



## Transcript

### Civilisations, Barbarity, Conquest, Legitimacy and Crimes of War, 31.05.2022

*This public event took place in the IWM Library on 31 May 2022, with John Dunn. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February of this year has cast a glaring new light on a very old but ever more urgent question. In his lecture John Dunn asked, if there are any terms on which the human population of the world could still hope to live with one another in peace and personal freedom into a future of many generations? Do we still have any rational horizon for collective hope over time?*

**John Dunn** is Emeritus Professor of Political Theory at King's College, Cambridge, Harkness Fellow at Harvard, and Fellow at King's College in Cambridge. He is currently Krzysztof Michalski Fellow at the IWM.

I'm going to speak, of course, about the war in Ukraine and what I think it means. That's the point of the title. But before I start, I need, as trustees of British charitable institutions are legally obliged to, to declare an interest. My wife, who is a British university teacher was born in Odessa and has her second home and in fact, her second life there. And she was there late in January, this year, with our four-year-old daughter. So this is my war too.

I'm speaking, as you can see and hear for yourselves as a pretty antiquated British university teacher. So what I think and have to say reflects the sensibility and experiences of my own life. Born in England, a few months after the battle of Dunkirk as the son and grandson of officers in the British Army, when my country was facing the Third Reich, more or less alone, and had little rational expectation of surviving its onslaught.

So that's the life from which what I have to say comes as all human thinking has always come and had to come from the particular time and space-bound lives of an individual human being. I don't apologize for its provenance because it makes no sense for anyone to apologize for who they are. You should apologize for what you've done and left undone, not for the

contingencies of your birth, and upbringing, or the settings through which you moved before you could hope to choose for yourself.

For me, it's a very great privilege for which I'm duly grateful, I hope, to speak under the auspices of the institute that's provided such a home for a number of people I care about and admire greatly. Especially my brilliant, brave, and tragic pupil Tony Judt. For Charles Taylor, 90-years-old last year, who opened so many vistas for me, when I was first trying to learn to think about the history of human imagination, and especially the human imagination of politics. And for Tim Schneider, who has written and spoken for the miseries and heroism of the blood lands more eloquently and searchingly than any other Anglophone scholar, and far more powerfully and discerningly, I think, than any career politician of whom I'm aware. I don't think of President Zelensky as a career politician.

It's important for me, though, that I don't mean what I'm trying to say to be addressed primarily to you, as the audience here tonight, in this ancient and extraordinary city, or the citizens of the NATO powers and military alliance to which my country belongs, and about whichever the decades of its existence have very often had quite ambivalent feelings.

The audience I centrally have written it for isn't mainly for you who've had the courtesy and optimism to come to listen to it tonight, but for one, which couldn't be here. For the many peoples of the great mass of the world beyond our borders to the east and south, and any of their citizens I could certainly hope my words might sooner or later reach. And most especially, I have in mind the Chinese listeners to whom I was invited to speak this month in the second China Global Forum, but couldn't agree to, because I knew and had to tell my prospective hosts and hostesses that they couldn't show in the People's Republic at this point what I would have to say and say it as clearly and forcefully as I can. They said, of course, "Well, couldn't you just talk about something else?" But I'm afraid I couldn't talk about something else now.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February of this year, or, to put it more accurately, since it was his choice and his alone to launch it, Putin's invasion of Ukraine has cast a glaring new light on a very old, but ever more urgent question. Are there, actually, any terms on which the human population of the world could still hope to live with one another in peace and personal freedom into a future of many generations? Could we still create, even now together, a *modus vivendi* of real duration, a *modus vivendi* which could hope to last for many generations of human experience and action, last into an indefinite human future?

We know now as we didn't yet in the year 1940, 81 years ago when I was born, that any future generational horizon is going to be in ever starker jeopardy because of the colossal and ever less controllable harm we're still inflicting as a species on our global habitat. We know, as we could have known in much of Europe for at least the last three centuries, that the world was then as it mercilessly remains a vast distance from realizing those terms, and that it couldn't in principle realize them at all rapidly. We still have only a tiny repertoire of forms through which to try to act collectively on any scale: international agencies, civilizations maybe, states, peoples, or if you prefer nations. Each of doubtful efficacy and eminently questionable legitimacy, which of those forms could still take how much of the strain of creating and sustaining that framework for sharing the earth, and how and why could war still feature as anything but grounds for despair within that ever more desperate struggle.

