



RETHINKING PEACE AND CONFLICT STUDIES
SERIES EDITOR: OLIVER P. RICHMOND

Pacifism's Appeal

Ethos, History, Politics

Edited by
Jorg Kustermans
Tom Sauer
Dominiek Lootens
Barbara Segaert

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Rethinking Peace and Conflict Studies

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Introduction: Why Pacifism?

*Jorg Kustermans, Tom Sauer, Dominiek Lootens
and Barbara Segaert*

1.1 WHY WRITE ABOUT PACIFISM?

It strikes us as undeniable that the notion of pacifism—the ideas and attitudes that the notion encapsulates—appeals to people’s moral intuitions. Although many of us enjoy the vicarious experience of (stylized) violence (when we watch a film or read a novel), most of us feel much less comfortable with the actual exercise or firsthand witnessing of real,

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in-the-flesh acts of violence. When we do end up committing an act of undeniable violence, many of us will feel guilty. When we are forced to commit an act of violence against our will, many of us will try to evade the command or follow up on it half-heartedly. As was documented in multiple wars of the nineteenth and twentieth century, soldiers, especially the conscripted ones, would often deliberately miss their targets. They would not fire at the enemy, but shoot their bullets in the air (Grossman 2009, pp. 12–13). Human beings are certainly capable of aggression, and there are situations where we might expect human beings to act and react violently, but most human beings do not seem to be fond of violence. It causes them distress to watch it live and they feel remorse when they have engaged in it.¹ Or more precisely: *when they know themselves to have engaged in violence*. It follows that at least the core idea of pacifism—that violence ought to be shunned—will appeal to many a (modern) person.

Pacifism, one could say, chimes with a basic human instinct to shy away from violence. There is a good reason, then, to assume that many people would call themselves pacifists, but this turns out not to be the case, neither among laypeople nor among intellectual elites. Committed pacifism remains a minority position. ‘Within international relations in recent decades,’ notes a recent paper in the same vein, ‘pacifism has been a marginalised position, most often figuring as a foil to just war theory in debates over the ethics of war’ (Hutchings 2018, p. 176; Jackson 2018). This invites a number of questions. Why is it that pacifism fails to persuade a general audience (in spite of its intuitive appeal)? Why is it that just-war-thinking has managed to become the dominant framework to think about questions of war and peace, and that, as a consequence, so many of us are busy contemplating and elaborating justifications for violence (notwithstanding our seemingly inherent dislike of it)? How ought the pacifists’ appeal be expressed for it not to be experienced—as we think it often is—as a siren song, and thus not to be warned against for its dangerous allure?

We are posing these questions at a time when pacifism seems to be staging a comeback. Recent years have witnessed the publication of a number of texts that take up the ‘defence of pacifism’ and do so articulately (e.g., Howes 2016; Hutchings 2018). This very volume could easily be read as a part of that movement of pacifistic resurgence. Many of our contributors write from a pacifist (or ‘pacifist’) position and express an awareness that pacifism cries for an update. A shifting geopolitical and geocultural context certainly motivates them to rethink the

pacifistic project and to reinvigorate the pacifistic tradition. But it is also (their reading of) that same shifting context that strengthens their conviction that pacifism ought to have wider resonance. They argue that the theory of just war had its chance, but all it did was to strengthen the military-industrial-entertainment complex. The concept of a just war sounds virtuous—it suggests ‘wisdom’ and ‘courage’—but it serves to sustain a vicious international order. Such is many of our contributor’s appraisal of the current situation, which leads them again to make the plea for the appeal of pacifism. Whether this appeal will resonate, and to what extent it will do so, remains an open question. In the conclusion to this volume, in an attempt to respond to these questions, we ascertain the promise of pacifism’s renewed appeal.

