

*The Socio-Philosophical Evaluation of Conflict
Resolution and Synergy: A Path to History*

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Introduction

Of the classical founders of social science, conflict theory is most commonly associated with Karl Marx (1818-1883). Based on a dialectic materialist account of history, Marxism posited that capitalism like previous “Socio-Economic Systems”, would inevitably produce internal tensions leading to its own destruction. Marx ushered in radical change, advocating Proletarian revolution and freedom from ruling class. At the same time, Karl Marx was aware that most of the people living in capitalist societies did not see how the system shaped the entire operation of society. Just like how we see private property, or the right to pass that property on to our children as natural, many of members in capitalistic societies see the rich as having earned their wealth through hard work and education, while seeing the poor as lacking in skill and initiative. Marx rejected this type of thinking and termed it “false consciousness”, explanations of social problems as shortcomings of individuals rather than the flaws of society

Marx and Fredrich Engels observed that society is composed of groups divided into social classes, which are engaged in a conflict or struggle over claims to wealth. According to Marx and Engels, the ruling class of society owes its position to its ownership and control of means of production. The ruling class dominates other social groups in society by using the institutions of society to perpetuate its position of privilege.

Modern conflict sociologists such as Wright C. Mills and Ralf Dahrendorf did not only view class as constituting a conflict between social groups, but they also viewed race, religion and ethnicity, as sources of conflict in the society.

Man being a philosopher has always told stories of struggle leading to development. This, in other words, entails that conflict is a necessary ingredient to harness the full potentials of the society, which is a conglomeration of different individuals, with different ideologies. Most philosophers have engaged themselves in the argument that the universe is a product of confusion and struggle, example is the “big bang theory” of evolution.

The universal struggle between ourselves as being unique, separate and different from others with our specific blend of experiences, abilities, attitudes, aspirations , needs and wants and our social selves, intricately connected, and interdependent on others-our loved ones, our friends and favored groups, our communities and cultures, leads inevitably to internal as well as interpersonal conflict.

Diversity however, though it may lead to conflict, plays an important role in the flourishing of communities and societies. One of the challenges of modern society is harnessing the synergy that emerges from the interaction of these differences. As there are diversity in different spheres of life, there is always the tendency of conflict, this is because conflict arises out of people’s different ideologies, opinions, philosophies and mindsets, which are yet to be harmonized.

This introduces us to synergy and conflict resolution. Synergy and its goals are to resolve conflict by using the sum total of individuals’ ideas to produce a greater effect, than as each of the individuals will do.

Synergy and Conflict Resolution at a Glance

Synergy is described as interaction of two or more agents or forces so that their combined effect is greater than the sum of their individual effects, while conflict is a state of disharmony between incompatible or antithetical persons, ideas, or interest; a clash.

Nevertheless, difficulties are not meant to rouse not discourage. The human spirit is to grow strong by conflict.

The term synergy comes from the Greek word 'synergia' – meaning “working together”. It is therefore the interaction of multiple elements in a system to produce an effect different from or greater than the sum of their individual effects.

In the natural world, synergistic phenomena are ubiquitous, ranging from physics (for example the different combinations of quarks that produce protons and neutrons), to chemistry (a popular example is water, a compound of hydrogen and oxygen), to the cooperative interactions among the genes in genomes, the division of labor in bacterial colonies, the synergies of scale in multi-cellular organisms, as well as the many different kinds of synergies produced by socially- organized groups.

In the context of organizational behavior, following the view that a cohesive group is more than the sum of its parts, synergy is the ability of a group to outperform even its best individual member. These conclusions are derived from the studies conducted by Jay Hall on a number of laboratory-based ranking and prediction tasks. He found that effective groups actively looked for points in which they disagreed and in consequence encouraged conflicts amongst the participants in the early stages of the discussion. In contrast, the ineffective groups felt a need to establish a common view quickly, used simple decision making methods such as averaging, and focused on completing the task rather than on finding solutions they could agree on. In a technical context, its meaning is a construction or collection of different elements working together to produce results not obtainable by any of the elements alone.

Synopsis of Conflict, Conflict Resolution and Synergy

The term was refined by R. Buckminster Fuller, who analyzed some of its implications more fully and coined the term 'synergetics.'