War, more dramatically, is a more immediate and overwhelming threat to the ways of life of the vast majority of the world's human population now than it has been for at least six decades, or the very least, ever since the world held two hostile thermonuclear strike forces because that alone has always placed it at risk of global devastation more or less by accident. It's arguably in greater immediate danger at this point of utter disruption as a result of deliberate human choices than it's ever been before. Mutual assured destruction did in the end, prove to carry a fair amount of rational inhibitive force for several decades during the Cold War. And we need to recognize how reckless it was to choose to dismantle the structure through which that force was exerted. You also need to recognize whose choice it was to do the dismantling. So much for the occasion for what I have to say, but one of the terms under which I've chosen to speak.

The civilization is the grandest, largest, most enduring unit that humans have yet created for trying to live together for the better over time. It's not a bounded territorial unit or an integrated unit of coercive control and putative authorities any state must aspire to be, nor is this an immense and opaque tissue of instrumental exchange, like the global market. Every civilization is an edifice of value, and a focus of pride for those who see and feel themselves as belonging to it. It necessarily values itself, but it always has more discretion over how far to value any other civilization and risk its own diminution by doing so.

Barbarity, by definition, my definition, the sense in which it appears in the title. Barbarity, by definition, is the enemy of any civilization, a vacuum of value, and a menace to any hope that humans on any scale can live together for the better. Barbarity isn't other people's, it's what human beings must not do.

It works permanently within every civilization, blunting the aspirations of all who belong to it whenever it breaks out into the open and canceling most of the value of the civilization itself. Plainly, it's not an ethnographic category, in the way I'm thinking of it, a full and accurate description of any grouping of human beings as a particular point in time. Rather, it's a fiercely assertive normative category with a very volatile hold on any of us over time, especially in time of war.

The essence of barbarity is the destruction of human value, worst on a colossal scale. The peak episodes of barbarity in the last century were Germany's Third Reich, and the Japanese Imperial assault on China, Southeast Asia, and in the end, with wild improvements, the United States of America. That time, barbarity was defeated and defeated in the end by means all too barbarous in themselves.

I didn't see with my own eyes the relics of that barbarity in Japan itself until four decades later when even in Hiroshima, they'd been largely tamed into an edifying tourist spectacle and the vast firestorms which swept through Tokyo and its other great cities were just a memory and one which those who could still remember them, on the whole, prefer to keep to themselves. But I did, however, as a young child, driven through the ruins of Hamburg in my father's army staff car a year or two later, I did see some of the destruction reaped there by the Allied Bomber Forces. So I knew long before I tried to think about such things, that barbarity is inseparable from war and can't readily be confined to those who fight on a wholly unjust basis.

Barbarity never simply disappears from the world, although it can die down for quite long periods over much of the world's surface. It's been prominent enough in recent decades, in Afghanistan, in Iraq, in Syria and Libya, in Yemen, in Central Africa, and Ethiopia. Today, appallingly, it's come back on a huge scale in Europe itself, the continent that prided itself so much, for most of my lifetime, on having put war firmly behind it. In doing so, it's brought into increasingly, direct confrontation two great military powers, each fully equipped to destroy the human world by choice.

Why begin to think of this huge crisis through, of all categories, the category of civilization? One in the worst of odor, with social scientists, and widely seen as politically toxic. None of the three most prominent modern thinkers who focused extensively on it as a category, the British historian and student of international affairs, Arnold Toynbee, the cosmopolitan

sociologist, Norbert Elias, nor the American political scientist, Samuel Huntington, did so in a way which much illuminates what's happening now.

I begin from it now because there's nothing else beyond it for us still to appeal to. In a great European city like this one, those of us who come from Europe see ourselves naturally from the horizon of our own continent. And the value register through which we think and feel is a historical product of the history of that continent over a very long time. Three or so centuries ago, almost everyone who held articulated beliefs about value for human beings in this city and others to the west of it, believed they lived in a world designed and made by an omnipotent and beneficent creator. When all else failed them, as of course it frequently did, they could and often did appeal to heaven itself. "Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints, whose bones lie scattered on the Alpine valleys cold," read the great English poet John Milton.