1.2 WHAT TO WRITE ABOUT PACIFISM?

But first we let our authors speak. As its subtitle suggests, this volume consists of three parts. The first part articulates a contemporary **‘ethos of pacifism’** and develops a coherent proposition as to what pacifism could—and maybe should—mean today. Cheyney Ryan defends the continuing viability of a pacifist stance in response to the continuing existence and operation of (what he dubs) the war system. Amanda Cawston radicalizes Ryan’s reflections: it is not just warfare that ought to concern us, but violence more generally, and much as with contemporary warfare, we have become alienated from today’s violence. In order to reinvigorate pacifism, she suggests, we need to ‘re-appropriate violence’. The appeal of pacifism will be undeniable once we recognize our implication in modern society’s manifold structures and processes of violence.

Ryan’s and Cawston’s chapters are steeped in the history of pacifism. Their contemporary articulation of the pacifist position clearly draws sustenance from earlier forms of pacifism, as well as from debates in and about those earlier forms. Their historical resources are mainly Euro-American in origin. However, if pacifism wants to achieve wider appeal, if it truly wants to weigh in on international debates in our post-Western world, then it should ‘de-provincialize’ its repertoire of intellectual resources. Such is the intuition that animates the second part of the volume, which begins the reconstruction of a **‘global intellectual history of pacifism’**. To de-provincialize need not mean to ignore the province of Europe, especially not in our particular case, given that the very concept of ‘pacifism’ is undeniably of European

stock. Martin Ceadel documents the Western European history of pacifism, paying specific attention to the internal debates within the British pacifist camp. Iain Attack then begins the move east. He describes the pacifism of Lev Tolstoy and emphasizes its radical nature by comparing it to the peace-thinking of Immanuel Kant. Meena Sharify Funk continues the move east and turns southward as well. She excavates pacifistic strands from within the (polysemous) traditions of Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. Mark Gelber closes the second part with a similar exploration of the presence (and position) of pacifistic ideas in Jewish and Zionist thought. Pacifism is clearly not a prerogative solely of Western civilization: there have been pacifists in all great civilizations. Even if pacifism is definitive of none of the world traditions, it is nonetheless a presence within all of them.

It is very clear from Cheyney Ryan's opening chapter that pacifism need not entail a withdrawal from the world—although pacifist expectations are maybe bound to be disappointed and, as a result, the allure of a retreat from the world sometimes great. Pacifists oftentimes engage the world politically. They want to make peace (*pacem facere*). They are peacebuilders. Traditionally, this has often meant that pacifists have sketched out plans to redesign the institutional architecture of world politics. Today's pacifism will have to engage in that task as well, although it cannot simply copy old models. Some have proven inadequate, and, more generally, it can simply not be assumed that that which worked in the past will work in the present or the future too. Changed circumstances demand revisions to any plan for perpetual peace. In this light, the third part of this volume investigates the prospects of a '**pacifistic global order**'. It begins with a chapter by Heikki Patomäki, with a sketch of what he calls a 'concrete utopia'. In the spirit of Karl Deutsch (1968), he imagines the establishment of a global security community committed to processes of peaceful change. The utopia is a concrete one. Patomäki spells out its cultural and institutional prerequisites. A global security community, he insists, must build on democratic institutions with self-transformative capacity and these institutions must in turn be grounded in a commitment to dialogical hermeneutics. However, Bart Dessein's chapter on China's world-political discourse—in which metaphors of peacefulness abound—makes it clear that the establishment of a global security community will not come easily. China is on the rise and it speaks the language of peace (even when it often acts otherwise). It is committed to an orderly international environment, but its conception

of a peaceful international order is uncomfortable with Patomäki's conception of a pacifistic international order. Other than the rise of China (and other emerging powers), the resurgence of religion is also often portrayed as an obstacle to (oftentimes) secular plans for perpetual peace. Nathan Funk takes up this matter. He accepts that religion can be a source of conflict, but nonetheless defends the moral agency of religious communities in its capacity for cooperative governance, beyond state-centric thinking. He promotes just peacemaking as an organizing framework and interfaith dialogue as its cornerstone. Religions can promote peace, he argues, if they shake off their pretensions to unqualified truth and allow themselves to show 'holy envy'; if, that is, they accept the need for self-transformation.

