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# Religious and Secular Visions of Peace and Pacifism

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**Abstract:** Pacifism is a complex and significant moral, political, religious, and philosophical idea. There is an evolving conversation about peace and nonviolence that occurs among secular scholars, religious figures, and activists. This paper explores this conversation, while employing a five-part thematic frame of analysis that attempts to distinguish secular and religious visions of peace and pacifism. The result of this analysis provides a ready framework for making that distinction. But it also demonstrates that the task of distinguishing secular and religious approaches is complicated and difficult. The paper also shows, through a brief genealogy of pacifism, how secular and religious voices are in conversation with one another.

**Keywords:** pacifism; just war tradition; secularism; religion; liberalism; peace

## 1. Introduction

Pacifism is often considered to be a religious idea, connected with an otherworldly and utopian orientation. This caricature imagines some reclusive religious saint dreaming of peace with stars in his eyes. One typically caricatured description of pacifism is as follows: "Pacifism, say many thinkers, belongs not in the domain of politics but in the realm of religious ideology. At best, pacifists are seen as hopeless idealists or as otherworldly dreamers" (Pacifism 2018). That article goes on to problematize this thesis. But more work needs to be done to distinguish between religious and secular versions of pacifism and to rebuff the claim that pacifism is for otherworldly dreamers. One part of the work of defending pacifism involves a sustained critique of violence and war. The core of the argument in favor of pacifism generally holds that violence and war cannot be justified. Another part of that work, involves showing that nonviolence can be an effective and successful strategy for social change. Erica Chenoweth and Gene Sharp each have contributed to the empirical study of nonviolence. Neither of those concerns are the focus of the present paper. I will take it for granted that the critique of violence is plausible and that nonviolence can be effective. My goal here is to show that there are multiple sources from which one could articulate a pacifist argument. Pacifism is a complex and significant moral, political, religious, and philosophical idea. Indeed, as I argue, pacifism is not a simple idea at all. Rather, it is a complex set of ideas and commitments involving a variety of methods and approaches, which are in conversation with one another. Another response to the caricature, then, involves understanding the depth of the conversation and the diversity of approaches that are found in a broad dialogue about peace and pacifism. Pacifism is not only found in the starry eyes of the saint. Rather, we find pacifism in the complex and ongoing conversation about peace and nonviolence that occurs among secular scholars, religious figures, and activists.

## 2. The Varieties of Pacifism

Pacifism is a complex idea that is internally diverse. There are different kinds of pacifism (see Fiala 2021). But the core of the idea is the claim that violence and war cannot be justified. In some cases, this is understood as a deontological claim grounded in some fundamental moral principle such as "killing is wrong" or in a religious commandment such as "thou shalt not kill". In other cases, pacifism involves a critical analysis of theories that

purport to justify violence or war. For example, "just war pacifism" results from a critical interpretation of the just war theory, holding that actual wars fail to live up to the standards of that theory. Sometimes the argument in favor of pacifism is based upon consequentialist considerations, arguing that war tends to produce bad outcomes or more generally that violence leads to worse outcomes than nonviolence. I have contributed to the analysis and justification of pacifism in various ways in a number of other places and assume here some of these arguments. Here I am attempting to extend the discourse further in order (1) to flesh out the distinction between religious and secular (or nonreligious) arguments in favor of pacifism and (2) to show how secular and religious pacifisms have been in conversation with one another. As we'll see, in general this results in an invitation to further thought, since religious pacifisms include a variety of commitments connected with the diversity of religious belief and since secular pacifisms are also diverse and in conversation.

In considering the varieties of pacifism, one useful distinction is that between what scholars call conditional (or contingent) pacifism and absolute pacifism. Absolute pacifists are committed to peace and nonviolence without exception, while contingent pacifism is the result of a critical argument about the justification of violence and war in particular cases. There is also a difference between:

(a)  a narrowly political form of pacifism that is focused on a rejection of international war;
(b)  a strategic commitment to nonviolence as a means or method of social change; and
(c)  a comprehensive commitment to nonviolence and pacifism that extends beyond war and social movements toward nonviolence in domestic life and even in relation to the nonhuman world.

