



The Other and the Dilemma of Coexistence: From the Instinct for Survival to the Ethics of Sharing

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Abstract

The contemporary world is witnessing profound transformations in the structure of human relationships as a result of the escalation of wars and conflicts among human communities. Giving that from ethnic and religious conflicts to technological and biological wars, this suggests that humanity stands at a decisive crossroads: either coexistence despite differences, or confrontation that may lead to shared destruction. In light of this troubled reality, the question of coexistence re-emerges, not as a utopian theory but as a human and philosophical horizon that rethinks the nature of the relationship between the self and the other within a reality that imposes itself through violence, which leads us to question once again the true meaning of "coexistence" and why it appears as a distorted vision and a stalled project. It seeks to outline the features of human interaction beyond the dichotomy of absolute peace and permanent war. Accordingly, coexistence should not be conceived as a state of perpetual peace, because conflict and struggle are an integral part of human reality. It is therefore necessary to find just, equitable, and shared frameworks that regulate the relationship between the self and the other, accept tension and conflict as structural elements of this reality, and strive to manage them rather than deny them or assume their disappearance.

Keywords: Coexistence; Ego; The Other; Conflict; Confession; Hatred; Rational Criticism; Dissimilarity; War.

Introduction:

The world today is witnessing profound transformations in the nature of human relations as a result of the unprecedented escalation of tensions and wars among human communities. From ethnic and religious conflicts to technological and biological warfare, and from identity-based extremism to the crises of migration and displacement, humanity appears to stand at a decisive crossroads: either coexistence despite differences or confrontation that may lead to shared destruction, starting from the current human condition, this study seeks to explore the paths toward coexistence and the conditions that make it possible within a reality that imposes itself through violence. In this context, coexistence emerges not as a utopian philosophical theory but as an existential necessity imposed by the very nature of our world. Thence, otherness becomes an existential stake in the possibility of building a relationship between the self and the other that allows coexistence despite the clash of identities and interests. However approaching the concept of otherness through its various philosophical trajectories is undoubtedly important; it is not the primary focus of this study. Rather, this study takes



otherness as its point of departure and analytical framework for understanding the possibility of coexistence in a pluralistic world, which leads us once again to question the true meaning of "coexistence" and why it appears as a distorted vision and a stalled project? Human history confirms that wars and conflicts have always been, and continue to be, the most dominant features of human life. On that account, peaceful coexistence is neither the rule nor the prevailing norm of international life. If it is essential today to reconsider what is at stake in coexistence, can the avoidance of shared destruction constitute a new form of possible coexistence? And could the wars of the future become the new foundation of our shared humanity?

This study aims to formulate a new and alternative horizon for interaction between the self and the other as the basis for a balanced human relationship that rethinks the possibilities of encounter and interaction beyond the dichotomy of absolute peace and perpetual war. Employing an analytical-hermeneutic approach, the study goes beyond mere description to reveal the mechanisms that shape relationships among individuals. It recognizes tension and conflict as integral components of human reality and seeks to manage them rather than deny or surrender to them, thereby contributing to the development of possible forms of human encounter.

1. The Human Being and the Other: From Association to Conflict

Self-consciousness is what distinguishes human life, and this awareness necessarily entails recognizing the existence of the other and acknowledging them as a partner in life and in existence in general. For, human existence can only be realized within a community. Living in society is not merely one option among many, for "man was made to become social." In keeping with Rousseau's proposition, human history demonstrates that the common or shared interest has been a fundamental incentive for peoples to become acquainted with one another and to coexist together. Giving that it was from this process that human society emerged in its earliest form: from a life of simplicity to civilization, from movement and nomadism to settlement, and ultimately to the construction of civilization. Furthermore, as Al-Tawhidi notes, "man is incomplete through need and complete through seeking." Humanity therefore strives to attain completeness rather than remain deficient or fragmented. It must compensate for its shortcomings by drawing inspiration from the other whenever the need arises. This is the meaning of Rousseau's statement: "If none of us had any need of others, we would never think of uniting with them" (Todorov, 2009, p. 31). Further, the genius of humankind lies in its ability to transform "its life from disbelief, fear, and conflict into unity and closeness with the other through a new invention represented by the law, which must be respected" (Abu Talib, 1995, pp. 24-25). Hobbes, for his part, questioned why individuals need to live together and why life in society is necessary. Besides, in his writings, he argued that escaping the condition of the war of all against all compelled human beings to create an artificial person embodied in the state. Yet later, under the very name of that same state, wars were waged and continue to be waged. For, the motive behind this coming together may have been, the reality remains that we live in society because there is no other possible form of existence available to us. The equation of shared life is therefore founded upon the dual relationship between the



