate and murder their fellow humans. The same is true for the Center for Ecozoic Studies, founded in the year 2000, or the movement for Steady State Economics inspired by the work of Herman Daly. They have begun to provide a model for survival in a future world not controlled by these amoral mechanistic assumptions. The history of humanity suggests that we can overcome these problems, if we “just put our minds to it”, as the saying goes.

This effort has already begun with the many organizations mentioned above, and with the continuing effort to inform the world, in spite of the efforts by power-hungry men (and women) to obstruct this effort, as they always have, for that matter. And yes, indeed, we do have a mind, which should make the contributions of biology less deterministic. It’s interesting to know what chimpanzees do, but this should not determine what we think human beings should act. This is something that we should put our minds to work to determine in a democratic way.

Good luck to us all!

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