One of the inspiring aspects of religious pacifism is that it often seems to advocate for something like (c)—a comprehensive commitment to pacifism and nonviolence that is broad and deep. This is a generalization, of course—and religious pacifists can also be committed to the other forms of pacifism. But religious pacifism often hinges on certain metaphysical claims and assumptions that can point toward a broadly conceived spiritual agenda. And in the background is a *vision* of an ideal world of peace and harmony. In this paper, I am interested in the question of vision. What do pacifists and advocates of nonviolence imagine or envision when they think of peace? I submit that religious approaches to pacifism are often motivated by a broader spiritual vision than we find in the thinking of secular or nonreligious pacifists.

In Christianity, this includes a doctrine of *agapic* love that is connected with virtues such as mercy and forgiveness and which extends even to enemies. This kind of vision of comprehensive peace is one in which, according to a metaphor taken from the book of Isaiah, the lion lies down with the lamb. We also find a comprehensive vision of peace in South Asian traditions that emphasize *ahimsa*. This can be connected to the idea of compassion for all sentient beings, which extends even beyond the human realm. Thich Nhat Hahn explains, "peace is not simply the absence of violence; it is the cultivation of understanding, insight, and compassion, combined with action" ([Hanh 2003](), p. 5). And in Islam, a comprehensive approach to peace can be found in the idea that Allah is *Ar-Rahman* and *Ar-Raheem* (merciful and compassionate). Rashied Omar discusses *rahma* (compassion) as a kind of opening or softening of the heart ([Omar 2021]()). He points out that the word is also used with a connotation that connects to the word for a mother's womb, *rahm*. A comprehensive vision of peace and nonviolence in these traditions might be described as a kind of "positive peace". This is not peace as the absence of violence or war; rather it is peace as a state of harmony, solidarity, compassion, and love.

Such a metaphysical vision is typically lacking in secular approaches to pacifism. Secular pacifisms tend to shy away from comprehensive visions of positive peace. Indeed, secularism generally attempts to avoid affirming any comprehensive vision (related to what John Rawls calls a "comprehensive doctrine" ([Rawls 1996]())). This does not mean that secular pacifists are lacking in vision. This does not mean that secular pacifists are lacking in vision. Indeed, as we'll see, secular pacifists have been at the forefront of imagining a grand vision of international peace organized by something like a federation of peace or

league of nations. While this is a secular ideal, oriented toward a practical and political solution to the problem of war, it is still an ideal way of envisioning a peaceful world.

## 3. Five Thematic Distinctions

There has been mutual cross influence between religious and secular pacifists in the past couple of centuries. This makes it difficult to establish a firm distinction between religious and secular approaches. These distinctions are difficult to nail down and there is substantial overlap. Nonetheless, there are some prevailing themes that can be used to distinguish various approaches to pacifism and peace. We cannot discuss these in depth in a short paper. But let me begin by mentioning five useful themes along with a brief explanation of how each can be used in an effort to distinguish between religious and secular versions of pacifism. These "themes", as I call them, can be used as analytic lenses for examining various forms of pacifism. These "themes" as I call them can be used as analytic lenses through which to examine various forms of pacifism. They are not proposed as a set of necessary and sufficient conditions that can help us sort things categorically. Rather, they are hermeneutical focal points that can help us make sense of the way that secular and religious approaches to peace and pacifism differ. The five thematic distinctions are oriented around the role of exegesis; the importance of justificatory argument; the metaphysics of peace; ritual, community, and practice; and eschatology and hope. Here is a brief explanation of how each can help us distinguish secular from religious pacifisms.