Now, even most of those who still believe there to be a heaven would seldom think to look to it for practical aid, especially in conditions of great collective peril. In a global crisis as acute as this one, the bearers of any civilization have no choice but to reach out as bravely and lucidly as they can to the many other civilizations still active in the world and to appeal to what those value too. That appeal may always fail, as it plainly failed already, in the case of Russia itself, for all its dazzling literary, musical, and artistic heritage, when the metropolitan of Russia's Orthodox Church took up Putin's invitation, I don't suppose it was exactly an invitation, but you understand what I mean, to bless the war he had unleashed. And so many other Russian citizens cheered it so heartlessly and brutally on its way.

To reach that degree of abandon of human decency has required Russia's citizens to submit to a vast befuddlement and to embrace a picture of the huge majority of Ukraine's inhabitants, which is utterly ludicrous to anyone who has been there within the last few years. More disconcertingly still, it required them to succumb to attitudes towards other human beings, which are shockingly vicious.

No, war brings out mainly what is best in human beings, and especially when it becomes at all intense, lasts for any length of time, and involves much of a population at all directly. But this war has barely begun yet for most of Russia's citizens except those unlucky enough to be drafted to fight in person. But most, it's interfered a bit with their consumption opportunities. And already, more than a third of them have expressed themselves to pollsters

happy to unleash thermonuclear weapons on the people their leader has chosen deliberately to attack.

In unleashing that attack at this point in his personal tenure of power, Vladimir Putin has done something truly terrible. He has made himself an enemy of the human race as a whole, drastically deepened the pressing threat he's already faced to any secure and collectively acceptable future, and sharply worsened its prospects for preserving the world as a viable human habitat on any scale into a lengthy future. In his own eyes, as he told his subjects and the world at large, he did so to reestablish and reassert Russia's power in the world, and do so on behalf of its historical civilization. Hence, the need and the occasion for the metropolitan's sleazy blessing.

Most civilizations in the world today don't view their own value through the prism of conquest, a non-invasive the practical horizon of our species can no longer afford to. Seen domestically, the rule of civilization must always be a regime of peace. But every civilization, like almost every external state, won its territorial and demographic extension and established whatever sway it now holds over its population, largely through military conquest. Territoriality has never defined itself and never could do so. Political incorporation and subjection have always issued largely from armed coercion. Most civilizations across human history have viewed their own military extension unapologetically and proudly. It's inherently easier to distinguish civilization from barbarity at any point in time if you're not at the receiving end.

Now that human beings have accumulated the power to destroy the conditions of their own existence, whether all but instantaneously or by relatively slow and cumulative ecological degradation, any hope for the human future requires that civilizations can and will learn not merely to coexist in peace, but also to cooperate closely and unreservedly together in arresting ecological degradation, and reversing as much of it as can still be reversed. They need and need more urgently than ever before to arrest barbarity across the world. They have no choice, but to implement that coexistence and cooperation predominantly through the existing system of states and its fragile structures for acting internationally.

Civilizations can't govern. And most of the states which now claim to govern for them still do so quite ineffectually. The miserably, and in many ways, absurdly disunited United Nations is a comprehensively proven failure at governing the world. How can you hope to do anything of the kind when its principal instrument for uniting for peace, the Security Council, contains

a power which has chosen to make itself the enemy of mankind. It matters more than it ever has before how far the states of today can exercise their power to rule legitimately. All states, of course, claim to do so, in fact, by exercising the power they need for the purpose, and by doing so, by right, but both claims are always to some degree strained in practice, and the two are quite readily confounded. It's the claim to rule by right which is voided by barbarity and it can never hold beyond the state's territorial frontier.

The states of today offer a miscellany of grounds for viewing their own rule as legitimate from the explicit choices of their own citizens to the evident benefits their citizens derive from being ruled as they are, and others too, of course. None of those grounds runs through conquest as such, and non, any longer, can afford to.