self and the other, since "the human, in the end, is a composition of two" (Fathi, 2021, p. 131). Such coexistence does not necessarily require loving the other as much as it requires a vigilant consciousness grounded in responsibility and in its absence, the city is transformed into nothing more than a space governed by the law of disorder and chaos.

The question of the self and the other, as well as the issue of coexistence with the other—the outsider, the stranger, and the one who is different has been the subject of discussions extending from Hannah Arendt to Emmanuel Levinas, Paul Ricoeur, Jacques Derrida, Judith Butler, and many others. In her definition of coexistence, Hannah Arendt states: "To live together in the world means ultimately that a world of things exists between those who have it in common, just as a table is located between those who sit around it. The world, like every in-between (In-Between), both relates and separates human beings at the same time" (Al-Maskini, 2016, p. 41). And by saying "the world," Arendt does not refer merely to material and inanimate objects; instead, she means everything that human beings can produce and share, including language, laws, culture, art, memories, and so forth. Therefore, the world unites us as individuals because we live within it and share it as a space for action and communication. At the same time, however, it separates us because each of us occupies a unique position and possesses a distinct perspective. Notwithstanding today's world reveals troubling paradoxes under the dominance of a form of unilateralism nourished by conflict, selfishness, and self-love. In reality, the conflict between the self and the other is an existential conflict, embodied in the statement, "In the beginning was murder," which depicts the conflict between Cain and Abel and presents it as a powerful model through which we can understand the relationship between the self and the other. As stated in Surat Al-Ma'idah: "Narrate to them in all truth the story of the two sons of Adam. When they made an offering and it was accepted from one of them and was not accepted from the other, the latter said: 'I will surely kill you.' Thereupon the former said: 'Allah accepts offerings only from the God-fearing'" (Al-Ma'idah). Upon examining Cain's declaration, "I will surely kill you," and Abel's response, "I shall not raise my hand against you to kill you," we find that these verses portray the first form of human conflict in history. In reality, this is not merely a conflict between two brothers, but a confrontation between a self (Cain) and an other (Abel). Cain perceived his brother as a threat, and in the words, "I will surely kill you," the moment of negating the other clearly emerges, which is a decisive moment in understanding the nature of human violence, demonstrating how the inability to recognize the other as an autonomous self becomes a principal cause in the emergence of conflict. On the other hand, it becomes evident that the moment of killing and conflict is not a passing event but rather part of human nature itself. Additionally, the Qur'anic narrative offers no resolution to the confrontation; instead, it concludes with murder, signifying both the inevitability and the persistence of conflict. Nonetheless, Abel's response "I shall not raise my hand against you to kill you" expresses a moment of moral and voluntary awareness that refuses to confront violence with violence, elevating our understanding to another level, suggesting that the conflict was not between one strong party and one weak party, but between two wills: one chose killing and violence, while the other consciously chose to reject and restrain them. Thence, the first murder became the



symbolic foundation of human conflict, and every subsequent conflict is but a repetition of the conflict between Cain and Abel, albeit in different forms and under different pretexts. As long as conflict, in its absoluteness, remains the law of life, our central question is not how we may share existence in peace, but rather how we may become worthy of survival. For if shared life is an inevitability, then survival must be an achievement.