- A dynamic state in which combined action is favored over the difference of individual component actions.
- Behavior of whole systems unpredicted by the behavior of their parts taken separately, known as emergent behavior.
- The cooperative action of two or more stimuli (or drugs) resulting in a different or greater responses than that of the individual stimuli.

We cannot understand any system by seeking to comprehend each component. When elements interact with each other, there is a flow of energy between them, perhaps in the form of nutrients, water, food, or information. Synergy is when the sum of its parts; $1+1=3$. We have the individual elements and we also have the relationship that adds further complexity and characteristics.

Many parents will identify with having to manage not only the demands of each child but also the dynamics between them, which can create more work. The whole is not predictable from looking at the parts because, we do not know what the relationship and flow of energy between them or how that will influence each part. From this synergy of interactions, new properties will emerge.

We cannot predict the wetness of water by looking at oxygen and hydrogen molecules separately. From neurons, consciousness and creativity emerge. The number of possible relationships increases exponentially with the number of parts. Perm culture seeks to create more synergy in systems by seeking to make beneficial relationships between the different elements of systems.

Drug Synergy

Drug synergy occurs when drugs can interact in ways that enhance or magnify one or more effects or side-effects of those drugs. This is sometimes exploited in combination preparations, such as codeine mixed with acetaminophen or ibuprofen to enhance the action of codeine as a pain reliever

Biological Sciences

Synergy of various kinds has been advanced by Peter Corning as a casual agency that can explain the progressive evolution of complexity in living systems over the course of time. According to the synergism hypothesis, synergistic effects have been the drivers of cooperative relationships of all kinds and at all levels in living systems.

The thesis in a nutshell, is that synergistic effects have often provided functional advantages (economic benefits) in relation to survival and reproduction that have been favored by natural selection. The cooperating parts, elements, or individuals become, in effect, functional “units” of selection in evolutionary change.

Similarly, environmental systems may react in a non-linear way to perturbations, such as climate change, so that the outcome may be greater than the sum of the individual component alterations. Synergistic responses are a complicating factor in environmental modeling.

Pest Synergy

Pest synergy would occur in a biological host organism population, where, for example, the introduction of parasite ‘A’ may cause 10% fatalities and parasite ‘B’ may also cause loss. When both parasites are present, the losses would normally be expected to total less than 20%, yet in some cases, losses are significantly greater. In such cases, it is said that the parasites in combination has a synergistic effect.

Toxicological Synergy

This is of concern to the public and regulatory agencies because chemicals individually considered safe might pose unacceptable health or ecological risk in combination.

However, in normal agricultural practice, it is rare to use a single pesticide. During the production of a crop, several different materials may be used. Each of them has had determined a regulatory level at which they would be considered individually safe. In many cases, a commercial pesticide is itself a combination of several chemical agents, and thus the safe levels actually represent levels of the mixture.

In contrast, a combination created by the end user, such as a farmer, has rarely been tested in that combination. The potential of synergy is now unknown or estimated from data on similar combinations. This lack of information also applies to many of the chemical combinations to which humans are exposed, including residues in food, indoor air contaminants, and occupational exposures to chemicals.

Corporate Synergy

Corporate synergy occurs when corporations interact congruently. A corporate synergy refers to a financial benefit that a corporation expects to realize when it merges or acquires another corporation.

This type of synergy is a nearly ubiquitous feature of a corporate acquisition and is a negotiating point between the buyer and seller that impacts the final price both parties agree to.

There are distinct types of corporate synergies:

Management and Synergy of Participation

Synergy in terms of management and in relation to team working refers to the combined effort of individuals as participants of the team. The condition that exists when organizational parts interact, to produce a joint effect that is greater than the sum of the parts acting alone. Positive or negative synergies can exist. In these cases, positive synergy has positive effects such as improved efficiency in operations, greater exploitation of opportunities, and improved utilization of resources.

Negative synergy on the other hand has negative effects on production in the firm with effects such as reduced efficiency of operations, under utilization of resources and disequilibrium with the external environment.