To make war on another state today on any grounds but immediate territorial self-defense or resistance to unprovoked aggression cannot be legitimate. It is a war crime in itself. To attack civilian populations on a vast scale, destroy whole cities, and deliberately kill women and children in huge numbers decisively destroys the legitimacy of any state which decides to undertake it. Few, if any, states are qualified to judge the domestic legitimacy of another regime. But international aggression is far easier to judge and even states are quite partial, or even parlous legitimacy, are fully equipped to do so.

The Russian republic under its present leadership has voided any historical claim it may ever have held to be a site of civilization. In choosing the way of barbarity, it's made itself the enemy of the human future as a whole. A state run by criminals and answerable to the peoples of every other state for the crimes they continue blatantly to commit. The case for any political regime is fragile, poor, partial, and always very far from transparent. The case against barbarity is immediate, peremptory, and conclusive. It vaporizes any claim to act by right and with due entitlement.

The sole compelling claimant to act coercively, and we give entitlement in the world in which we now live is still a state, or an agency directly or indirectly authorized to do so by one or more states. Whenever an international court of any kind claims the right and authorities to adjudicate and do justice, it does so always on the basis of a jurisdiction conferred on it, usually by a treaty, by a larger or a smaller number of states. And whenever it succeeds in enforcing that jurisdiction, which is not that often, it does so invariably, by courtesy of the age of one or more states.

When the United Nations was created, it embodied the aspiration as it proved pretty transitory to establish an authority above states to secure peace between them and their human populations by exerting that authority. But it was paralyzed from the start and seeking to do so whenever it was needed most urgently, by the composition of the body in trusting to do the enforcing the Security Council, and the all-too-effective veto exercised by its founding members.

So if there's still no effective authority to secure peace or enforce justice above states, how and why do states themselves or any amongst their number, hold the authority to secure peace and impose justice within their own territories? We prefer on the whole now, in the continent, which invented the modern conception of the state which has come to furnish the political and legal architecture of today's world, to suppose that they do so by being legitimate and that their legitimacy, in turn, comes from us, from their citizens, conferring it voluntarily upon them, and adjusting at fairly reliable intervals to whom exactly we're still content to consign it. We're distinctly less clear which of the numerous other states across the world, which conspicuously failed to conduct themselves in that way, are indeed fully legitimate, and even less clear on where exactly to draw the line between the convincingly legitimate and the flagrantly illegitimate, or quite why it's right to draw it there, not somewhere entirely different.

But that's not the way that matters are seen by very many people in other countries, whether they happen to find themselves located inside the core institutions of the state itself, or nakedly subject to those who are. It's very hard for your appearance because of their continent's history, not to view themselves as the source and criteria and their political right. But the global confrontation today in that confrontation that sometimes all but automatic assumption is politically disastrous because it's so ludicrously egocentric. It's also damaging ingenuous about the sources of whatever degree of legitimacy their own states have contrived to achieve and sustain within their own borders. You can see that most clearly by considering the basis of territoriality.

What makes a state a state is a relation between a bounded territory, a structure of law and government, and a human population, which the latter regulates and governs. The relation between that population and its government may or may not be negotiated over time by its members choosing for themselves between the candidates to government whom they find themselves offered. But that was very seldom indeed, the way it was initially established. The



huge majority of states in the world today are ascertainably the result of military conquest, every bit as much so on the continent of Europe itself as anywhere else.

Those conquests were virtually never the outcome of anything plausibly conceived as a just war, but virtually, always the product of armed assault, or strategies of gymnastic appropriation, as a point as conspicuous in the built environment today in Vienna as anywhere else in the world. Even for those few countries outside Europe lucky or clever enough to escape conquest or devastating molestation from the European continent, it is merely ludicrous to see that history as a basis of right in any way superior to their own. And for the very considerable number of countries that were at one point or another, deliberately subjugated or massively disrupted through the exercise of European military and naval power, it is actively and intensively offensive.

So the question of where the legitimacy of the state does come from, when and where, and if it comes at all, is harder and more perturbing, and the need to pose that question now, as we survey the shaky edifice of human interaction across the globe, open our eyes and ears to the scale and ferocity of the challenges which face our species is more urgent than it's ever been before in our collective history. There's no chance whatsoever of their proving to be a simple and compelling formula, which will answer that question for us, and do so right across the living membership of our species, if only it were conveyed to them lucidly and accurately enough through the most interminable and magically par extricated process of deliberation.