### 3.1. The Role of Exegesis

Religious pacifisms focus on texts and authorities found within specific religious traditions. Of course, one of the issues to be resolved within religious discussions of pacifism is the degree to which texts and traditions support violence, war, and peace. For example, there is a centuries-long conversation in Christianity about whether war can be justified and whether Christianity requires "nonresistance" (this conversation has led to sectarian divisions among Christians). Secular pacifists are much less concerned with this exegetical project. While secular thinkers may find inspiration from religious texts, traditions, and authorities, they are not concerned with the question of which texts matter and how much they matter for the sectarian purpose of establishing orthodoxy.

### 3.2. The Importance of Justificatory Argument

For secular thinkers, justificatory arguments are the primary focal point. Secular philosophy that engages with pacifism includes quite a bit of this, involving narrow and focused arguments about the justification of war and the critique of violence. Religious thinkers may also be interested in these kinds of arguments. But there may also be an element of faith found within religious traditions that points beyond narrowly philosophical argumentation. For secular pacifists, the persuasive power of these arguments will point toward certain conclusions—but there tends to be a kind of modesty and restraint in the conclusions of secular pacifists, which tends to prevent them from embracing "absolute pacifism" and leave them more committed to a less absolute approach (such as "contingent pacifism" or some similar idea).

### 3.3. The Metaphysics of Peace

There are significant questions about what counts as peace—whether it is merely the absence of violence (negative peace) or whether it involves something more substantial (positive peace). There are also metaphysical questions about the structure of reality, the social world, and the human soul that are connected to discussions of peace. For example, in Christian pacifism, the idea of *agape* (love) becomes a central metaphysical organizing principle. In secular thought, there is less concern for overarching metaphysical speculation. Indeed, one hallmark of secularism is its effort to avoid metaphysics. Of course, it is impossible to avoid metaphysics entirely. But secular theorists are typically

more parsimonious and restrained, while religious thinkers are more willing to explore larger theories of life, the universe, and everything.

### 3.4. Ritual, Community, and Practice

Religious traditions include ritual, communal practices, and other religious practices including spiritual practice. Secular thought is less focused on this. This difference may influence the practical outcome of a commitment to pacifism. Much of the most committed anti-war activism and nonviolent activism is often grounded in religious belief. The work of James Lawson and Martin Luther King, Jr. during the American Civil Rights movement comes to mind as an example of how religious leadership can lead to sustained activism on the part or religious communities. Secular pacifism may be less directly connected to activism that requires community organization and practice. But secular pacifism might be more oriented toward critical engagement with structural and institutional ideas—such as formulating proposals for something like a league of nations or other proposals.

### 3.5. Eschatology and Hope

I mentioned above that religious pacifism is often connected to a set of metaphysical commitments—such as the idea that love or *agape* structures ultimate reality. This may influence the role of hope and suffering in thinking about pacifism. Religious pacifists may ground hope in a metaphysical scheme, while seeing suffering as redemptive for similar reasons. And this will often have some eschatological focus that orients religious pacifism toward some ideal future state. But secular pacifists will be less inclined to accept such ideas. In a sense, secular hope is less idealistic and more narrowly grounded in amelioration. Secular pacifists offer critical comment and concrete resistance to violence and war. But they do not necessarily imagine that violence and war will come to an end or that unearned suffering will have redemptive power in the long run due to the benevolent justice of a loving God. This difference may influence the degree to which secular and religious pacifists are willing to put their lives on the line and engage in concrete acts of nonviolence.

I suggest these themes as focal questions for research. We can ask a pacifist what they understand in terms of the role of exegesis, the use of argument, what they think about the metaphysics of peace, how they relate their pacifism to ritual and practice, and what they think about hope. In asking these questions we can discern different points of view and orientations. But while these questions can provide a rough distinction between religious and secular pacifisms, the distinction is not firm or clear. Religious people will differ in their answers and orientations, so will secular people.