Human Synergy

Human synergy relates to human interaction and teamwork. For example, say person 'A' alone is too short to reach an apple on a tree and person 'B' is too short as well. Once person B sits on the shoulders of person A, they are tall enough to reach the apple. In this example, the product of their synergy would be one apple.

Another case would be two politicians. If each is able to gather one million votes on their own, but together they were able to appeal to 2.5 million voters, their synergy would have produced 500,000 more votes than had they worked independently.

Synergy usually arises when two persons with complementary skills cooperate. In business, cooperation of people with organizational and technical skills happens very

often. In general, the most common reason why people cooperate is that it brings a synergy.

On the other hand, people tend to specialize just to be able to form groups with high synergy.

The Philosophical Interpretation of Conflict (War), In Contradistinction with Self and Others

The philosophical interpretation of conflict is the description of war. An alternative definition of war is that it is an all-pervasive phenomenon of the universe. Accordingly, battles are mere symptoms of the underlying belligerent nature of the universe; such a description corresponds with a Heraclitean and Hegelian philosophy in which change (physical, social, political, economical, etc) can only arise out of war or violent conflict.

Heraclitus decries that “conflict (war) is the father of all things,” and Hegel echoes his sentiments. Interestingly, even Voltaire, the embodiment of the Enlightenment, followed this line: “famine, plague and war are the three most famous ingredients of this wretched world... all animals are perpetually at war with each other... Air, earth, water are arenas of destruction.” (from pocket philosophical dictionary).

Alternatively, the Oxford Dictionary expands the definition to include “any active hostility or struggle between living beings, a conflict between opposing forces or principles”.

This avoids the narrowness of political-rationalist conception by admitting the possibility of metaphorical, non-violent clashes between systems of thought, such as of religious doctrines or trading companies. This perhaps indicates a too broad definition, for trade is certainly a different kind of activity than war, although trade occurs in war and conflicts, and often motivates war.

The Oxford English Dictionary’s definition also seems to echo Heraclitean metaphysics, in opposing forces act on each other to generate change and in which war is the product of such a metaphysic. So from two popular and influential dictionaries, we have definitions that connote particular philosophical positions.

The Latin root of war (bellum) gives us the word belligerent, and duel, an archaic form of bellum; the Greek root of war is “polemos”, which gives us polemical, implying that and aggressive controversy. The Frankish-Germanic definition hints at a vague enterprise, a confusion or strife, which could equally apply to many social problems besetting a group; arguably it is of a lower order sociological concept than the Greek, which draws the minds attention to suggestions of violence and conflict, or the Latin, which captures the possibility of two sides doing the fighting.

The present employment of ‘war’ may imply the clash and confusion embedded in early definitions and roots, but it may also, as we have noted, unwittingly incorporate conceptions derived from particular political schools. An alternative definition that the author has worked on is that war is a state of organized open-ended collective conflict or hostility. This is derived from contextual common denominators, that is,

elements that are common to all wars, and which provide a useful robust definition of the concept.

This working definition has the benefit of permitting more flexibility than the Oxford English Dictionary's version, a flexibility that is crucial if we are to examine war not just as a conflict between states (that is, the rationalist position), but also as a conflict between non-state people. Other forms and shades of war can emerge spontaneously such as ritualistic wars, guerilla uprisings, cultural wars, etc which in essence has no centrally controlling body.

Different Shades of War (Conflict)

War is always as a result of opposing ideas, opinions, beliefs and doctrines. Every war is caused by something, either definite or indefinite. War or conflict is an effect, which is traceable to a cause.

Nevertheless, we have different shades of war/conflict:

a). **RELIGIOUS WAR:-** This form of war or conflict arises out of people's different religious beliefs and practices. Every religion has its doctrines, beliefs and modes of teaching. And no two religions have the same beliefs. This is the major reason why there is always religious crisis among different religions

For instance, in Nigeria, we have freedom of religion and each person has a right to any kind of religion he/she prefers. But when people gather for the good of the society, it happens that people now come together with their different religious beliefs, which will cause conflict or even war.

