Section Four

COSMOLOGY IN PERSONS

Future Conflicts Are Inevitable: Causes of Interpersonal Conflicts According to Immanuel Kant and Thomas R. Malthus

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The paper entitled “Future Conflicts Are Inevitable: Causes of Interpersonal Conflicts According to Immanuel Kant and Thomas R. Malthus” is composed of four parts. The first part outlines the validity and importance of the issue of interpersonal conflicts, as well as the need to unveil their deepest causes. The second fragment is devoted to the vision of discord between people, developed by Immanuel Kant. The author emphasizes that, in the opinion of the German philosopher, due to the “unsociable sociability” of people, one has to take into account the impossibility of eliminating conflicts from interpersonal relations. The next part presents the concept proposed by Thomas R. Malthus concerning the causes of conflicts. The author observes that the Anglican cleric, supplementing Kant’s reflections, identifies non-human conflict-generating factors, among which the key factor is an indelible shortage in the environment of goods and values desired by people. To summarize the reflections made, in the last part of the paper, the author emphasizes that in the light of Kant’s and Malthus’ observations, it seems easier to understand why the dream of building a world entirely free of interpersonal conflicts is a utopian idea.

Keywords: Immanuel Kant; Thomas R. Malthus; “perpetual peace”; “unsocial sociability” of man; shortage of desirable goods and values; conflicts; future of humanity

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Introduction

Conflicts between people are one of the most intriguing phenomena of the human world, demanding a reliable and in-depth response. It can be observed that the highest expectations of mankind include the need to “create”, in the future, a world in which universal peace will prevail. The dispute in recent decades between the supporters of liberalism and communitarianism, significant contemporary ideological trends, can be perceived as a manifestation of this desire. Both trends remain in opposition and propose different viewpoints on man and his place in the society. Liberals suggest, among others, that it will not be possible to develop relations between people in a proper (peaceful) manner as long as specific groups of people identify themselves with different nations. Therefore, liberals demand, e.g. undertaking in the future activities aimed at gradual loosening of the national bonds between people. On the other hand, although communitarians, unlike liberals, appreciate the role of social bonds as one of the key conditions for proper interpersonal relations, they barely recognize the role of the nation in this regard (for more on this topic see, e.g. Kieliszek, 2017; Kieliszek, 2018).

The dream of the conflict-free world is more vivid in times greatly affected by the results of various conflicts — often dramatic results and leaving an indelible mark on the future development of a given society. Finally, at present there are also thinkers “dreaming” about a future world of lasting peace, or common happiness and prosperity. It is therefore justified to continuously reflect upon the deepest nature of factors that generate interpersonal conflicts (Szacki, 2000).

The need to question the most fundamental causes of interpersonal conflicts is also revealed in view of the fact that conflict theory, developed in the latest decades based on the legacy of Karl Marks, Max Weber and Georg Simmel and considered one of the most significant theories in social sciences, does not expose the actual sources of discord between people. Of course, the supporters of conflict theory provide adequate answers to the questions concerning the mechanisms of interpersonal conflicts or accurately predict the results of feuds between people. Nevertheless, representatives of the conflict theory do not unveil the deepest reasons leading to emergence of disputes between people. For instance, Ralf Dahrendorf, a German sociologist and political scientist, who is believed to be the founder of the conflict theory, blames relationships of dependence between people and the power structure for interpersonal feuds. They cause constant tension in every society, and consequently, the existence of a state of equilibrium is not possible in any society. In the opinion of Ralf Dahrendorf, it is not feasible to eliminate those tensions from a social system, which means that conflicts are inherent in interpersonal relations. In other words, Ralf Dahrendorf puts the “blame” for the existence of conflicts on the invariable and dialectic nature of the structure of any society. On the other hand, another outstanding supporter of conflict theory, Lewis A. Coser, points out a positive aspect of the occurrence of conflicts between people. According to this American researcher, conflicts fulfil a positive role in the life of a given society, since it contributes to an increase in its integration. Further on, Randall Collins, also an American thinker, emphasizes that in each society it is possible to distinguish two opposite groups (classes): order-givers and order-takers. According to Randall Collins, this basic distinction is a fundamental source of conflicts between people. Steven Lukes and Michael Foucault express a similar opinion. They also see the cause of interpersonal feuds in the existence of the institution of power (Jasińska-Kania et al., 2006: 451-548).

The supporters of the conflict theory “charge” the structures and mechanisms operating in social life with responsibility for the emergence of conflicts between people. This point

of view provides a basis to postulate, for example, an appropriate arrangement of social life and its proper planning in future. According to proponents of conflict theory, gradual implementation of this postulate leads to “creation” of a conflictless world, as well as to ensuring common happiness and well-being to mankind.