In a concluding chapter, the editors of this volume will reflect '**on the appeal of pacifism**'. Precisely what is its appeal? How has its appeal evolved over time? How far does its appeal reach? And in light of these questions (and our answers to them): what can pacifism accomplish? What are its limits?

1.3 HOW TO WRITE ABOUT PACIFISM?

The study of pacifism, as a body of thought aspiring to influence political praxis, can happen either from a position of involvement or a position of detachment. In the former case, one sets out to evaluate the intellectual *and* political merits of pacifism and, at the conclusion of one's efforts, one invariably comes out against pacifism or in favour of it. One either defends the value of pacifism or one puts its merit into doubt. Such an exercise will never happen in an intellectual vacuum. The merit of pacifism (or any other body of political thought) is typically a relative merit. One does not simply defend pacifism; rather, one defends it against attacks. One reconstructs it in light of earlier (politically motivated) misrepresentations. One does not promote pacifism in the abstract; one champions it in light of the deficiencies of rival doctrines (such as just-war-thinking) and in light of one's reading of the changing circumstances (such as the consolidation of the military-industrial-entertainment complex). The same argument applies to those assessments that conclude that pacifism is a dubious set of ideas. But whether one defends or attacks pacifism, in both cases one studies it from a position of involvement. One wants to see it succeed or see it fail. One wants to add to or subtract from its political power. As mentioned before, most

of our contributors write from such a position of involvement. What is more, they want to see pacifism succeed. They want to add to its political power. They come out in defence of pacifism.

As editors of this volume, and as organizers of the workshop that constituted its conception, we do not share our contributors' involvement with pacifism. We are writing from a position of detachment. By this we do not mean that we are keeping the question of pacifism's ultimate merit in balance. Although we do not necessarily agree among each other about the value of pacifism, each of us certainly has an idea of where we stand individually. However, when we choose to write from a position of detachment, we choose to approach the question of pacifism with a different concern in mind. Rather than assess the (relative) merit of pacifism, we want to understand pacifism as a social phenomenon, as a historically situated and historically evolving way of thinking, feeling, and acting. We wish to contextualize its emergence, its transformation, and thus also the vagaries, the ebb and flow, of its appeal. Rather than defend pacifism, we will attempt to give an interpretive account of it.

Obviously, the two approaches to the study of pacifism—involvement and detachment—do not exclude each other and neither are they unrelated. The defence of pacifism that our authors stage forms the most important resource for our understanding of pacifism and thus also for our account of its appeal. And, in reverse, our account of pacifism's appeal can eventually feed back into the arguments that our contributors make—for better or worse. It will become very clear in the chapters that follow that the pacifism of today is not the same as the pacifism of yesterday and neither will the pacifism of tomorrow necessarily be the same as the pacifism of today. Whether its appeal will sound stronger tomorrow than it does today remains to be seen.

1.4 A WORD OF THANKS

This volume consists of papers presented at a workshop organized in Antwerp on the 6th, 7th and 8th of December 2017. All chapters were substantially revised after the workshop and many of them bear clear traces of the discussions that we had during our three-day gathering. For a variety of reasons, not all of the papers presented then could be included in this volume. We would nonetheless like to thank all of those who participated in the workshop for having contributed to the lively debates that marked the event. The workshop was organized and

sponsored by the University Centre Saint Ignatius Antwerp (UCSIA) as a first in a series of three workshops on War & Peace. We would like to thank UCSIA's board for sharing our belief that questions of war and peace are in need of continuous consideration and that a purely scholarly workshop remains an apt setting within which to pursue such questions.

NOTE

1. But cf. Schinkel (2004), who points out that at least some people revel in the exercise of violence. They commit violence for its own sake. Schinkel develops the concept of autotelic violence to come to terms with this phenomenon. Our point of departure is that incidents of autotelic violence form an exception to the general rule that people do not enjoy the direct experience of real violence.

