

## Notes On War, Suffering, And Personal Judgement

Since around 2011 one recurrent theme of my writings has been the question of war and suffering, with the early writings, such as *War and Violence in the Philosophy of The Numinous Way* <sup>1</sup> and *A Slowful Learning, Perhaps* <sup>2</sup> concentrating on my 'numinous way' of *pathei-mathos*, <sup>3</sup> and later ones, such as *The Way Of Jesus of Nazareth: A Question Of Hermeneutics?* <sup>4</sup> and the 2018 *Persecution And War*, <sup>5</sup> in addition considering a particular Christian view expressed in 1682 by William Penn in *Some Fruits of Solitude*: "Let us then try what love can do." <sup>6</sup>

Texts which were helpful regarding this question of war and suffering included the 1759 essay *Thoughts on the Nature of War, And Its Repugnancy To The Christian Life* by Anthony Benezet, <sup>7</sup> William Penn's *Essay Towards The Present And Future Peace of Europe* 1693, <sup>8</sup> *Discourses on War* by William Ellery Channing, <sup>9</sup> and various reports by the American Congressional Research Service (CRS) such as their 2007 *Declarations of War and Authorizations for the Use of Military Force: Historical Background and Legal Implications*, the 2007 *Private Security Contractors in Iraq: Background, Legal Status, and Other Issues*, and the 2006 *The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Global War on Terror Operations Since 9/11*.

### Supra-Personal Authority

In my 2024 essay *Reflections On Conflict And Suffering* <sup>10</sup> the vexatious question of a recent, and as of the date of writing ongoing, armed conflict was considered in a philosophical context of denotata and in particular in regard to the manufactured category named 'the nation-State' <sup>11</sup> which by its nature involves:

"principles similar to those of the Ancient Roman *Leges Regiae* – *qv.* the *Jus Papirianum* attributed to Sextus Papirius – where someone or some many possess or have acquired (through for example force of arms) or have assumed authority over others, and who by the use of violence and/or by the threat of punishment and/or by oratory or propaganda, are able to force or persuade others to accept such authority and obey the commands of such authority.

This acceptance by individuals of a supra-personal authority – or, more often, the demand by some supra-personal authority that individuals accept such a supra-personal authority – was manifest in the Christian writings of Augustine (b.354 CE, d.430 CE), such as his *De Civitate Dei contra Paganos* where in Book XIX, chapter xiii, he wrote of the necessity of a hierarchy in which God is the supreme authority, with peace between human beings and God requiring obedience to that authority; with peace between human beings, and civil peace, also of necessity requiring obedience to an order in which each person has their allotted place, *Ordo est parium dispariumque rerum sua cuique loca tribuens dispositio.*" <sup>5</sup>

Most modern Western nation-States, which nation-States now dominate our lives, have simply replaced kings, emperors, potentates and oligarchs, with Prime Ministers, Presidents, and by what are described as "representatives of the people", and in regard to the violence and the threat of punishment, domestic and foreign, former brute honesty has been replaced by rhetoric and propaganda, political and social, about 'law and order', about 'national defence and security' and 'in the national/public interest'. But the demand, often unstated, that individuals should or must accept some supra-personal authority remains as does the threat or the use of violence or punishment, against dissenting individuals, by officials appointed and approved by such supra-personal authorities. That is, that individuals must or are expected to forsake their own judgement, their conscience, and rely instead on the judgement of Prime Ministers/Presidents, 'representatives of the people', government ministers and officials, with – as it was for the Roman kings and Caesars – the individual required to obey the laws and decrees they manufacture and which laws and decrees such modern types regard, or claim to regard, as necessary, 'just', and moral with declared enemies, domestic and foreign, often said to be 'evil' or a threat to 'our' way of life, our nation, or our society. As often in former times there thus is a hierarchy of judgement involved, whatever political 'flavour' a modern government is assigned to, is assumed to represent, or claims it represents.

In practice, therefore, the personal suffering, domestic and foreign, that modern nation-States cause or have caused not only continues the periodical pain, trauma, injury, grief, and death inflicted on individuals over the past four thousand years or more, but increased the multitudes affected as evident for instance in the West (i) by the First and Second World wars with their millions upon millions upon millions of casualties and dead and the associated destruction inflicted nationally and supra-nationally, and (ii) by the poverty, despair, homelessness, robbery, theft, murder, and violent offences against the person, which still exist in so many Western societies.

Even religions such as Christianity, with its millions of adherents past and present which has been claimed by many of its adherents to be the way of peace and equality, <sup>12</sup> have not prevented such wide-spread and continuing suffering. Primarily, according to my understanding, <sup>13</sup> because such religions derive from and depend upon a written text or texts which invite indeed depend upon exegesis and thence on the interpretation or exposition of one particular individual or on a collective, often hierarchical, exposition codified in a particular doctrine.