Proposals similar to those put forward by the representatives of the conflict theory referred to above can be also illustrated by the widely known works by Plato, Thomas More, Thomas Campanelli, Francis Bacon and Karl Marx. However, as the human history has shown multiple times — expectations to build a world free of conflicts in the future between people are only lights of fancy; moreover, attempts to make them real always end with building an “unhuman” world.

The possibility of making real human dreams of the world without conflicts in the future were (brilliantly, picturesquely and, at the same time, sarcastically) assessed by the Polish winner of the Noble prize, Wisława Szymborska, aware of the historical experiences of mankind. In her poem *Utopia*, she writes:

For all its charms, the island [this is a reference to the fictional island of Utopia from the work by Thomas More; Z.K.] is uninhabited, and the faint footprints scattered on its beaches turn without exception to the sea. As if all you can do here is leave and plunge, never to return, into the depths (Szymborska, 2018, trans. by S. Barańczak and C. Cavanagh).

Bearing in mind the observation of this Polish poet, one might ask: Why are any hopes to build a future world without conflicts between people only castles in the air?

In answering this question, it is worth referring to the legacy of two authors, as the concepts developed by them at the turn of the 18th and the 19th centuries seem to aptly and with great relevance demonstrate the reasons for conflicts between people and the reasons why it should not be expected at all that in future they (conflicts) could be totally eliminated from interpersonal relations. Those thinkers are Immanuel Kant and Thomas R. Malthus. They both, independently of one another, considered the eternal dream of man to build a just world in a future free of wars.

“Unsocial sociability” of man — Immanuel Kant’s concepts of human conflicts

Immanuel Kant published works in the last two decades of his life in which he raised the issue of the sources of conflicts between people. These publications include: 1. *An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?* (1784); 2. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785); 3. *Critique of Judgment* (1791); 4. *On the Old Saw: That may be right in theory, but it will not work in practice* (1793); 5. *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (1793); 6. *Metaphysical Elements of Justice* (1797); 7. *A renewed attempt to answer the question: “Is the human race continually improving?”* (1798); 8. *Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View* (1784); 9. *Conjectural Beginning of Human History* (1786); 10. *Perpetual Peace* (1795); 11. *The Conflict of the Faculties* (1798). Although the last four works mentioned above contain relatively the greatest amount of reflections concerning the sources of conflicts between people, even in those writings the source of conflicts itself was not the main subject of Kant’s interests. An illustrative point in this regard can be, for example, that the term “conflict” is not listed in the index (prepared by Andrzej M. Kaniowski, a Polish researcher on Kant’s philosophy) of the classical work *Immanuel Kant* by the outstanding

German scholar, Otfried Höffe (Höffe, 2003: 307-316). However, it would be a mistake to claim that Kant's reflections on disputes between people are only of marginal importance in his philosophy. The solution to the problem related to the causes of conflicts, proposed by the German philosopher, seems to be not only deeply related to his other proposals, but also seems to shed significant light on the sense of Kant's idea of the human being (Delfino, 2008: 237-257).

In *Perpetual peace*, Kant observes that conflicts between people emerge, among others, from the following causes: 1. lack of transparency and dishonesty in agreements made between people; 2. treating others subjectively; 3. having coercive measures at their disposal (e.g. an army, in the case of the state); 4. Contracting debts; 5. Interfering in the business of other people; 6. Failing to fulfil commitments made and treaties concluded; 7. Non-republican organization of public space; 8. Enforcing justice on others; 9. Unkindness towards others (Kant, 2005: 165-181).

In Kant's opinion, the above-listed causes of interpersonal conflicts are generated by one, principal source. This source — using the terminology of the German philosopher — is the “unsocial sociability of people” (*die ungesellige Geselligkeit der Menschen*). The “unsocial sociability of people” is understood by Kant as an inclination, deeply and permanently (i.e. naturally and indelibly) rooted in every person, to build — on one hand — “correct” bonds with people, and at the same time, to be involved in conflicts with others. Kant writes about this in the following way:

Man has an inclination to associate with others, because in society he feels himself to be more than man, i.e., as more than the developed form of his natural capacities. But he also has a strong propensity to isolate himself from others because he finds in himself at the same time the unsocial characteristic of wishing to have everything go according to his own wish. Thus, he expects opposition on all sides because, in knowing himself, he knows that he, on his own part, is inclined to oppose others (Kant, 2005a: 34, trans. by L.W. Beck).