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PART I

Contemporary Ethos of Pacifism



War, Hostilities, Terrorism: A Pacifist Perspective

Cheyney Ryan

Discussions of terrorism since the events of 9/11 have been part of a larger discussion about the changing nature of war, a central concern of which has been what is meant by ‘war’. The immediate occasion was Sir Michael Howard’s questioning the notion of a ‘War on Terror’—not just practically but conceptually. Did the open ended, ambiguous enterprise, thus envisioned, constitute a ‘war’ in any true sense? (Howard 2002; Mégret 2002).

Replies to Sir Michael have insisted that yes, they are wars—but not of the traditional type:

The case against calling the War on Terror a ‘war’, writes one authority, rests on the mistaken assumption that wars must have a beginning, a middle, and an end, that their aims must be clearly stated, or stated at all, that they must be fought by recognizable combatants, and must lead to one side or another winning. But today we are dealing with what another authority calls ‘non-linear war’, to which none of these notions apply; indeed, the whole distinction between war and peace is blurred (Gerasimov 2014). Other names proposed are ‘hybrid wars’, ‘postmodern

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wars’, and ‘wars of the third kind’ (Duffield 2001; Gray 2007; Hoffman 2007; Kaldor 1999; Munkler 2005; Smith 2005). If we just scuttle archaic notions, if we conceive of war instead as something with no defined beginning or end, no particular aims, no clear adversaries, and no decisive outcome—then enterprises like the ‘War on Terror’ fit right in.

And there are historical precedents, it is claimed. One authority finds them in ancient times, likening them—without irony, as it did not end well—to the ‘the kind of long struggle with exterior barbarians that characterized the wars of the later Roman Empire’ (Brown 2004). Others find parallels in more recent experiences of colonialism. Philip Bobbitt concludes *The Shield of Achilles* by likening America’s predicament today to that of ‘Indian Summer’, but with the term’s original, menacing implications. ‘The early American settlers were often forced to take shelter in stockades to protect themselves from attacks by tribes of Native Americans.’ They knew such tribes would retire once winter came, but a break in the approaching winter—a so-called ‘Indian Summer’—could leave them vulnerable to attack. Likewise the attacks of 9/11, Bobbitt writes, occurring on a ‘warm, summerlike day’ on America’s East Coast (where colonists once resided), were both ‘the herald of further savagery and the call for defenses’, for a war that will have ‘no final victory’, just the ongoing project of ‘*avoiding defeat*’.¹

If some think they’ve encountered this picture of war before, they have. ‘War has changed its character’, we have read before. The fighting ‘takes place on vague frontiers whose whereabouts the average man can only guess at’. In the past war was something that ‘sooner or later came to an end, usually in unmistakable victory or defeat’, but now it is ‘literally continuous’ to the point that the whole distinction between war and peace ‘has ceased to exist’. ‘Strictly speaking, it has not always been the same war’, though ‘to trace out who was fighting whom at any given moment would be literally impossible’. In contrast to the mass wars of the past, war now involves ‘very small numbers of people, mostly highly trained specialists, and causes comparatively few casualties’. But this does not mean that attitudes are ‘less bloodthirsty or more chivalrous’. On the contrary, ‘war hysteria is continuous and universal’. Hence, the enemy, whoever they are at the time, ‘always represent absolute evil, and it follows that any past or future agreement with them is impossible’.

The author is George Orwell and the book is *1984*. Orwell had launched a spirited defense of Allied bombing against the objections of pacifist Vera Brittain. But he nevertheless had grim forebodings of where

that type of war could go, and his picture of war has disturbing similarities to features endorsed today. War in modernity has always made a fetish of newness, most notably in its fascination with new technologies. The ‘Revolution in Military Affairs’ is a recent example of the constant claims we encounter that the latest technologies will ‘change everything’; another is the current preoccupation with drones. But here the claims pertain to the social *practice* of war. And I reference Orwell to raise the question that should naturally occur to the pacifist: Are the conflicts of today truly a qualitative break with the past or are they just the *reductio ad absurdum* of the same old thing?

