Empathy….

At face-value I think everyone would agree that if empathy (or any of its close sentiment-relatives) existed between Israelis and Palestinians then they wouldn't be at each others' throats. But going by one's own experiences, one knows that one's sentiments, whether positive or negative, are often prompted or shaped in reaction to events or situations around one rather than being a set of behavioral displays any one of which can be activated by conscious will at the press of a button: I cannot –typically- invoke anger in myself or a sympathy for a crying child except if I am confronted with a situation where such sentiments are called for. I am not here discounting character: the innate dispositions, different among people, to be the kind of person who would react one way or differently in reaction to events or situations around one. One can safely assume that some people are by nature kinder than others, and some less mindful. A far less safe – and perhaps more popular Hobbesian kind of assumption- is that our natures or instincts are in any case predominantly negative and self-centered.  But leaving this matter aside for now, I think we must all agree that specific sentiments are in general stimulated in reaction to situations rather than being conscious acts of will. Indeed, these specific sentiments having different orientations, presumed predominant on the negative side, is what led the German philosopher Immanuel Kant to come up with what he called 'the categorical imperative' –that universal maxim only acting in accordance with which can characterize an act as a moral

one, and as an expression of human autonomy. Some of us will be driven by our natural inclination to help a person in need; but it is only when the cause for our act is not that inclination itself, but the moral maxim that this is what anyone in my situation ought to do can we determine that my act is of my free will as an autonomous agent. Otherwise, Kant would say, my impulsive act –considered good or bad- would be caused by my nature, or by a series of prior causes I am not the originator or sovereign of. Conscious autonomy, and the free will associated with this, were essential in his understanding of what a human being meant. It is not the prior presence of a good-will nature –even one, one might add, that is medically brought about with the use of a pill- that can assure us of a moral order; rather, it is the conscious decision of the human agent to do that which ought to be done by all. Perhaps the biological manifestations of the act in the person's organism may be similar however these are brought about; but Kant would probably still claim that being prompted by instinct or by will makes all the difference as to whether the act was truly moral.

Injecting Reason like Kant does into our perspective already therefore raises a critical question about the moral role instinctive empathy might play in a conflict –even were we to find a way to increase its dosage, so to speak, in the human condition. But already, even on the assumption that it, or its close sentiment relatives, can play a positive role, what was already said about empathy needing to be prompted or 'stimulated' makes the picture –our initial observation- quite complex if it were to be seriously considered as a practical tool for determining policies: while it may seem reasonable to suppose if there were empathy there would be no enmity –thus favoring the thought that *this,* more than anything else,

must therefore be the long sought-after rosetta stone for all our troubles- the challenge we would find ourselves immediately facing is how to make such a button actually work in a political system. After all, political systems and decision-making mechanisms are far more complex than single organisms. For a start, think of the different kinds of state systems that exist, and therefore for which part of a population the empathy button should be pressed in order to effect change; or which different groups or parties, or individuals belonging to them, may be critical in political decision-making processes, and that therefore need to be targeted; or indeed, what, in some state systems, can be defined as a critical mass of a population where the pressing of that button would bring about the required sea-change in public opinion. Even more to the point would be the challenge of activating such a sentiment in each individual belonging to whatever group one decides is a determining factor, allowing for the different specific prompts required for each of them to produce that sentiment. After all, more than perhaps anything else, such sentiments are individual rather than group-indexed. What stimulates a caring sentiment in me can be quite different from what stimulates such a sentiment in my neighbor. If, to counter all these potential obstacles to the diffusion of empathy among a population, habituation through education rather than a pill is proposed –for example, through raising awareness for the need to account for others- then we will surely find ourselves back in Kant's laps, where it is by means of cognitive processes that we now hope to achieve our goal. Here the maxim 'I ought to be empathetic in my relations with others' comes to replace at the primary level my instinctual disposition to be or not to be empathetic.

On the other hand, were we to follow in Kant's footsteps by emphasizing the rational component of our acts –essentially, by agreeing that it is moral *reasoning* that must underwrite such acts rather than sentiments, we will not find ourselves any the safer. To repeat, Kant's observation clearly shifts the weight of moral decision-making to the realm of reason, essentially implying that it is by rational means that conflicts can be morally resolved –by my coming to regard the rule that I ought to be empathetic, for example, a duty I am obliged to fulfill. But this leaves us with a quandary similar in kind to that of relying on sentiment, for, just like sentiment, it is not at all clear how morally reliable Reason's rules are. Reason, after all, is possessed of the peculiar feature of being pliant to serving different masters, besides also –as Kant would have it- to serving itself at the *ought* level. Such masters, as different ends defined by the different parties, are multitudinous and conflictual at the states level: in international relations theories, for example, we are often and typically bombarded with the hypothesis that what determines state policies are such interests, each clearly being different from the other, and optimally only intersecting at certain points where, by the use of Reason, a working relationship between the different parties can be worked out. Initially, this way of seeing things may at first seem Kantian –in that we are called upon to consider rational calculations as the determining factors in political decision-making, rather than what in this context may be described merely as soft sentiments. But being calculative and being benign are totally different. For a start, so-called interests are primarily defined by self-centered parameters rather than by a Kantian universal law, these often being reflected in social dis-equilibriums, or what one might ordinarily regard as plain injustices in the human condition. The rule by one people over another is one example, as is the