According to Kant, the inclination of man to “isolate himself” should be evaluated ambivalently.

On one hand, interpersonal conflicts are not something wrong and undesirable, as they seem to provide a perfect opportunity to properly modify relations between people, an example of which could be, for instance, proper adjustment of specific legal regulations (Kant, 2006: 42-43). Additionally, human conflicts seem to be, in some sense, even expected (desirable), i.e. their absence should be considered as a greater threat to people than their occurrence. In Kant's opinion, the history of China provides a good case in point. This country had not fought any great wars and had not taken advantage of that in economic, political or cultural terms. However, according to Kant, the absence of significant conflicts with other states contributed to China's stagnation (Kant, 2005b: 78-79). Further on, Kant observed that interpersonal conflicts seem to be, in a way, “fruitful” and their absence “disastrous”:

Even war, when it is conducted with orderliness and holy respect for the rights of citizens, has something sublime about it. The way of thinking of the nation that conducts it in this way becomes more sublime as it becomes exposed to greater dangers and faces them with courage. On the other hand, a long peace usually leads

to the dominance of the spirit of trade that comes with petty selfishness, cowardice and self-indulgence and tends to lower the way of thinking of a people (Kant, 2004: 161, trans. by C.A. Perrottet).

However, at the same time, it is not possible — according to Kant — to permanently eliminate “explosive situations” from interpersonal relations. The reason for that is the fact that:

[...] From such crooked wood as that which man is made of, nothing straight can be fashioned (Kant, 2005a: 36).

Therefore, the widely-known Kantian concept of “perpetual peace”, emerging first of all from his four works: 1. *Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View*; 2. *Conjectural Beginning of Human History*; 3. *Perpetual Peace*; 4. *The Conflict of the Faculties*, with its vision of the world entirely freed from conflicts between people, should be only considered as a postulate of reason. “Permanent peace” is only a constructed idea that gives sense to human history. Consequently, it can be claimed that if — in Kant’s opinion — human history were to be considered reasonable, then it would be recommended that the possibility of existence of interpersonal conflict should be limited. However, it is not entirely possible to permanently eliminate conflict from relations between people. In other words, Kant’s idea of “perpetual peace” is just a postulative hypothesis and not a description of a state, which, in practical reality, can be achieved in the future (Höffe, 2003: 226-232; Angehrn, 2007: 71-80).

A Dutch story, to which the title of “Perpetual Peace” refers, provides a good illustration of the hypothetical-postulative nature of Kant’s concept of “perpetual peace.” This anecdote is quoted by Kant himself at the beginning of his work, aiming in this way to “set” further considerations in the proper light. The story has it that at a roadside inn during a long war, the guests were engaged in a lively discussion of whether it was possible for mankind to reach a state of common and permanent peace in the future. The innkeeper, listening to the discussion, hung a sign over the inn, with a cemetery painted on it, with an inscription saying “towards eternal peace” next to the picture (Kant, 2005: 164-165).

Considering the story quoted above, it can be noted that, according to Kant, a world without conflicts between people is possible, but only on one condition: all people would have to “disappear” (in the sense of “die”) from the world. In addition, until this happens, conflicts between people, more or less violent, will always take place. The point is that although man is — in Kant’s opinion — a creature capable of peaceful coexistence with other people, at the same time he is indelibly inclined to develop conflicts with them.

A shortage of desirable goods and values — Thomas R. Malthus’s concept explaining the cause of human conflicts

An interesting addition to Kant’s reflections on the causes of interpersonal conflicts can be found in the works of Thomas R. Malthus. Unlike Kant, who focused on the human causes of disputes, the British thinker focuses on non-human circumstances for the emergence of conflicts between people. Malthus’ analyses were carried out in the context of the industrial revolution at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, which caused thinkers at the time to consider ways to improve the plight of the poorest groups in individual societies. At that time, such authors as, for example, William Godwin and Jean A.N. Condorcet, trusting (among others) in the unlimited possibilities of the human mind and expecting further scientific and

technical development of mankind, anticipated that in the near future people would enjoy common well-being and permanent peace (Podgórski, 2017). Forecasts of this type, although bewitching contemporaries with their beauty, met with severe criticism. Malthus was the author of one of the strongest critical opinions. In 1798, he published a work titled *An Essay on the Principle of Population as it Affects the Future Improvement of Society*. According to Robert L. Heilbroner, a contemporary historian of economic thought, this work deprived the scholars of that epoch of the feeling of uncritical satisfaction derived from the dynamic growth of science and technology and, instead of a rosy forecast of the common well-being and peace; Malthus depicted a poor, gloomy and appalling future for mankind (Heilbroner, 1993: 67-69).