There's also, I'm afraid, no chance of extricating as in that way, now or in any future we can coherently imagine from the catastrophically unequal and unjust structuring of power between living human beings across the world. It's not merely that the history which has produced that outcome has been to such a large degree, a history of brutality, plunder, and exploitation, a history of barbarity. The very capacity to act today, of all living human beings, necessarily reflect that terrible history. I don't mean just to wring my hands in incoherent shame or still more incoherent guilt by the thought of all that suffering, or even at the thought of the motley role my own forebears may have played in a few cases, ascertainably did play in small fragments of it.

I merely wish to underline the simple political fact that it can't be to that history, and still less from any complacency we may personally happen to feel about how it's come out, present in our own countries, that we can hope to appeal to much of the world's population as grounds for recognizing the pressing need to act together against a terrifying common threat.

There's one and only one need in a world so hideous beyond just which is indeed common to every human being over time. The need to survive and live a life worth living for as long as they have the opportunity to do so. For huge numbers of human beings throughout human history, that's not been the life available to them. And we're a better place today than ever before to judge for quite how many of us it still remains far from being so. Just think of the terrible famines burgeoning across Africa and the global food crisis unleashed by Putin's war.

When the idea of the state was first articulated really clearly in the pages of Thomas Hobbes' "Leviathan," and sometime before it was realized at all, fully, anywhere in the political, economic, and social structures of the historical world, it was on the need to survive and live a life worth living that Hobbes grounded his argument that all human beings do need the protection of a state and have a compelling reason to give their allegiance to and to obey one if they're fortunate enough to find themselves subject to it.

No state on its own can provide that protection and furnish its subjects with the life they have come to see and feel as worth living in a global habitat which is rapidly being destroyed. Only a union of states and perhaps only a union of nations, which identifies those states as their own could hope to act together to arrest that hectic process of destruction, still less begin to reverse it. Any such union, unsurprisingly, has always proved far beyond our reach so far, in our collective history, whatever terminological promises to the country may have been proclaimed in prominent settings, or taking continuing institutional shape for significant periods of time.

The grim circumstances of the present could scarcely be less propitious for a brisk movement in that direction. But their very goodness is itself an index of its ever-growing urgency. The League of Nations and the United Nations, each came into existence in the wake of terrible wars, and with the mission to prevent the recurrence of any such war. And in so far has proven practicable to prevent or briskly bring to an end any war at all.

Today, once again, we have such a war on our own continent, and for the first time in human history, we have it in very close to real-time on camera. Not of course, in its full horror with hour-long rape and subsequent murder of mothers in front of their children and their beaten and toothless children sent off to tell the tale, painstakingly recorded on video for wider audiences, but with a huge surplus of directly visually and already recorded wanton destruction and catastrophe over what anyone could possibly take in. A surplus which will go on and on mounting until the war comes to an end. It's that more than anything else, more

even than watching the endlessly genocidal fantasies on Russian public media, and the constant calls to go on to Warsaw and Tallinn and Prague and Berlin, which has forced the leaders of a very reluctant Europe to come to the aid of Ukraine's ravaged people. I didn't mean that every bit of Europe was equally reluctant. It is a summative judgment, I think, to come to the aid of Ukraine's ravaged people and its heroic armies and try belatedly to ensure that Putin's assault fails.

Much of the rest of the world's population do not have the means to watch these horrors in the same way. And a very significant proportion also have little inclination to. They either cannot or do not see them at all, or they see them and feel about them as other people's war. Some, of course, in Ethiopia or Mali, Nigeria, or Yemen, and Syria or Myanmar or actually scores of other countries have long had, very much continued to have wars implacably of their own. For others, Ukraine, and its people and their difficulties with one another, and with their formidable neighbor just seem very far away.