appropriation of its territory for its self-aggrandizement. The calculative pursuit of self-defined interests is also reflected in such matters as so-called 'collateral damage' –a euphemism for causing death to non-combatant women and children; or targeted-killing –also an umbrella for justifying extra-judicial executions. The actions of the so-called 'Islamic State' can also be subsumed under this category, namely, the execution of calculated but cold-blooded measures for the fulfilment of divinely defined ends. All these latter examples are not, of course, ruled by the special reasoning Kant had in mind for the categorical imperative, but they are ruled by his preliminary hypothetical imperative, the mechanical substrate for the former – that descriptive conditional in the realm of everyday acts where we choose those means which we believe will help realize our desired ends. This causal calculation is what defines rationality, according to this view, never mind what the ends are. This distinction –between Reason as end and Reason as means- is quite popular in the literatures. In an interesting recent work on the Crusades Christopher Tyerman challenges the common view that the pre-Enlightenment European Middle Ages were characterized by the absence of rationality: the meticulous logistical, financial, political and public-opinion calculations needed to carry out those crusades reflected a well-established culture of rationality, he tells us. Those ages, we are led to conclude, were not 'dark' if the the measure of this was the use of Reason. In all these real-life examples, ends are separated from means, the former typically defined from a self-centered perspective, with rationality simply coming to be defined as the calculative means for achieving those ends. Turning away from sentiment and to Reason for an answer to conflicts, therefore, is a path laden with danger: unless the ends themselves are defined by (moral) Reason –as Kant wished this to be-

we would be left as much in a quandary as that we found ourselves in as we considered empathy. How, for example, could we by means of a pill or by education reconcile between an Israeli goal to subject Palestinians to perpetual control, and a Palestinian goal to be totally free? Surely, all that Reason can do for us is to institute a co-existence mechanism where such conflicting goals will remain immanent.

This observation leads us to consider another angle of the empathy-proposition: for it can further be said that that initial observation (if there were empathy, there would be no enmity), while true, is in any case redundant as can be shown by any number of historical examples where conditions of peace between groups or nations or states are often and typically 'negative', meaning they are more in the nature of the withholding of conflict or of being a conditional suspension of enmity and war, rather than being states of affairs yielding an outpour of empathy between sides. In other words, actual or existing peace among states is more often defensive in nature or negative rather than 'positive'- almost Hobbesian, one might say, their determinant factor being the safeguarding of one's territory, or self. Indeed, surveying attitudes of Israeli peace proponents – for example the Labor Party's recent peace proposals- this said appeal to the 'negative' benefits of peace on Israel are plain to see: it is because Israel's Jewish majority needs to be maintained that populated Palestinian territories have to be somehow disgorged. Or it is because a Palestinian may end up as Jerusalem's mayor one day that many Arab neighborhoods in Jerusalem need to be given over to the Palestinian authority. One can view in like-manner the 'peace ideas' proposed by Israel's right –including that Israeli Palestinians be somehow

disenfranchised. Neither attitude is prompted by what can be described as a positive sentiment towards Palestinians, and both are clearly egotistic and self-focused. Typically, if one looks around for injustices in the world, one often finds them embedded in these kinds of peace, for self-centered peace conditions or plans are often defined by balances of power rather than by the altruistic imperative. Yet, peace around the world continues, unreliably, to hold, no love gained or lost between the parties involved. Turning back to Kant, such conditions of peace are by definition temporary. For contrast, one can define positive peace as an instantiation of that other element often vocalized in these contexts but rarely allowed to determine them, namely, justice. Justice must be conceived as an equilibrating mechanism in international relations before which all nations are judged equal, irrespective of the status, power or resources they hold, and where all men are likewise considered equal, simply by virtue of belonging to the human race. Offhand, in the Israeli-Palestinian case this would straightforwardly imply an equitable distribution of rights, whether collectively or individually. But if such a positive peace is too idyllic, even negative peace is often elusive, as the case has been in the Israeli Palestinian context.