Each of these focal points invites further questions. And cases and examples in the real world won't conform exactly to the framework suggested here. For example, with regard to the metaphysics of peace, I suggest that there is a difference between positive and negative peace and that religious pacifism tends to focus more on positive peace than on the mere absence of violence.[1] I have in mind here the fact that secular, liberal political thought tends to focus on negative liberty as well as negative peace: the goal is to create a system in which coexistence is possible without foisting a "comprehensive doctrine" (as Rawls put it) onto a diverse polity. But religious communities can benefit from the negative peace of secularism, as it promises to reduce religious violence and crusading wars. And some secular political philosophies can be much more focused on positive peace and what we might call "positive liberty." Socialist and communist governments are not "religious" (and indeed are often avowedly atheistic). But they may also be concerned with creating communal "harmony" and not averse to using violence to create conformity, even to the extent of using violence against religious communities who resist such efforts.

To be clear, then, there are complexities in the real world that resist any precise analytic set of distinctions. These questions and distinctions are merely pragmatic and critical tools for thinking about ways that we might differentiate religious and secular pacifisms.

## 4. Pacifism in Context

Now let's consider further, the complexity of the idea of pacifism. The term is of recent origin. The ancient thinkers who gave birth to contemporary religious traditions did not use the term. It does show up in the Christian bible in the book of Matthew where Jesus says, 'Blessed are the pacifists' (*beati pacifici*) (Mt. 5.9). This is often translated as "blessed are the peacemakers." But a literal translation would use the term "pacifist". The Latin *pacifici* combines *paci-* (peace) with *-fici* (maker). The *pacifici* are peacemakers. In Greek the word is *eirenopoios*, combining *eirênê* (peace) with *poiesis* (making). And although Jesus is viewed as a source for Christian pacifism, there is an open question about whether he advocated pacifism as we know it today. Indeed, the dispute within Christianity between pacifism and the idea of a just war shows us that this question remains unresolved.

Our modern understanding of the term "pacifism" can be traced to a secular origin. Before the term became widely used, it was more common to speak of "nonresistance" in connection with the idea. This was the way the idea was described in connection with the American transcendentalists and in Tolstoy, who was influenced by them (see Fiala 2019). It was not until the dawn of the 20th Century, that the term pacifism came into widespread use. The term was originally popularized by secular thinkers and applied in a non-religious context with a focus on political arrangements and anti-war activism in international affairs. The term was probably coined by Émile Arnaud (who used the French term *le pacifisme*) at the turn of the twentieth century at about the same time that the humanist philosopher William James was speaking of "pacific-ism" (Arnaud 1906; James 1911; see Fiala 2017, 2018). Both thinkers were primarily concerned with a critique of war in international politics. From this vantage point the biggest problem for peace was the world of nation states, standing armies, and imperial adventures. The critique of international war grew out of the concerns of other earlier humanistic thinkers such as Rousseau, Kant, and Bentham who each imagined a path toward what "perpetual peace" by way of some sort of international "federation of peace" (to use Kant's formulation of the idea—as in Kant 1991). This secular approach to thinking about violence and peace was subsequently adopted by other humanistic pacifist thinkers including Jane Addams, Bertrand Russell, and Goldsworthy Dickinson. And it is a central concern of contemporary philosophers who defend pacifism from within contemporary moral and political philosophy including Robert Holmes (2017), Barry Gan (2013), Cheyney Ryan (1983), Duane Cady (2010), and myself (Fiala 2004).