Examples being (i) a vernacular interpretation of meaning of the Christian Gospels and/or of the Christian Bible and (ii) a particular doctrine derived from a particular interpretation of some or parts of those texts, either in the vernacular or in their original language, by a particular individual or by a group, both of which can result and has resulted in schisms, such as the Nestorians, the Lollards, and the Protestant reformation, and thence to accusations of heresy and even of blasphemy by a particular and established religious hierarchy or by some authority who or which claim to rule 'in the name of or by the grace of God'.

## Empathy And Pathei-Mathos As A Guide

It is my contention that the wordless knowing which personal empathy provides or can provide together with the wordless knowing arising from a personal pathei-mathos is a moral alternative to the abrogation of personal judgement and of personal conscience required by a nation-State and by established religions in the particular matters of war and the violence involved in supra-personal conflicts where there is an assumed 'us' and a 'them'.

A moral alternative because there is a personal, individual, horizon to both empathy and pathei-mathos so that what is beyond this horizon is something we rationally, we humbly, we morally, accept we do not yet know and have not personally experienced and so cannot judge or form a reasonable, a fair, a balanced, opinion about. For empathy and pathei-mathos live within us manifesting the always limited nature, the horizon, of our own knowledge and understanding. That it is a failure to appreciate and understand this which continues the periodical pain, trauma, injury, grief, and death inflicted on individuals.

Basically, this is

"an alternative way that compliments and is respectful of other answers, other choices, and of other ways of dealing with issues such as the suffering that afflicts others, the harm that humans do so often inflict and have for so long inflicted upon others.

The personal non-judgemental way, of presumption of innocence and of wu-wei, balanced by, if required, a personal valourous, an honourable, intervention in a personal situation in the immediacy of the moment. There is, in this alternative, no guidance required; and no-thing - such as an afterlife, or enlightenment, or liberty or happiness - to be attained. No need for dogma or too many words; no need for comparisons; no 'just cause' to excuse our behaviour. No mechanisms and no techniques to enable us to progress toward some-thing because there is no need or requirement to progress toward what is not there to be attained. There is only a personal living in such a way that we try to be compassionate, empathic, loving, honourable, kind, tolerant, gentle, and humble. And this is essentially the wisdom, the insight, the way of living - sans denotatum - that thousands upon thousands of people over millennia have contributed to the culture of pathei-mathos, as well as the essence of the message which many if not all spiritual ways and religions, in their genesis, perhaps sought to reveal: the message of the health of love and of our need, as fallible beings often inclined toward the unbalance of hubris, for humility." <sup>14</sup>

As it says in Matthew 5 v.7:

μακάριοι οἱ ἐλεήμονες, ὅτι αὐτοὶ ἐλεηθήσονται

"Fortunate, the compassionate, for they shall receive compassion." <sup>15</sup>

As it says in the Rule of Saint Benedict:

"The peak of our endeavour is to achieve profound humility..." Chapter 7, The Value of Humility

As it says in the Quran:

"The 'Ibaad of Ar-Rahman [Allah] are those who walk on earth in humility." 25:63

As it says in the Dhammapada:

Yo bâlo maññati bâlyae paúóitovâpi tena so bâlo ca paúóitamânî sa ve bâloti vuccati.

"Accepting of themselves, the simple person in their simplicity is wise, [although] if they pride themselves they are wise, they are simply full of pride."

Which interpretations of mine, in English, of the original texts return us to the question of exegesis, and to empathy and pathei-mathos and why I personally find in them a more reliable, because wordless, guide to wisdom understood as an appreciation of, and of our relation to, the other mortal beings, Hominid and otherwise, with which we share this planet, and of our relation to Being itself: that is, to The Numinous, The Acausal, The One-The-Only (τὸ ἓν), the Monas (μονάς) and The-Unity.

The numinous is θεϊότης, divinity-presenced, as in tractate XI v. 11 of the Corpus Hermeticum, θεϊότητα μίαν, and as in Plutarch, De Pythiae Oraculis, 407a, 398a-f. The numinous is essentially what is, or what manifests or can manifest or remind us of (what can reveal) that which is felt, experienced, or understood as sacred, numinal, sublime, divine, awe-inspiring, beautiful, and beyond our ability, as mortals, to control or meaningfully express through the medium of words. For Christians, it is considered to be God; for Muslims, Allah; for the Romans, divinitas; for others ancient and modern, it was and is considered to be expressible, or intimated, by mythoi and presenced in ὁ θεὸς, the deity, and/or by θεοί, the gods.