In sum, then, whether one follows the trail of Reason, or that of sentiment, the impression one comes out with as one seeks the sought-after rosetta stone for a positive or negative peace is that of a brick-wall, with no clear path either round it or through it. While Kant's moral maxim, if followed as a duty, combines Reason with the effects of what one presumes are the values arising from positive sentiment, our very knowledge that in real life such a maxim is not followed, and is instead typically replaced by self-serving maxims, makes us feel as much at a

loss as when we found ourselves ending up by turning to pure sentiment. In both areas we end up asking the rhetorical question –whose answer we know pretty well- whether there is a secret button by pressing which we would succeed in magically transforming dispositions –whether of Reason or of Sentiment-in such a way as to bring two conflicting sides -for example, Israelis and Palestinians- to a peaceful resolution between them. Indeed, all I have said may begin to make us wonder whether we have properly identified the right trail to follow in the first place.

I've so far led you along what might begin to seem like a maze from which there is no satisfactory exit. However, part of the problem has to do with our assumptions –classic distinctions and associations between ideas that seem to leave us entrapped, unsure how to proceed. At this juncture I will therefore just state a few propositions by way of challenging those said distinctions and associations, hoping thereby to readjust our focus, and to help us find a satisfactory exit from this maze.

*My first proposition* is that the classical rationalist position to view our instinctual nature primarily in negative terms –as if to assume that our instincts are predominantly egotistic, these only coming to be pruned to be associative through acculturation- is surely mistaken: I would suggest –along with many others- that instincts like compassion and empathy are just as active at the primary level as our instincts for self-serving desires or wants. It is just plain mistaken to assume that our primary instincts are only for 'our dear selves'.

Related to this, *my second proposition* is that it is unnecessary for us therefore to feel that Sentiment and Reason must belong to generically separate realms, the one having to be brought in at the heels of the former in order –so to speak- to prune it. It is more likely that this hypothesized consecutive order between the two (what we might call 'the 'disjunctive' hypothesis, where Reason and Sentiment are posited as being generically different) should give way to a 'conjunctive' view -where the conceiving of an end can be considered to be typically inseparable from –indeed, as a function of- the conceiving of the causal mechanism by which to realize it. This 'conjunctive' view does not deny that behavior can be prompted at times exclusively by one or the other of these two; it simply asserts that their birthplace is one, and they are typically conjoined, as when the child's sense of hunger is accompanied by her cries to be fed. This proposition relieves us from holding on to the distinction between Reason as means and desires as ends, and therefore from seeking Kantian moral ends in the nether-world of *ought.*

*My third proposition*, following from the above two, and concerning values, may be described as *a constructivist* view -that what we view as our moral choices (ends) are simply a historical outgrowth of our real choices (ends), pruned over time to become formulated as universal values. The *is-ought* distinction, therefore, that separates between rational moral ends and real ends- and therefore also on that account between means and ends- is fictitious: The difference between a Roman regarding himself as a citizen possessed of certain inalienable rights to the exclusion of so-called barbarians, and an Italian regarding himself today as being possessed of certain inalienable rights as a human being, is

not one due to some rational discovery; rather, it is due to a historical process whereby different values as choices (ends) that are inextricably tied to the practical mechanisms by which these are realizable (means) slowly come to be standardized in the context of human interactions.

*My fourth proposition* –what we may call 'a convergence view'- is that an ultimate brick in this moral construction of values seems to be being crystallized in our day and age to being that of the double-principle of freedom and equality –these essentially being two sides of the same coin. By fortuitous circumstance, or natural design, these two happen to be rooted in the two primary instincts of egotism and altruism, or of fear for oneself and of fear for the other.

*My fifth and last proposition* –to do with psychological attitudes, and relevant for our discussion here- is that just as it is possible by repellant rational or emotive behavior for one party to make an antagonist of another, it is conversely true that by opposite behavior to make a partner of another. This is perhaps more true of general publics even than it is at the personal level. By this proposition, calculative reasoning in the determining of acts by one party –how it projects its image, as being one which is sympathetic or not- can be optimally employed to stimulate positive (or negative) psychological attitudes in the other.

Informed by these propositions, let me conclude my observations by trying once again to see how Reason and Empathy (and its relatives) may be drawn upon in the pursuit of a peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict:

*First*, it is important to be aware that- by the lights of present-day values- a just peace that may be the closest to what, in Kant's words, can be called 'perpetual' is one *both* that would be so through the *equal distribution of rights* among Israelis and Palestinians, whether in one state, or two, or in any conjoined form that will allow the country to be indiscriminately possessed by the two peoples; *and*, is not likely to be realized in light of present-day political realities. Here, I am simply dismissing the notion of an abstract justice, replacing it by one defined as a rationally conceivable end in terms of present-day values. On the other hand, in emphasizing political realities, I am also ruling out for the foreseeable future the practicability of achieving such an end -what would count as a 'positive peace'- leaving us with the theoretical option of a 'negative peace' –one that is primarily self-preserving.