This last stage of development has occurred in conversation with a secular approach to just war theory. Christian pacifism developed in conversation with the just war tradition of the Christian Middle Ages. Contemporary secular pacifism has developed in conversation with the secular just war theory. In the scholarship on the justification of war, a useful distinction has been made between the religious just war tradition and the secular just war theory. The standard story told by scholars is that just war thinking originally developed in ancient Greek and Roman thinking about war (see Douglas 2022; Johnson 1999; Nardin 1996). Early Christianity was devoted to a kind of pacifism. After the Roman empire became Christian, authorities in the Christian tradition including Ambrose, Augustine, and Aquinas reinterpreted the idea of justified warfare in light of Christian theology and philosophy. By the time of the Renaissance and early Modernity, other authors such as Suarez, Vattel, and Grotius extended this discussion of the morality of warfare further. At the same time, the modern period saw the development of secular nation-states and ethical and political philosophy that moved away from traditional Christian moral theology and theological political philosophy. In the background of the modern development of thinking about the ethics of war is the critique of the Crusades and of holy war. As I have explained elsewhere, the idea of religious warfare and the Crusades was a focal point for criticism within the modern religious just war tradition and in the development of a more secular approach to thinking about the ethics of war (Fiala 2020). By the time the just war theory was reinvigorated in the 20th Century by Michael Walzer and other secular thinkers—and in the system of thought that emerged through international treaties, institutions and

agreements—the idea of holy war was no longer considered either reasonable or defensible. By now, it is common sense among most scholars working on the ethics of war to focus on a secular just war theory. For example, in describing what he sees as the "triumph" of just war theory, Michael Walzer has explained that the modern just war theory is a "worldly" or "secular" theory that developed in opposition to "religiously driven crusade" (Walzer 2002). It has also developed out of an implicit critique of traditionally religious discussions of the justification of war.

As Walzer and others have been developing and defending the idea of secular just war theory, this theory has been subject to critique by the secular pacifists mentioned here—Holmes, Ryan, and so on. One basic claim made in the secular pacifist critique of just war theory is that arguments claiming to justify modern warfare ultimately fail. Notice that at issue here is a question of justificatory argument. These arguments are not about exegesis, ritual practice, or about metaphysics. Rather, they tend to focus on moral concepts (deontological or consequentialist) and on empirical details about war, political reality, technology, and military systems. These kinds of arguments are quite different from more metaphysical and exegetical claims of religious pacifists. This is not to say that religious pacifists do not also engage in justificatory arguments. Rather, the point is that there is a different kind of emphasis in each approach.

It is also worth noting that the secular focus tends to be political and liberal. The version of "the political" that I am referring to here is broadly liberal conception of politics that generally respects individual liberty, the rule of law, and democratic norms of governance. The first set of secular authors mentioned above—Addams, Russell, and Dickinson—were active in the early part of the 20th Century and were focused on political questions that arise from within the broad liberal framework. Again, this distinction allows exceptions. But consider, for example, how Jane Addams' vision of social peace led her to oppose war but also to a life-long commitment to social work on behalf of the poor and oppressed, which also included her advocacy for women's rights and suffrage. There was likely a religious orientation that influenced her: her family background was Quaker. But her work was not merely focused on exegetical or metaphysical concerns. And her anti-war activism had an international and political focus. She helped to coordinate international peace efforts through the Women's Peace Party, which she founded in the U.S. in 1915 and which evolved to become the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). Of course, Russell is more decidedly irreligious. He is well-known as an atheist. He is less well-known as a pacifist. But Russell was a devoted pacifist who was jailed for his opposition to the First World War. He described his own position as "relative political pacifism," by which he meant that it was primarily focused on a critique of international warfare of the sort that occurred during the First World War (Russell 1943–1944). Again, notice that this is not a question of metaphysics or eschatological hope. Rather, Russell's focus was on secular questions of political actuality. His suggestions for achieving peace were grounded in respect for liberty and democracy, as well as in thinking about creative ways to channel human energy and desire into productive and peaceful activities. Part of this project included a critique of religion, at least of that kind of religion that supports war, is nationalistic, and that refuses to support liberty, reason, and human energy and desire. Russell praised religious people who were willing to advocate for peace. But he said, "It is not through even the most sincere and courageous believers in the traditional religion that a new spirit can come into the world" (Russell 1917, p. 221). From Russell's vantage point that new peaceful spirit would be produced by a kind of secular, liberal internationalism. Russell's colleague, the philosopher Goldsworthy (G. L.) Dickinson, had a similar focus. He helped to articulate the idea of a "league of peace" that became realized in the League of Nations. This approach to peace is paradigmatic of what we might call "liberal peace" as described more recently by Michael Doyle (Doyle 2012, 1997). The later set of secular thinkers—Holmes, Ryan, and others—has developed these ideas from within the framework of contemporary Anglo-American philosophy. This includes technical moral arguments about the justification of violence as well as an ongoing critique of political