The Other and International Conflict: When Difference Becomes an Instrument of War

The central problem in the relationship between the self and the other lies in the way diversity and difference are transformed from a source of human richness and an existential possibility into symbols of domination and control, where the other is no longer perceived as a partner in existence but rather as an enemy, a threat, and a means of justifying the logic of war and aggression, and instead of becoming a space for plurality and human diversity, difference is turned into a symbolic pretext for violence, producing distorted representations of the other as the "intolerable other," in Julia Kristeva's terms this violent instrumentalization of the principle of difference clearly demonstrates that otherness has not been understood as a value at least not politically. Conversely, it has been stripped of its ethical significance and employed in a purely pragmatic manner as a mechanism of domination. It is impossible to discuss the dialectic of the self and the other, and the nature of the dominant forms of conflict, without referring to the long-standing civilizational antagonism between East and West, or between "Us" and "Them," in Edward Said's terminology. Equally important, concepts such as the "Clash of Civilizations" and the "End of History" have contributed to intensifying these manifestations of conflict, which reached their peak following the events of September 11, these events appeared to validate Huntington and his theory of civilizational conflict, a vision that was subsequently reflected in geopolitical discourses seeking to redraw and reshape the map of the world according to "cultural-conflictual" criteria, whereby the international arena is redefined as a field of inevitable confrontation among competing cultural entities rather than as a space for encounter.

The collapse of the Twin Towers was, at the time, a severe blow to the "international public sphere." It lent a measure of credibility to the theory of the Clash of Civilizations and provided a justification for the invasion of Iraq. More than that, in a blatant display of defiance, the Bush administration publicly announced its National Security Strategy, through which it asserted its right to resort to force in order to eliminate any challenge to American global hegemony. It was as though "America's national security is simply about keeping Americans alive and to hell with the rest of the world... Yet that road will lead much of the world to hell" (Barnett, 2021, p. 324). The situation in Gaza is no different and does not depart from the same subordinate principle of stripping the other of their humanity in order to facilitate their destruction and extermination, and that is reflected in Netanyahu's statement calling for the killing of Palestinians on the grounds that they are animals deserving annihilation. Such violence directed against the other truthfully expresses the inability of the self to coexist with any form of difference or any presence that exposes its own fragility. Accordingly, transforming every difference into an instrument of war reveals a profound moral bankruptcy and the absence of rational political thinking, which calls for the



development of a serious new philosophical and political vision for international relations, one that moves beyond the logic of domination and power toward a framework of mutual recognition, and such a framework cannot arise from idealistic assumptions about the possibility of achieving universal harmony or complete cultural rapprochement. On the contrary, it must be grounded in a critical awareness that recognizes that greater mutual knowledge among peoples has not always been a reliable path toward understanding or the prevention of conflict. Considering that today's wars appear more organized than ever, informed by sophisticated readings of human behavior and a deep understanding of the psychology of those against whom they are waged. For, hostility often remains beneath the surface, waiting for the moment to erupt whenever the foundations of mutual understanding are shaken or disappear. Since history is, in the end, a human creation almost equally divided between communication and tragedy, the aspiration toward a reconciled form of otherness remains fragile and defective because it has not been supported by structural foundations deeper than mere superficial coexistence, since today ideologies play a central role in creating an environment that nurtures forms of conflict serving the interests of predatory capitalism while simultaneously legitimizing the repressive conduct and aggressive policies of states. In this context, Fathi Triki differentiates between what he calls "regulated violence" and "violence outside the law," arguing that "all countries seek to regulate their own means of violence. At the global level, wars are now justified through an ideology based on combating terrorism.. This new form of violence has escaped the legal frameworks governing the use of force and aims at undermining the existing order and establishing a totalitarian system". (Fathi, Philosophers and War, 2015, p. 13) In view of the fact that, it is a form of violence that no longer submits to the traditional rules governing the use of force, it excludes plurality and seeks to empty the public sphere of the possibility of difference. Yet, although it appears as an act of destruction, it nevertheless remains a form of encounter with the other. Further, even when founded upon rejection and hostility, it reveals a presence "that cannot be overcome or erased," making violence itself a form of relationship (Levinas, 1996), albeit a crisis-ridden one that establishes confrontation rather than understanding. Thence, the relationship with the other even when built upon violence or conflict remains a relationship, however distorted or defeated it may be. In this sense, a conception of "violent coexistence" emerges before us, one that regards war as both a necessity and a genuine existential criterion through which freedom is realized only by means of struggle and sacrifice. For, war as a shared danger, plays a positive role in unifying peoples and reorganizing them. Consequently, violent coexistence should not be understood as a contradiction but rather as a dialectical possibility in which tension and conflict function as a means of connection rather than rupture. Nevertheless, this perspective may be criticized for failing to acknowledge the existence of possible alternatives to war for resolving conflicts, such as recourse to international and humanitarian law, which could have spared humanity the immense costs of violence and destruction.

