

Nonkilling Philosophical Reaction: Flattery in Empty Rhetoric and Sophistry sham Politics in the Russia / Ukraine Conflict

by Clay Edwards

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The U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Milley predicts that this war will last for a long time. Indeed, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin reportedly said that the object of US/NATO assistance to Ukraine in the February 24 Putin police action in Ukraine is to weaken Russia, evidently by draining off the lethal potency of the Russian war machine. Indeed, Russian Colonel-General Leonid Ivashov argued that President Putin's military action is calculated to divert the attention of the Russian people from the dismal political and economic conditions that impair the health of Russian society.

General Milley may have good reasons for saying this. Indeed, the comments of Secretary Austin and General Ivashov should alert us all that Putin's so-called special military operation is like Truman's police action in Korea, a problem in justice – challenged bare rhetoric and sophistry covering what is explicitly political in the ignorance of bad habits in a routine of cookery. Plato likened cookery to a routine -concocting empty of nutrition tasty food that starves the body into disease while fattening it into obesity. This is in political terms the flattery of the international community which built an economic system in Eurasia that alternately feeds and starves and kills people. Ukraine is the open eruption that reverberates in mass killing and oppression starving Ukraine and Russia of their people and driving human dislocation and hunger around the planet. The injustice is manifest and requires immediate political intervention to save lives.

The problem is political even if Clausewitz perhaps is interpreted to establish war as outside of politics. In Gorgias, Plato speculated in a way that suggests that politics is always there even when violence and killing cover it up in sham. It all is a matter of competence in generating and directing and recycling power, much as one might build and operate a dam to direct and redirect water and return it to desirable use. We either do it or we just don't do it. If politics is the management of human souls in medicine and justice; with the sight of legislation as it affects bodily fitness, we have the hypothesis of flattery, the art of making things pleasant, which deals in empty rhetoric, sophistry, habit and cookery to distract us from reality - i.e., to conceal it from us and prevent us from addressing the truth and redirecting our energy to empower ourselves as a human community. In Timaeus, Plato has Socrates say:

"Gladly would I listen to anyone who should depict in words our State contending against others in those struggles which States wage; in how proper a spirit it enters upon war, and how in its warring it exhibits qualities such as befit its education and training in its dealings with each several State whether in respect of military actions or in respect of verbal negotiations. And herein, Critias and Hermocrates, I am conscious of my own inability ever to magnify sufficiently our citizens and our State. Now in this inability of mine there is nothing surprising; but I have formed the same opinion about the poets also, those of the present as well as those of the past; not that I disparage in any way the poetic clan, but it is plain to all that the imitative tribe will imitate with most ease and success the things amidst which it has been reared, whereas it is hard for any man to imitate well in action what lies outside the range of his rearing, and still harder in speech."

Plato put forward a hypothesis that Flattery, the art of making things pleasant refers to what in legal terms is a public fraud that our education system doesn't really address when it comes to politics and philosophy. We speak of a mistake in general and specific terms. This war that Putin has undertaken is by mistake, a mistake the international community shares in. The effort to punish Russia including accusing Putin of war crimes and aggression on the Nuremberg model is

a display of rhetoric without instruction in justice. The idea is to punish a bad man to help elevate our own estimation of ourselves, but in all events covers politics in sham because it expresses sheer powerlessness in the international community as among states. We speak bravely and poetically as a human slaughter takes place in Ukraine. We speak of the future to make people account - this when the immediate problem is to get everyone to put their weapons down and work on learning the matter of justice among ourselves. That is truly the issue of this war.

Justice should be the foremost concern in our lives, no matter our struggles. Punishment whether of Russians or Ukrainians or anyone else does not determine human character because the choice of a different life inevitably determines a different character and therefore demonstrates the imperative of justice in art. Punishment should be rightly inflicted and make people better and profit thereby. In medical terms, we deal with the curable and incurable. In legislation, we deal with conditioning for the better and this implicates better political education. Wealth and poverty and sickness and health are the intermediate conditions addressed by justice. It is at the point of these conditions which appear the supreme hazard to all of us. This is why we need a nonkilling global political education in our schools to prevent or remediate despotism.

In sophistry, we speak bravely and incoherently as we seek to separate ourselves from each other. Thus rhetoric and sophistry become ingrained in habit and in ignorance making an unhealthy though perhaps good-tasting stew to elevate the mood in a disaster. The Russians become pathological liars who dumb down thinking they know what they don't know, and the west in speaking truth covers over its own deficiencies in thinking about and implementing European security arrangements. We Americans flatter ourselves by encouraging in some way the idea that the Europeans cannot or will not take care of their own house and we keep American forces employed around the world, armaments industries thriving and killers killing. We are all in a mess of cookery of very bad food that misleads as to its nature and we have to find a way to climb out of it - as Glenn D. Paige (Nonkilling Global Political Science, 2002) put it, changing the paradigm.

I think this is what Plato tried to do in *Timaeus* where he constructed a character he conceived as having scaled the heights of philosophy and politics together in the company of Socrates, Hermocrates, and Critias. Plato saw Socrates miscast as a sophist who was convicted falsely of defaming the Athenian gods and corrupting the youth of Athens, while at the same time, calling himself a politician in *Gorgias* and intimating Pericles as running a state into the ground on flattery as historians credited him as a democratic leader, leaving trash behind him in monuments, the Parthenon and other infrastructure from misused funds. Hermocrates was a great statesman who prevented a war between the Greek settlements of Sicily and Athens but who found himself so wrapped up in a war against Athens on behalf of rival Greek cities that he was undermined at home and killed when he tried to return to Syracuse. Critias, apparently Plato's uncle was perhaps Athens' cruelest and most ignorant tyrant who I read was killed abandoning his soldiers and running away from a battle with the democratic forces in the Athenian civil war. The guy ran Athens for a year extorting people with goon squads and betrayed everyone including the rest of his group the thirty tyrants.

Again, we can look down the barrel of Glenn D. Paige's funnel of killing (Nonkilling Global Political Science, pp. 74-80) and look to the unfolding fan of nonkilling possibilities and have the opportunity to make the best choice by educating ourselves about both. That could take a while. My concern is that we could overuse time in a world of habit and nukes.

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