Christians and Muslims do not have the same belief or faith. They have divergent beliefs about the world, and most especially about humanity. While Christians believe that killing is bad in every sense of it and not justified, Muslims hold that killing merits one heaven and that the more you kill the more you acquire for yourself many possessions in heaven. And this has been one of the major crises and conflicts resulting from Christians and Muslims.

b). **ECONOMIC WAR:-** The economic war theory is original to Karl Marx and Fredrich Engels. They believed and fought against capitalism. For them, capitalism is antithetical to common good of the society. This kind of war arises when there is a deprivation of justice. According to Marx, the capitalists and the feudal lords control every means of production. They tap the energy of the proletariat, and use their man-power to increase production rate.

But at the point, there is always a state of anti-thesis, when the proletariat will organize themselves and fight for their own right and for justice. At this point, there is an economic crisis, which will lead to a stable economy.

c). **ETHNIC WAR:-** This kind of war arises out of ethnic beliefs and practices. This is a form of war between two ethnic groups. For instance, war or conflict between the Igbos and Yorubas.

This is as a result of disharmony or disagreement between what each of the tribes believes in. An ethnic conflict or ethnic war is an armed conflict between ethnic groups. It contrasts with civil war on one hand (where single nation or ethnic groups is fighting among itself) and regular warfare on the other, where two or more sovereign states (which may or may not be nation states) are in conflict.

d). WARLESS WAR:- This is a kind of war that is a self war. A warless war is a form of internal conflict, which one has, out of his not believing in anything. Here, the individual believes in nothing, he stands for nothing, anything can go for anything. He has no standpoint/perspective/point of view and philosophical background. Such an individual is in conflict with the self. He is in war with him/herself. Not believing in anything implies believing that you are not believing, and eventually you are believing.

Lessons/Philosophical Implications

1. Conflict is a concept with a dual character. When positively handled it yields a better out-come. But when negatively handled, it leads to more conflict and confusion. So conflict is a condition-sine-quanon for an integral development of the human society at large.

2. The Marxian notion of economic conflict is a pictorial representation of how the human society has developed from the stage of thesis, and finally to the level of synthesis, which eventually becomes the new thesis.

3. Synergy is the most perfect way to harness cooperation in every sphere of humanity. This is because it encourages togetherness, and paves way to achieve a higher goal, other than one single individual could have achieved.

4. Unless a conflict is resolved, it will continue to linger, and cause more problems. This is why every conflict goes a long way with its conflict resolving method.

5. Philosophically, conflict leads to new knowledge as expressed in Socrates (the method of mid-wifery), Heraclitus, Hegel and Karl Marx. This is because two opposing views must produce a balance, and that balance of harmony produced is a new knowledge.

6. Human synergy makes it possible for a cooperative affair between individuals of different sector to harness the goal of unity and increased productivity in business, and creates room for good human relationship.

7. In computer synergy we see the combination of human strengths and computer strengths, such as advanced class. Computers can process data much more quickly than humans, but lack the ability to respond meaningfully to arbitrary stimuli.

8). In market synergy, the use of information campaigns, studies, and scientific discovery or experimentation for research promotes the sale of products for varied use as well as development of marketing tools and in certain cases exaggeration of effects

9). In revenue synergy, there is an opportunity of a combined corporate entity to generate more revenue than its two predecessors stand-alone companies would be able to generate.

10). It is now obvious, that philosophically speaking, synergy is as a result of conflict resolution. In humanity, synergy creates room for cooperation to enhance better yield. The ultimate goal of synergistic union is to enhance better output.

Conclusion

It has been proven beyond reasonable doubt that conflict is one of the integral components of human development, and the development of the human society at large. Philosophical knowledge has made a great impact towards the proof stated above. There is always a need to eschew the fixed bias and fixed mindset, which we have already preconfigured about conflict. In the enlarged human society, conflict is necessary, in order to produce a better effect. Thus the conflict we are talking about is not war resulting in bloodshed, but conflict of knowledge, which will produce a new knowledge and clear all our doubts. In every conflict, there is always something to be harnessed, something to be derived, just as Socrates harnessed new knowledge from the philosophical method of mid-wifery, which is a method of questions and answers, or simply put – the method of dialectics. Conflict resolution and synergy all work hand in hand, such that each complements the other. Synergy is always the solution to conflict resolution and every conflict must have the method of resolving it, and this method, philosophically must give way to new knowledge.

Suggested Further Readings

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