Hate Speech and Difficult Coexistence:

Kant declared on numerous occasions that "the greatest evil afflicting civilized nations arises not from present or past wars, but from the constant preparation for the next war." It was for



this reason that he wrote *Perpetual Peace*, a project addressed to humanity as a whole, calling for the establishment of a universal peace in which war would have neither presence nor place. For, war in all its forms, constitutes an equation opposed to humanity, morality, and ethical values. Hence, humanity is obliged to eliminate its causes and motives in order to achieve a lasting global peace. However, a reading of the current political, cultural, and social reality inevitably tempers Kantian optimism. Considering that Kant neither witnessed the tragedies of the two World Wars, nor lived through the age of nuclear weapons, the partitioning of our Arab countries, the execution of their rulers, or the massacres committed by the Zionist entity in Gaza. Such horrors are sufficient to shake our confidence in the very notions of coexistence, dialogue, and the acceptance of the other. Regardless of the fact that these notions represent a rational vision expressing the desire for coexistence, encounter, exchange, and mutual understanding among peoples, they often appear to us as attempts to anesthetize the consciousness of defeated nations. Further, the ideological and political instrumentalization of the discourse of coexistence through its trivialized and superficial use has obstructed its realization, instead laid the foundations for a counter-discourse nourished by human emotions namely, the discourse of hate. This raises a fundamental question: Do peoples have the right to hate?

Hate speech today constitutes a direct threat to the very idea of living together, as it functions as a form of psychological warfare that targets social behavior and transforms symbolic violence into an ideology before it becomes aboveboard aggressive and extremist conduct; it feeds upon feelings of resentment and the desire for revenge. Further, in the philosophical context, hatred is understood as a powerful, intentional, and irrational emotion nourished by disdain, hostility, discrimination, and intolerance toward the other, as well as by the desire to eliminate their presence or replace them. As Aristotle expressed it, hatred is the desire for the annihilation of the hated being. The production of hatred operates through various models and at different levels, yet they all share the objective of constructing and reinforcing an antagonistic consciousness that is exploited within ideological or authoritarian contexts. Some forms are associated with igniting wars between states, while others are concerned with fostering internal conflicts within a single country and fueling hatred and division among its people on the basis of race or religion, with the aim of inciting sectarian tensions and amplifying discord and conflicts that may ultimately escalate into civil wars. The efforts of the West can neither distort the image of the Arab individual through its media be overlooked, as they have contributed to the emergence of the phenomenon of Islamophobia, the phenomenon which gained further credibility following the violent and bloody events that took place across the Arab region, which portrayed the Arab individual as a terrorist, a murderer, and a religious extremist. From this perspective, lying, falsifying facts, manipulating minds, and spreading false consciousness have become among the principal strategies employed in the manufacture of hatred. Moreover, the pages of history bear witness to the crimes committed by European colonizers against the Indigenous peoples of the American continent, and to the inhumane, hatred-driven treatment inflicted upon Native Americans, which marked the beginning of wars of extermination. This historical trajectory



extends to what is taking place in Gaza today, where a war destroys the land before it destroys the people. Concurrently, this American terrorism continues to violate our Arab lands and to wreak havoc in many parts of the world in search of new "Amerindians."