and economic systems organized around the assumption of militarism. It is frankly not interested in exegesis, eschatology, or metaphysics.

One significant feature of this secular and humanistic approach to thinking about peace is its firm grounding in secular, political and moral philosophy. This approach to peace is not focused on spiritual transformation understood in connection with traditional religious dogma. Often secular versions of pacifism are focused primarily on negative peace—that is on criticizing war and preventing violence.

But a more robust and comprehensive secular form of pacifism may include an ideal vision of community understood in secular terms. One obvious source for this idealism is Kant's notion of the "kingdom of ends". In this ideal community, there would be peace grounded in respect for persons as ends in themselves. The political implication of this idea is a domestic constitution and system of international relations that is grounded in the moral law. As Kant explains at the end of his *Metaphysical Elements of Justice*, "we must act as though perpetual peace were a reality" by creating a system that would "bring an end to the abominable practice of war, which up to now has been the chief purpose for which every state, without exception, has adapted its institutions" (Kant 1965, p. 128). Kant continues:

> The establishment of a universal and enduring peace is not just a part, but rather constitutes the whole, of the ultimate purpose of Law within the bounds of pure reason. When a number of men live together in the same vicinity, a state of peace is the only condition under which the security of property is guaranteed by laws, that is, when they live together under a constitution. (Kant 1965, pp. 128–89)

The Kantian approach is not anti-religious. But Kant reinterprets religion from within a standpoint of enlightenment deism. His arguments do not appeal to traditional religious texts or dogmas; nor do they depend upon some external source of inspiration or authority. Kant's critical philosophy is well-known for its reluctance to embrace metaphysics and eschatology. So, the vision of perpetual peace that we find in Kant is focused on secular concerns that include the need for nations to obey the laws of war, the need to spread republican values, and the need for an international federation of peace. It is important to note that the Kantian vision of a kingdom of ends is less ideal that something like the ideal community of brotherhood and love—what Martin Luther King, Jr. called the beloved community—that is imagined in religious traditions. We must be careful here not to over-generalized: King was not naïve about the beloved community. But there is a significant difference between a community based on respect (in the Kantian sense) and a community based on love (in the Christian sense). The first is a secular community grounded in republican principles of toleration and respect for autonomy. The second is "thicker" and may involve a more intimate and robust set of interpersonal relations.

## 5. Negative and Positive Peace

One way of describing the liberal, secular approach to peace is to describe it as primarily concerned with "negative peace", understood as the absence of war; it is not concerned with developing "positive peace" (see Galtung 1964; Boersema 2017). This may also be connected with the strategy of argumentation found in the writings of secular pacifist authors, who provide negative arguments against the justification of war and violence. When they speculate about an ideal social and political system, the focus tends to be on liberal, tolerant systems instead of imagining a more robust community. Liberal, secular philosophies focus on toleration and liberty, which means that they admit that there will be remaining diversity and tension within political life (see Fiala 2005). So long as those tensions are regulated and prevented from becoming violent, that is a sufficient form of negative peace from a liberal point of view. This includes religious diversity: there is no need within the liberal ideal for people to agree about fundamental metaphysical postulates or the dogmas of traditional religion. This ideal of toleration holds within domestic political arrangements. Something similar is supposed to occur at the level of international politics, with something like a law of peoples and a federation of peace allowing for diverse national

political arrangements. This need not require world unity or harmonious brotherhood across borders, so long as the condition of negative peace imagined by liberal internationalism holds (see Doyle 1997, 2012; Rawls 2001; Gursozlu 2017).