*Second*, from Israel's point of view, a self-preserving political condition can either be predicated on the prioritization of a territorial imperative (whatever justification for this is used); or on the prioritization of a demographic imperative (however this is explained). The first approach would not require a negotiation partner, while the second does. However, for such a partner to be dealt with as such, its good-will must be *seen* ultimately to exceed its latent threat –the real reason in this account for identifying such a partner. An engagement with such a partner would therefore consciously be for the establishment of a negative peace –the imperative being self-preservation, however this is defined.

*Third,* unlike the case in many other national or state conflict-situations, what was referred to above as 'a partner' in the Israeli-Palestinian case is not just the team

of government officials sitting across the table, but the publics themselves: an Israeli-Palestinian 'negotiation', unlike in many other cases, and because of the geo-demographic contiguity of the two publics, is one where factors determining the psychological state of the public are at least as important as the technical details –military and otherwise- deemed necessary by professionals for security or self-preservation: in other words, for the conditions of a negative peace to obtain, the Israeli *public* must be made to *feel* relieved of the direct or immediate fears it may have of the Palestinian *public.* Unlike the *reasoned-out* fear felt by experts or elites on the Israeli side –such as that of an ultimate internal dissolution of a viable Jewish state brought about through political stasis- *direct* public fear can be caused by any number of exigent factors, including - unfortunately, as recent polls show- by Palestinian acts of violence.

*Fourth*, direct public fear on the Israeli side can be used to garner support for a policy that dismisses the existence of a peace partner. Equally, it can be used to reinforce a policy informed by reasoned-out fear, but *only* if the Palestinian public comes to be seen *at the right time* in a positive light, by the Israeli public. This means that for a negative peace to emerge from such conditions, a convergence of circumstances must come or be brought about through an alignment of the right image of the Palestinian public in Israeli eyes at the right time with the right efforts on the Israeli side by those seeking that peace and who are motivated by reasoned-out fear: such a convergence can be fortuitous and objective, or it can be a conscious and rational alliance across the national divide. As an aside, one might add that, in theory at least, the conditions arousing Israeli direct fear (i.e., Palestinian violence) which can be used as a prelude to or a justification for a call

for peace on the Israeli side, can either be spontaneous or deliberately brought about by either side.

*Fifth,* unlike the Israeli public's defensive psychological posture, or negative reasons for reaching peace, the Palestinian public is stimulated by two *positive* desires, *in the sense that neither is the defense of something already in their possession*: one of these is ending the occupation and becoming free to rule their destiny, and the other is ending Israel and asserting hegemony throughout the land. The latter requires a continued state of war. The former is satisfiable by a state of peace. This presents us with the curious situation –not necessarily a feature of all conflicts- where although or because one side sits, literally, on top of the other, the party underneath strangely possesses more options than the one above. The limited options for the party on top are determined by the nature of of its negative (or self-preservation) motivation for changing the paradigm: letting go of its tactical advantage may simply turn the tables against it. The free choice for the party underneath –given the positive motivation for ending the occupation- is that between displaying behavior that increases fear in the Israeli public or that which exhibits fear-allaying signs. At opportune moments, such as when the negatively motivated peace seekers on the Israeli side can tap into the directly-felt fear in their own public, the display of fear-allaying signs on the Palestinian side would serve well the latter's realization of its positive motivation for reaching peace.

*Sixth*, the above account reveals that while it is primarily the factor of urgency that underlies the self-preservation motivations for achieving peace on the Israeli

side, what underlies its efforts on the Palestinian side must have to do more with calibrating actions in such a way that freedom from occupation as a positive desire comes to be appropriately aligned with the mechanism to achieve it. Framing desirable ends and operationalizing means here are inseparable from one another. As such, psychological attitudes and behaviors on both sides are integral to the process. It should be added that Israeli actions on the ground can tip the balance either in favor of those on the Palestinian side seeking such peace, or in favor of those seeking a unilateral peace. In this inter-connected frame, then, Israelis and Palestinians can help each other in order to help themselves.

In conclusion, my remarks have aimed at helping us see how best to understand the play of rational or sentimental motivations, and how best to employ their interactive forces, in order to develop best conditions for reaching peace between Israelis and Palestinians. Such a peace would be *negative,* given the 'self-preservation' motivations of one side for it, and the 'self-realization' motivation of the other side for it. I have tried to show that even in order to achieve such a peace, basic assumptions about these motivations -the distinctions or associations between them- have to be questioned, and another perspective provided.