The public sphere today is witnessing a remarkable rise in discourses that seek to confront the rhetoric of hatred and rejection and undermine its foundations under the slogan: "Humanity is always nobler than those who wrong it." Yet, as Al-Miskini notes, it is not easy for humanity "to dispense with certain doses of hatred in order to invent a certain measure of happiness." Seeing that according to him, hatred is a cultural passion that cannot be understood independently of its historical content, for "we hate within a particular imaginary, within a moral space, and according to norms already given" (Al-Maskini, 2016, p. 34). For, hatred often bears a cultural or national signature. Thence, the victim does not need to justify their hatred before the conscience of humanity. Considering that, hatred is not a base emotion, as traditional ethics has classified it, but rather the product of accumulated trauma and the absence of even the most basic forms of justice. Albeit it is difficult to imagine a world entirely free of hatred, it is equally impossible to expect a human being to love their executioner or to extend affection to the one who has humiliated them, destroyed their dreams and future, devastated their homeland, or violated their dignity. On that account, love cannot be imposed upon the victim as a moral obligation, for such a demand exceeds the limits of human capacity. Simultaneously, it is unreasonable to expect the victim to offer forgiveness before recognition has first been granted. Hence, the ethics of tolerance and love can only be meaningfully advanced once their necessary conditions, recognition, dignity, justice, and responsibility have been fulfilled. For, coexistence is not only a matter of sharing the same geographical space or living side by side. Conversely, it is an ethical and political project that seeks to rethink the foundations of recognizing the other through a deeper understanding of the suffering embedded within collective memory. In the absence of such recognition, it becomes difficult to speak of any genuine coexistence. By the same token, Paul Ricoeur emphasizes the need to differentiate between preservative memory and critical memory, underscoring the importance of just forgetting as a means of rebuilding healthy relationships with the other (House, 2004, p. 25). Eventually, even transitional justice cannot be achieved without a form of symbolic reconciliation that restores dignity to the victim without condemning the other to the status of an eternal enemy. Additionally, we shouldn't overlook the role that philosophy plays in this regard as a critical and analytical discourse that seeks to deconstruct and transcend the rhetoric of hatred, replacing it with a new language that opens the horizon for a different ethics, one that sees the other as a possibility for encounter and a space for shared understanding rather than an inevitable conflict. As Hannah Arendt observed, the common world can only be built when we recognize that no one is capable of living alone (Arendt, 1958, pp. 22-24).

Coexistence as a Philosophical Challenge:

In light of the transformations the world is witnessing today, the traditional discourse on otherness, mutual acquaintance, or tolerance is no longer sufficient, particularly when this type of discourse fails in the face of real-world challenges that expose its inability to bridge



the gap between intellectual positions and practical conduct especially in relation to humanitarian and existential issues. In this regard, the Palestinian cause and the recent events in Gaza provide a compelling example, where there remains a persistent insistence on "portraying the Palestinian as a problem rather than as a people with a legitimate cause, and an extension of an Orientalist logic that views the non-European as a being surplus to requirement" (Edward, 1982, p. 102). Accordingly, not every call for coexistence constitutes an expression of a genuine human possibility for encounter, which is why there is a need to adopt a philosophical vision capable of establishing real mechanisms for coexistence. Since the problem lies not in understanding what ought to be, but in questioning how living peacefully with the other can become genuinely possible. It is here that postcolonial approaches acquire particular significance, especially in the work of Edward Said, who called for the deconstruction and transcendence of the unilateral forms of representation through which the other is portrayed by means of stereotypical images shaped by the imagination of the dominant self. He advocated replacing these representations with a more open hermeneutic horizon, one that embraces the possibilities of encounter, recognition, and attentive listening to the other beyond the patterns of objectification and superiority.