1. Included in *War, Persecution, and Violence*, <https://archive.org/download/war-violence-davidmyatt/war-violence-dwmyatt.pdf>
2. <https://davidmyatt.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/dwm-slowful-learning.pdf>
3. qv. *The Numinous Way of Pathei-Mathos*, <https://perceiverations.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/numinous-way-pathei-mathos-v7.pdf>
4. Included in *Selected Essays And Effusions*, <https://davidmyatt.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/essays-and-effusions.pdf>
5. Included in *War, Persecution, and Violence*, <https://archive.org/download/war-violence-davidmyatt/war-violence-dwmyatt.pdf>
6. <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc2.ark:/13960/t5r78692x&seq=9>
7. [http://www.fredsakademiet.dk/library/benezet\\_thanksgiving.pdf](http://www.fredsakademiet.dk/library/benezet_thanksgiving.pdf)
8. <http://www.fredsakademiet.dk/library/penn.pdf>
9. <http://www.fredsakademiet.dk/library/channing.pdf>
10. *Reflections On Conflict And Suffering*, <https://davidmyatt.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/conflict-and-suffering-dwmyatt.pdf>
11. By the term the State/nation-State is here meant the concept of both (i) organizing and controlling – over a particular and large geographical area – land (and resources); and (ii) organizing and controlling individuals over that same geographical particular and large geographical area by: (a) the use of physical force or the threat of force and/or by influencing or persuading or manipulating a sufficient number of people to accept some leader/cliq/ue/minority /representatives as the legitimate authority; (b) by means of the central administration and centralization of resources (especially fiscal and military); and (c) by the mandatory taxation of personal income.
12. "If the Christian, however, recollects himself, he will find war to be a sad consequence of the apostasy and fall of man; when he was abandoned to the fury of his own lusts and passions, as the natural and penal effect of breaking loose from the Divine Government, the fundamental law of which is Love: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength; and thy Fellow-Creature, as thyself." *Thoughts on the Nature of War, And Its Repugnancy To The Christian Life*, Anthony Benezet, 1759, [http://www.fredsakademiet.dk/library/benezet\\_thanksgiving.pdf](http://www.fredsakademiet.dk/library/benezet_thanksgiving.pdf)
13. qv. (i) *Exegesis and Translation: Some Personal Reflexions*, <https://davidmyatt.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/exegesis-and-translation-partsone-two.pdf> (ii) *Questions Of Hermeneutics And Exegesis*, <https://davidmyatt.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/questions-hermeneutics.pdf> (iii) *The Way Of Jesus of Nazareth: A Question Of Hermeneutics*, included in *Selected Essays And Effusions*, <https://davidmyatt.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/essays-and-effusions.pdf> (iv) *Questions of Good, Evil, Honour, and God in Religion, Empathy, and Pathei-Mathos*, <https://davidmyatt.files.wordpress.com/2018/03/religion-and-empathy.pdf> (v) *Numinosity, Denotata, Empathy, And The Hermetic Tradition*, <https://davidmyatt.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/dwm-denotata-empathy-v1b.pdf>
14. *Religion, Empathy, and Pathei-Mathos*, <https://davidmyatt.files.wordpress.com/2018/03/religion-and-empathy.pdf>

In regard to some terms and expressions used in that quotation:

innocence. Innocence is regarded as an attribute of those who, being personally unknown to us and beyond the purvue of our empathy, are therefore unjudged us by and who thus are given the benefit of the doubt. For this presumption of innocence of others – until direct personal experience, and individual and empathic knowing of them, prove otherwise – is the fair, the reasoned, thing to do.

wu-wei. The cultivation of an inner balance arising from an appreciation of the natural change (the flux) of living beings and how it is unbalanced, and harsh, of us to interfere in ways which conflict with the natural character of such beings and with that natural change. Part of this appreciation is of the numinous; another is of our own limits and limitations because we ourselves are only a small part of such natural change, an aspect of which is Nature; and which appreciation of the numinous and of our limits incline us toward a certain humility. Regarding 'the numinous', qv. the end of the *Empathy And Pathei-Mathos As A Guide* section:

The numinous is θεϊότης, divinity-presenced, as in tractate XI v. 11 of the Corpus Hermeticum, θεϊότητα μίαν, and as in Plutarch, *De Pythiae Oraculis*, 407a, 398a-f. The numinous is essentially what is, or what manifests or can manifest or remind us of (what can reveal) that which is felt, experienced, or understood as sacred, numinal, sublime, divine, awe-inspiring, beautiful, and beyond our ability, as mortals, to control or meaningfully express through the medium of words. For Christians, it is considered to be God; for

Muslims, Allah; for the Romans, divinitas; for others ancient and modern, it was and is considered to be expressible, or intimated, by mythoi and presenced in ὁ θεός, the deity, and/or by θεοί, the gods.

a personal valourous, an honourable, intervention. That is, an honourable self-defence. For it is, in my experience, part of our reasoned, fair, just, human nature to defend ourselves when attacked and (in the immediacy of the personal moment) to valorously, with chivalry, act in defence of someone or others close-by who are unfairly attacked or dishonourably threatened or being bullied by others, and to thus employ, if our personal judgement of the circumstances deem it necessary, force sufficient to cause injury or injuries to the attacker or attackers.

15. *The Beatitudes*, <https://davidmyatt.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/the-beatitudes-v1.pdf>