At one level, of course, the current predicament of Ukraine's people simply is the most of the world's population, far too far away to mean anything at all personal, even for the modest proportion amongst them, whose own lives aren't too fraught or desperate for those of others in far off countries of which they know little or nothing to mean anything at all. It was another level, of course, that natural and pre-reflected assumption may prove all too miserably misplaced. The combined vastness of global warming and the devastation of Ukraine's food exports is already spreading famine and misery deeper and deeper into many of these countries. And the price shock from eliminating those exports can only intensify that effect and we can boast the wheel and the capacity of wealthier countries closer and more sympathetic to Ukraine to come effectively to their aid, and do so on the requisite scale, and in time.

The fluidity of global trade may have ebbed and its scale shrunk already at this point for political as well as medical reasons, but the inexorable rise in global temperature and accentuated climatic volatility it already ensures, continue regardless, and the menace of global food insecurity rises sharply with them. It's no longer a refined spiritual intuition that no man is an island, but a brutal biological and physical fact. For the rich and powerful across the world, as for most members of its wealthier and more secure societies, this is yet to become a pressing practical consideration. But all of them, like all of this, across the generations, are living on heavily borrowed time, and with no coherent strategy whatsoever for managing the dizzying levels of temporal debt they've accumulated into a lengthy future.

For all of their extravagant disparities in their present life chances, they face at this point, in the end, a common doom, and a doom they can only sanely hope to avert by learning whilst there is still time to act quite differently. In the hallowed medieval formula, ominous at singularity, individually and together. It's, of course, quite possible that it's already too late to avert that doom. There's nothing within the limits set by physics and chemistry that human agency retains the power to bring about, which could secure its collective rescue. But we certainly don't yet know that to be, so even if it does happen to be, and unless and until we do come to know that it could scarcely prompt us to surrender the hope of a durable future for our species.

In the meantime, those stark disparities in individual and collective life chances across the world have one clear and simple implication. They reflect, above all, disparities in power. For human beings, power is the reciprocal of responsibility. Those who are fortunate to have much, therefore, owe correspondingly more. The incidence of famine is the simplest way to see that structure of responsibility. If human beings owe each other anything at all, they owe at least the duty, if they readily can, to prevent one another starve. Even as unsentimental a thinker as John Locke, so the free choice to fail to do that and the guilt it carries and the shame it should occasion are just the same as murder.

Unfortunately, as our collective life is now organized, we don't possess the practical capacity to prevent famine across the world. And as the warming of the globe accelerates, we risk moving further and further away from being able to do so at an ever-faster pace. But at this point, still, shifts in political conflict, which are quite discretionary and purposeful changes in distributive choice could readily reposition us to intervene promptly and effectively to prevent most of the famine that already occurs and stave off the far higher levels that are now imminent.

For Locke, of course, the responsibility to do just that, had the need faced him in person, would have followed from his picture. Actually, I don't know what he would have done, if it had faced him in person. He was quite a mean person, really. But Locke, of course, had the need faced him in person would have followed from his picture of the world as god's creation and of humans as equal creatures assigned their roles, entitlements, and responsibility within it by his unchallengeable power and authority. But none of those presuppositions are needed to recognize the force of the judgment itself.

Without some very special and evidently pertinent consideration, it's hard to see how anyone on any basis could defend the deliberate choice to let another human being starve. You might choose to starve your deadlier enemies with some insouciance, or not especially care that others, of whom you would otherwise be wholly unaware, are running out of food and water. But to choose all on its own for someone else to starve to death, if you could readily prevent them from doing so, would be a very strange human response.

In a world in which human powers and life chances were not so desperately unequal, there might perhaps be a better-shared responsibility to ensure life and lives worth living to all its human inhabitants. In our world, unfortunately, the structuring of responsibility is far more nebulous, and the pressure to act on it, correspondingly, feebler.

At this dark point in the destiny of our species, I've tried to argue. That's the occasion for acute fear. It's not a ground for equanimity. Very few of us really feel it that way so far, though, more perhaps, or at last beginning to. It's instructive to set it beside the assumption widely shared in Europe until Putin's current invasion of Ukraine that peace on this continent was a secure and virtually irreversible good evinced by the intimate tentacular expansion of the European Union, if less transparently, by the forward movement of the NATO Alliance.

In the harsh glare of hindsight that now looks disturbingly reminiscent of Christopher Clark's portrait of Europe's then leaders, sleepwalking into the catastrophe of the First World War, a narcoleptic or even necrotic condition of its people's political imaginations.