In harmony with this orientation, Ali Harb called for dismantling closed discursive systems and deconstructing the mechanisms through which meaning is produced in its absolute form. Such an approach makes possible a transformation in patterns of communication that are founded upon exclusion and centralization, replacing them with new forms of encounter that regard the other as an active participant rather than an object of domination, he viewed this as a genuine possibility for managing public affairs. In his book *Interests and Destinies*, he affirms that contemporary societies are increasingly engaged in a global reality and a globalized civilizational horizon in which disasters and crises are deeply interconnected, these crises are not a mere material in nature but are, above all, crises in the architecture of human relationships and in the management of difference. For, Today's world is governed by new concepts that impose new forms of coexistence, and the true challenge in building a healthy and shared life does not lie in withdrawing into oneself or seeking refuge in fear, but rather in liberating ourselves from our fears and engaging in life as an act of partnership. In view of the fact that, a healthy life is founded upon recognition, difference, and negotiation in ways that reshape both interests and destinies, the solution therefore requires changing "the architecture of the public sphere, transforming the forms of communication, deconstructing the dominant symbolic structures, and liberating minds from closed representations, rigid doctrines, proclaimed absolutes, and essentialist propositions" (Ali, 2010, pp. 12-13). For that reason, the essence of the philosophical challenge requires a reconfiguration of the nature of the relationship between the self and the other, away from the logic of domination and the erasure of difference. For, coexistence can become possible only when it is founded upon the recognition of the fragility inherent in the human condition. Giving that human vulnerability is the criterion through which we come to understand the profound interconnectedness of human destinies, for destiny itself can only be built through partnership.



The COVID-19 pandemic revealed this truth with remarkable clarity, it demonstrated that human beings can no longer protect themselves in isolation; their safety became dependent upon the safety of everyone else. For, human beings do not hold their destiny in their own hands alone, and this is the very essence of coexistence: seeing the other as a partner in a shared destiny. Further, the pandemic offered a profound ethical lesson, confronting humanity with two alternatives: either we survive together, or we perish separately. It also showed that genuine coexistence is not achieved by avoiding conflict, but by coexisting with conflict itself, and any conception of living together that ignores this reality is merely naïve. For the central challenge of otherness today does not lie in avoiding conflict, but in reframing it within a horizon broad enough to include everyone, where living with the other even in the midst of confrontation becomes an opportunity to build a shared humanity rather than an arena for its disintegration. Perhaps the most important contribution philosophy can make is to remind us that we become truly human only in our encounter with the other, through the other, and together with the other.

Conclusion:

Reflecting on the stakes of otherness today is not a mere philosophical question or an idealistic ethical proposition; conversely, it is an existential question. As conflicts intensify and waves of extremist identities continue to rise, the other is increasingly perceived either as an enemy or as a distorted reflection of the self, and this clash of identities undermines the spaces of rapprochement and turns every difference into a threat rather than a possibility. Consequently, the question of otherness has become a decisive issue that determines the very fate of human coexistence and constitutes a genuine test of our humanity. The problem does not lie in the presence of the other, but in the way that presence is constituted: is it a presence founded on proximity and coexistence, or on confrontation and war? The analysis has shown that conflict is an inherent part of the original structure of human existence. Nevertheless, it is not an inevitable destiny but rather a reality that can be reshaped and redirected. Coexistence is not built upon good intentions alone; it requires a profound awareness that recognizes that, no matter how pervasive evil may become, how numerous and intense differences may grow, or how deeply conflict may escalate and erupt in its most violent forms, none of these can ultimately undermine the possibility of human coexistence or eradicate its foundations. The challenge, therefore, is not to eliminate conflict or escape from it, but to manage it wisely and to develop mechanisms for governing disagreement and difference in order to create a common ground through which we share the human space. Hence, living together does not require dreamers as much as it requires optimists who believe that evil, whatever its form or nature, is ultimately transient and incapable of destroying our shared humanity.

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