Two observations led to Malthus giving this highly pessimistic diagnosis concerning the future fate of the mankind: First of all, this Anglican cleric observed that, with a certain regularity (each generation, i.e. about every 25 years) the population of a given group doubles. The reason is the natural drive of man to reproduce. On the basis of this observation, Malthus reached the conclusion that a population multiplies geometrically, unless any obstacles occur, in the form of e.g. wars, epidemics or natural disasters (the so-called “positive” checks) or a given community undertakes certain steps, such as reducing charity to the poorest, promoting family formation later in life and refraining from giving birth to too many children (the so-called “preventive” checks). Secondly, he claimed that it was not possible to increase the resources of available food at the same rate at which a population grew in a given society. According to Malthus, available food supply could increase by the same amount every 25 years, i.e. the amount of food multiplied arithmetically. Taking into account both growth rates, Malthus estimated that after two generations a clear overpopulation could be expected, which would grow in subsequent decades. To Malthus, this meant that in the future people would increasingly suffer from a lack of food supply. Consequently, it could be expected that in the future people would fight violent wars for food (Giza, 2003: 108-110).

Malthus, in *An Essay on the Principle of Population as it Affects the Future Improvement of Society*, taking into account the observations made, outlined the following vision of the fate awaiting “hungry and thirsty” people:

Alas! what becomes of the picture where men lived in the midst of plenty [Malthus makes here an ironic remark about the utopian vision of the above mentioned Godwin; Z.K.], where no man was obliged to provide with anxiety and pain for his restless wants, where the narrow principle of selfishness did not exist, where Mind was delivered from her perpetual anxiety about corporal support and free to expatiate in the field of thought which is congenial to her. This beautiful fabric of imagination vanishes at the severe touch of truth. The spirit of benevolence, cherished and invigorated by plenty, is repressed by the chilling breath of want. The hateful passions that had vanished reappear. The mighty law of self-preservation expels all the softer and more exalted emotions of the soul. The temptations to evil are too strong for human nature to resist. [...] Benevolence, yet lingering in a few bosoms, makes some faint expiring struggles, till at length self-love resumes his wonted empire and lords it triumphant over the world (Malthus, 1925: 97-98).

Looking at the predictions made by Malthus, as well as their assumptions, it must be said that they have proven inaccurate and are denied by facts. For instance, population growth in a given group is a much more complex and complicated process than perceived by Malthus. It

turns out that demographic changes are affected not only by biological causes — as the British scholar believed — but also (and even first of all) by many religious, cultural, sociological and economic reasons, etc. (Kurkiewicz, 2008; Kurkiewicz, 2008a). Additionally, scientific and technological progress has made it possible to increase the food supply to a degree many times exceeding Malthus' estimates, which means that currently, depending on scientific and technological progress, a relatively constant number of agricultural farms are able to supply more food (Wójcicki, 2006). Additionally, in 1998, i.e. exactly 200 years after publication of *An Essay on the Principle of Population as it Affects the Future Improvement of Society*, an Indian economist, Amartya Kumar Sen, was awarded the Nobel Prize in Economics (among other awards) for proving the falseness of Malthus' expectations. Amartya Kumar Sen showed that it was not excessive population to be blamed that for the poverty of a given social group, but it was rather a direct result of mismanagement of available economic resources (Bąkiewicz, 1999).

However, it must be admitted that not all elements of Malthus' theory proved erroneous. Malthus, in his *Observations on the Effects of the Corn Laws, An Inquiry into the Nature and Progress of Rent and Principles of Political Economy*, among others, puts forward a thesis which has seems to have been confirmed by the development of the mankind so far. Malthus expected (as opposed to theories put forward at the same time, e.g. by the French researcher and industrialist, Jean B. Say) the inability of people to entirely absorb all goods produced. The point is that, according to Malthus, excessive investments result in such an increase in the supply of goods that they cannot be effectively consumed. As a consequence of this “general supersaturation”, Malthus predicted an economic crisis, i.e. economic regression, or in the best-case scenario, its temporary stagnation (Stankiewicz, 2007: 136-140). Additionally, as it seems, the so-called Great Depression in 1929-1935 confirmed these forecasts, since researchers have identified the causes of this economic collapse, among others, in overproduction (Piech, 1999).