What should pacifism’s perspective on all this be?

Pacifism has meant different things.² In my own case, my understanding of pacifism is deeply influenced by American thinkers who are the main ones referenced here. In Sect. 2.1 I say some things about the view of pacifism that I’ve developed in other writings (Ryan 2015, 2016, 2017a, b).³ Of special importance is the distinction between personal pacifism and political pacifism, as this chapter adopts the latter perspective. I turn in Sect. 2.2 to political pacifism’s understanding of and critique of the ‘war system’. The question, then, is how the current changes in war, real and imagined, fit within this analysis. Section 2.3 addresses terrorism as an aspect of the war system. I conclude in Sect. 2.4 with some remarks on current prospects, and the challenges of opposing war.

2.1 PACIFISM(S)—SOME DISTINCTIONS

Pacifism seems to invite endless debate over what it means to be a pacifist. We’ve seen this elsewhere. There used to be endless debates over, say, what it meant to be a Marxist, or what it meant to be a feminist. I’m skeptical of how far such debates take us, but in an essay of this sort, concerned with ‘the pacifist view X’, it’s necessary to begin with some words on its meaning.

2.1.1 *Personal and Political*

As I see it, there are two main strands of western pacifism.

One is *personal* pacifism. It opposes killing as a personal act, hence it opposes any social practice involving that act—like war, but also practices like capital punishment. This pacifism arose with the first Christians, it assumed a shadowy existence after Augustine and Christian just war theory,

then reemerged with the Protestant Reformation in the so-called left wing of that movement with groups like Mennonites and later the Quakers. It almost always has a religious colouring. In the United States, recent figures have included Dorothy Day and theologian John Howard Yoder.⁴

The other type is *political* pacifism. It focuses on social institutions, and opposes war as a social practice much as many oppose capital punishment as a social practice. Its objection is not to killing per se but to the *kind* of killing that war involves, much as critics of capital punishment do not oppose killing per se but to the kind of killing it involves. Key twentieth century American figures were Randolph Bourne and the late Jonathan Schell. The difference is illustrated in their approach to self-defense. Personal pacifists typically reject killing even in self-defense, while the political pacifist's opposition to war as a social system does not imply questioning killing in self-defense any more than opposition to the death penalty means questioning killing in self-defense; rather, this position insists that war and self-defense have nothing to do with each other. Personal pacifism approaches things from the bottom up (individual actions), political pacifism approaches things from the top down (social institutions).

I stress the question of killing here, but it's a mistake to construe killing as pacifism's only concern, as both types of pacifism have been equally concerned with *power*. The sinfulness Christian pacifists see in the taking of human life is in claiming a kind of power that should be the sole province of God. The objection of the first Christians to the Roman Empire was as much an objection to its self-idolatry in claiming divine power, blurring the distinction between the sacred and the profane. Early modern Christian pacifists, responding to the rising market order, equated this with treating human life as a commodity instead of a gift, as something that could be 'taken' like any other piece of property. Personal pacifists are wary of power per se; at most, they prefer an apolitical quiet power. Political pacifists stress the *corruption* of political power implicit in employing killing for political ends (much as death penalty opponents stress the corruption of power implicit in employing killing for legal ends). Their objection to empire is its exemplifying how predatory political power results from its centralization/concentration. Hence its affinities with the anarchist tradition. Both the personal pacifist's concern with idolatry and the political pacifist's concern with corruption regard the upshot as a loss of any sense of personal responsibility in matters of war.