What should we think now that we've been so briskly woken up?

You scarcely need to think at all to recognize that we urgently need peace, and don't need to think at all hard to recognize, as I've tried to argue this point, we need it right across the world, still more urgently than we've ever as a species needed it before. But within the species, of course, this has always been the case. We don't individually need it with anything like equal urgency. Those who need peace most urgently are always those who don't currently have it. Those directly menaced in and by war. They have long been many millions of people with that urgency across the world. In Asia, in Africa, and Latin America. And now there are millions who need it in Europe too. If you want to see the need for peace in our continent with your own eyes, all you need to do is look at the aerial photographs of the city of Mariupol. And think of the tens and thousands of lives that have been terminated or ruined there in the last three months. Once you're dead, of course, you no longer need peace,

because peace for you could only come too late. Peace is a need for the living. Peace is what life requires for it to go on.

It was to meet that need effectively that the idea of the state was first fully forged. It was forged, of course, as any complicated idea would have to be out of a range of earlier ideas. But in its full elaboration, it consisted in one core purpose, to make and keep peace between a set of human beings. Those human beings in themselves lacked either the steady will or the dependable power to make and keep peace with one another. And each of them hence had good reason to submit their own will and judgment to its will and judgment and give it such power as they disposed of to ages it in securing that peace.

Real estates, of course, never quite realized that idea. The protection they provide is always seriously imperfect in practice, and often not offered to many of their citizens with even a semblance of sincerity. Hobbes himself offered no magical formula for ensuring either efficacy or sincerity. And none, unfortunately, has been discovered in the centuries since he wrote.

Who exactly does Vladimir Putin protect, and from just what?

States today, in all their heterogeneity, all demand obedience, but they vary greatly in the strength of their claim to receive it. Today, as in 1651, each of them deserves allegiance only in so far as it does seek to provide protection and succeeds in doing so. And it deserves it only from those to whom it does provide that protection.

When Putin's present war began, the Republic of Ukraine, like most other states in the world today, was not an especially effective state in quite a number of ways. But it's wholly false to suggest that it wasn't a state and hasn't been one throughout the term of its current president, fully and sincerely dedicated to the effort to provide protection and do so impartially, for all its citizens. That's why for years, and for those of its citizens who give it their full allegiance, this monstrous war is a wholly just war. While for the government of the Russian Federation, and those of its citizens who've chosen to make it so wholeheartedly their own war too, it's a wholly unjust war.

No doubt many of the latter have been duped by the government, which has gone to such lengths to prevent them learning anything reliable about the world beyond their borders. But much that has happened in the invasion, and much that many of Russia's citizens say with alacrity, and apparent sincerity when questioned on the streets of Moscow or St. Petersburg,

suggests something far uglier. Not merely a government but a fair proportion of people quite at ease with the war, in their name launched and conducted without a trace of justice. I fear the same may well have been true in my own country with its long imperial past, if relatively seldom, still, in my own adult lifetime definitely, quite often, for many in those of my father and mother.

What matters about states isn't their origins, none of which are above suspicion. It's their present conduct, and what that conduct makes it reasonable to believe about how they will conduct themselves in the future. The idea of the state was forged deliberately to counter and disempower a wide range of rival claims, especially claims advanced on the presumption of religious authority, and from civic or group solidarities what we might now call pluralist claims.

Hobbes, the former, the religious, necessarily specious, and the latter, the group ones, inherently divisive. He was not an enemy of cities or communities on any scale to a lesser religious faith or worship. And he fully recognized that states themselves can be divisive, if those who direct them choose to make themselves. But he insisted that states, at least, in no way need to be, and that for them to be so is wholly against their interest, and a serious threat to their stability and capacity to discharge the core purpose.

Peace is a great good and a pressing need today for every individual human being and every human society. But it can't be secured just by recognizing the urgency and universality of that need. For there to be peace, it must be kept. And it can be kept only by providing effective protection against all who threaten it. It's hard, perhaps simply impossible, to provide peace at all effectively within the borders of a state against those who currently direct that state.

That's the political story of humanitarian intervention.