However, as regards the issues related to causes of interpersonal conflicts, what is intriguing is the statement by Malthus that the limited availability of goods essential for man to subsist, and of desirable values, is an important source of discord. Of course, Malthus has in mind here only food supplies and certainly, he is not right to suggest that their shortage constitutes a significant cause of conflicts between people. A historical and philosophical analysis of the causes of military conflicts between individual communities shows that the sources of wars are much more complex and cannot be reasonably reduced only to a lack of food. Conflicts between people can be also based on, among others, religious, historical or cultural motives (Bazaluk & Svrydenko, 2017).

Nevertheless, the concept put forward by Malthus can be treated as an inspiration to claim that there is an insurmountable imbalance between what the environment can provide to people (understood in the possibly broadest way) and their current needs. (By the way, a significant incoherence in Malthus' thought can be observed here, as he claims, at the same time — as presented above — that people are not able to full absorb the goods they produce). In the second issue of *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (it is interesting that in further issues this fragment was eliminated), the British researcher draws the following image:

A man who is born into a world already possessed, if he cannot get subsistence from his parents on whom he has a just demand, and if the society do not want his labour, [...] has no business to be where he is. At nature's mighty feast there is no vacant cover for him. She tells him to be gone, and will quickly execute her own orders, if he does not

work upon the compassion of some of her guests. If these guests get up and make room for him, other intruders immediately appear demanding the same favour. The report of a provision for all that come, fills the hall with numerous claimants. The order and harmony of the feast is disturbed, the plenty that before reigned is changed into scarcity; and the happiness of the guests is destroyed by the spectacle of misery and dependence in every part of the hall, and by the clamorous importunity of those, who are justly enraged at not finding the provision which they had been taught to expect. The guests learn too late their error, in counter-acting those strict orders to all intruders, issued by the great mistress of the feast, who, wishing that all guests should have plenty, and knowing she could not provide for unlimited numbers, humanely refused to admit fresh comers when her table was already full (Malthus, 1925: 145-146).

Many decades later, i.e. after formulating the above excerpt, the view of the American psychologist, Abraham H. Maslow, emerged, which provides an interesting illustration to Malthus' reflections. In Maslow's opinion, there is an invariable hierarchy, according to which the man satisfies his needs. This means that the needs that are higher in the hierarchy can be satisfied only upon satisfaction of the lower-level needs. In other words, needs situated lower in the hierarchy are more elementary than those situated higher. Using the concept proposed by Maslow, it can be observed that satisfaction of specific needs generates constant tensions between people. It is also a source of incessant conflicts, since from the point of view of a given person, a deficit of desirable goods and values is always present in his surrounding (Chelpa and Witkowski, 2004: 65-73). An obvious result of this deficit, as Malthus clearly suggests, seems to be constant competition, taking various forms (in the meaning of "fight") between people for goods and values they desire. In this context, it is also worth observing that it is not accidental that Malthus' concept became a catalyst for Charles R. Darwin to formulate the idea of evolution. Darwin became acquainted with Malthus' work at the end of September and the beginning of October 1838, i.e. almost 20 years after publication of his famous work *On the Origin of Species*. As Darwin himself emphasizes, it was Malthus who drew his attention towards the conflict and competition constantly existing in nature (Herda, 2011).

Summary

To summarize the above reflections, it is worth observing the highly meaningful title given by a German sociologist, Hans-Jürgen Krysmanski to one of the sections (11.3.) of his book titled *Soziologie und Frieden. Grundsätzliche Einführung in ein aktuelles Thema*, namely: *Die nächste Krise kommt bestimmt* (Krysmanski, 1993). In "free translation", the title of this section can be expressed in the following way: *Conflicts in the future are certain*.

It seems that the reflections of Kant and Malthus help us to better understand why any desires to build in future the world entirely free of conflicts are utopian. In the light of the work of Kant and Malthus, the projects outlined by supporters of the so-called conflict theories — which claim that as a result of appropriate remodelling or rearrangement of social structures, for example, all conflicts between people will be removed in the future — seem to be only castles in the air. Further on, although by proper upbringing of future generations it is possible to induce people to develop peaceful relations with others (Bazaluk, 2017), it is not feasible to entirely remove conflicts from the domain of interpersonal relations.

Moreover, each attempt to theoretically and practically handle the problem of conflicts between people should take into account the accurate observations made by Kant, who by

reference to the “unsociable sociability” of people points out the fact that man, out of his nature, is a creature incessantly inclined to enter into conflict with others. One should also not lose sight of Malthus’ reflections. The British scholar completes the achievements of the Königsberg philosopher, also suggesting an indelible cause of conflicts out of the man’s control, namely, the limited nature of the world, i.e. a constant shortage of goods and values desired by people.

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