I've found that people often equate what I call the personal pacifist with the 'true' pacifist, 'real' pacifist, or 'absolute' pacifist. This is nonsense. In the United States, the term pacifist was coined in part to *distinguish* political pacifism from the personal sort, which was then termed 'non-resistance'. So neither can claim priority over the other and both are 'absolute' in their own way. I've put this in terms of contrasts but they are not mutually exclusive. One way to understand the significance of Martin Luther King Jr., the leading pacifist in American history, is that he combined both orientations.⁵

2.1.2 *Appraising and Opposing*

A second distinction cuts across these types of pacifism and pertains to other positions like pacifism. It is the distinction between pacifism as a theoretical position, or what I shall term a way of *appraising* war, and pacifism as a practical position, or what I shall term a way of *opposing* war.

To explain, consider the parallels with another radical position.

In nineteenth century America, 'abolitionism' denoted two things. An abolitionist was someone whose views of slavery were ones of unconditional *condemnation*. And an abolitionist was someone whose actions toward slavery were ones of absolute *opposition*. One without the other was not enough. There were people whose attitudes to slavery were ones of unconditional condemnation, but their reasons were ones that implied that nothing could be done about it; hence, they were not considered Abolitionists.

What needs to be stressed, though, is that within this framework there was room for a great deal of disagreement. Theoretically, Abolitionists disagreed about *why* slavery should be unconditionally condemned. As with pacifism, some did so for religious reasons, others for secular ones. And practically, they disagreed about *how* slavery should be absolutely opposed. Some saw it as a purely personal matter: opposition meant not engaging in slavery oneself (leading to arguments about what constituted 'engaging in slavery'). Others saw it as a more political matter, and here the disagreements were even greater. Some felt that absolute opposition meant working through existing political channels, for others it meant activities of education/moral uplift, for others it meant acts of terrorist violence. Abolitionists often agreed more with non-abolitionists on what to do, while still agreeing with each other in their unconditional condemnation of slavery.

The same schema—and its room for disagreements—can be applied to pacifism.

Theoretically, a pacifist is someone who unconditionally condemns war. ‘Unconditional’ means that the pacifist does not distinguish between good and bad wars, or allow for the occasional exception to the badness of war, any more than the Abolitionist distinguishes good or bad slavery, or allows for the occasional exception. Practically, as I understand it, a pacifist is someone who absolutely opposes war, where ‘absolute’ means a wholehearted commitment to its abolition. The difference here is evident in the different accusations they invite. The pacifists’ unconditional condemnation elicits the charge of *dogmatism*, while their absolute opposition elicits the charge of *fanaticism*. The same charges were leveled against the Abolitionists and are probably leveled against any radical movement. Again, I think both are necessary. It’s possible that one’s reasons for condemning war are ones that imply absolutely nothing can be done about it; if so, one might just as well work in the arms industry if it pays better, or vote for a warmonger if they’re better on other issues. This position, it seems to me, would not be pacifism.

But I note some of the disagreements that have occurred within this.

One concerns the theoretical appraisal of war. Pacifists have agreed on their unconditional condemnation of war while disagreeing about what *counts* as ‘war’. The same was true of abolitionists: they unconditionally condemned slavery but disagreed about what constituted slavery, most importantly whether prisons were a form of slavery. So too, pacifists have disagreed about what constitutes war. For example, they have disagreed whether acts of collective self-defense count as war; that seems strange to us, accustomed as we are to think that acts of self-defense are paradigmatic just wars, but the two were often distinguished (the United States Constitution distinguishes them in its account of the ‘war power’). Another was whether the action/arrangements of collective security count as war. The thinking here is that many pacifists do not oppose a domestic police force, so why should they oppose a global version of the same? Both issues warrant more attention to *why* the pacifist condemns war, hence whether that condemnation extends to these other matters (Yoder 2009, pp. 215ff.).

Practically, pacifists have disagreed as much as Abolitionists on the meaning of absolute opposition, and along very much the same lines. In both cases, I think it’s hardly surprising there would be such disagreement given the entrenched, all-encompassing character of what is being