Between states, it can be protected only by defeating any state which decides to violate it. Uniting to protect is still the constitutive purpose of the United Nations and the deliberate and increasingly routine frustration of that purpose, by the exercise of a veto by a permanent member of the Security Council, remains the principal sight of the UN's impotence as a peacekeeping agency. This is clearly against even the medium-term interest of every human population, however desperate and wretchedly misgoverned. It remains, unfortunately, clearly in the short-term interest of a number of those who still hold authority in several states which do hold a veto, and not always for the same states over time.

For as long as it remains so constituted, the Security Council will remain a standing guarantee of global insecurity. And insecurity, appallingly intensified ever since more than one state came to possess thermonuclear weapons, and was perhaps especially in the brief interval while only one single state did have them. From that time on, our species has stood in jeopardy to thermonuclear blackmail, to every threat to use those weapons regardless of the consequences. To implement that threat would always be a hideous gamble. With the impulse to level it once you've acquired the weapons has often proved hard to resist. And isn't obviously deranged in the same way.

It's unsurprising that this should have prompted nuclear proliferation on the scale that has already occurred, and short of a reliably effective union of states for peace, it's hard to see how that proliferation can ever be stopped. I don't know if there can be such a union. And even if there could be, it's fully evident that no one has the least idea how to create it. Until it does come into being, a great weight of responsibility falls on every effective state to judge when peace has been violated, and do what it can to restore it. It falls more heavily, the more powerful the state in question, and the closer and ghastlier the violation.

The war in Ukraine has launched a deluge of war crimes and it's a vast war crime in itself. It has wounded the civilizational claims of every civilization still clearly extant in the world and spread barbarity densely across the land in which at least, as large a proportion of the population, as anywhere else on Earth, had chosen to and wished to live in peace and freedom. It's a land too, which has long fed the peoples of very many other lands, and its devastation already ensures mass hunger across the world, amazingly, condemning millions far away from it to starve to death.

It was launched gratuitously and under the most ludicrous and shameful of pretexts. It was launched with hideous brutality and in utter cynicism. As soon as the assault began to falter, it was backed up by the threat to use thermonuclear weapons on the population of any state with the affront to impede it. If ever there has been a time to face down nuclear blackmail, and restore a just peace, this is it. If there is to be a long-term and civilized future for our species, this is a war which the aggressor must lose, and every state whose citizens have the intelligence to recognize what such a future requires, and the courage to face that blackmail, must unite to ensure that the aggressor does.

Civilization is quite a nebulous idea, and already incitement to narcissistic illusion. But there is nothing nebulous about barbarity. I chose my title over two months ago, but I think it



remains all too apt. As President Zelensky said, eloquently in his address earlier this month, "This is not a war of two armies. It's a war of two worldviews, a war waged by barbarians." This has never been a just world for its human inhabitants, and no one has ever had a clear conception of how it could be made one in practice. The nastier legacies of history can be palliated, but they can never be rectified. History, necessarily, in Edward Albee's stinging phrase, is all blood under the bridge. But perhaps even the grim and perilous world in which we now live could still become, and if it could, it certainly should eventually be made into one, in which every human being could live in peace and live a life worth living.

Any hope of extended survival for human life on a civilized scale is quite extreme at this point. But it surely remains a rational horizon for collective human hope, over time. In a world preserved in that form, if only in that form, it might still make sense to hope that all its human inhabitants could live in peace and live lives which were worth living. And even in that world, it would surely remain more extravagant to expect that that's what all of them would choose to.

The struggle against barbarity is pervasive and ceaseless. At this point in time, it's assumed an unusually clear outline, and its demands on all of us are just as pressing as they'd come to be for those who faced them on this and other continents in the bleak winter of 1941. There's no hope we will meet all those demands in full. The colossal crime of the war itself can't just be terminated abruptly by anything within our power. Until it is terminated, the innumerable individual crimes it continues to prompt will go on multiplying uncontrollably. The vast mountains of rubble will continue to pile up. The searing weight of pain will press ever harder. And hundreds and thousands of further lives will be ruined forever.

We've always failed as a species in the struggle against barbarity. And the circumstances of the present preclude are fully succeeding now, but this time as never before, if we fail, we have to once again, we must, in Beckett's lapidary phrase, fail better. Because this war is everyone's war, perhaps the first real world war.