In contrast with this, a more spiritual or religious approach to pacifism will tend to emphasize harmony and positive peace. As mentioned, this idea was expressed by Martin Luther King, Jr. in his idea of the beloved community. King explained this in reflecting on the bombing of his home in 1958 in Montgomery. He wrote:

> Had we become distracted by the question of my safety we would have lost the moral offensive and sunk to the level of our oppressors. I must continue by faith or it is too great a burden to bear and violence, even in self-defense, creates more problems than it solves. Only a refusal to hate or kill can put an end to the chain of violence in the world and lead us toward a community where men can live together without fear. Our goal is to create a beloved community and this will require a qualitative change in our souls as well as a quantitative change in our lives. (King 1994, pp. 57–58)

Notice that King's vision of the beloved community is grounded in "faith" and that this kind of faith is includes a "dream" (to borrow a term popularized by King) of a qualitative change in the human soul. There is a hint of the utopian here. But King's vision is not merely utopian dreaming. It builds upon the insights of Gandhian *satyagraha* and includes positive and proactive nonviolent methods for opposing oppression and building community. King and Gandhi suggested that the way toward the creation of harmony, brotherhood, and the beloved community was to embrace nonviolence as a method and as a goal. But this is not merely a practical political method. It is also a spiritual practice. The Gandhi-King method includes a hoped-for transformation of the souls of the oppressors that also involves the possibility of reconciliation. This is a kind of eschatological hope, which we typically do not find in the writing of secular pacifists.

It is important to note that the Gandhi-King philosophy of nonviolence is not grounded in any specific religious dogma. Nor does it presuppose unanimity about religion. It is also worth noting that Gandhi and King develop their ideas in quite different religious milieus: South Asian (Hindu and Jain) in the case of Gandhi and Christian in the case of King. Gandhi admired and learned from Christians, Muslims, and others. And King's embrace of Gandhi demonstrates that his idea is not simply a narrowly sectarian and Christian concept. But despite this diversity and syncretism, there is an overarching spirituality or religiosity about their approach that is quite different from what we find in the humanistic thinking of those secular approaches to peace we discussed above. I already mentioned that one difference involves the contrast between negative peace (which tends to be a focus of the liberal, secular theory) and positive peace (which tends to be a focus of a more religious approach to peace). Another important point of contrast has to do with the idea of spiritual transformation. King expresses his hope for a "qualitative change in our souls". Gandhi described satyagraha as "soul force." He highlighted the spiritual connection between *satyagraha* and *swadeshi* as a spiritual one. *Swadeshi* has been translated as self-sufficiency, which is also connected to *swaraj*, or self-rule. But for Gandhi, this was much more than a political idea. Bikhu Parekh explained that it was fundamentally about love of one's community and love of other people (Parekh 1989, 56ff.). Siby Joseph goes further, claiming that for Gandhi, "*swadeshi* in its ultimate and spiritual sense stands for the final emancipation of the soul from her earthly bondage. Therefore, a votary of *swadeshi* has to identify oneself with the entire creation in the ultimate quest to emancipate the soul from the physical body, as it stands in the way of realising oneness with all life" (Joseph n.d., p. 42). This is a transformative spiritual ideal. Gandhi explained it in various ways. For example, in 1909 he wrote:

> *Swadeshi* carries a great and profound meaning. It does not merely mean the use or what is produced in one's own country. That meaning is certainly there in *swadeshi*. But there is another meaning implied in it which is far greater and much more important. *Swadeshi* means reliance on our own strength. We should also

know what we mean by reliance on our own strength. Our strength means the strength of our body, our mind and our soul. From among these, on which should we depend? The answer is brief. The soul is supreme, and therefore soul-force is the foundation on which man must build. Passive resistance or *satyagraha* is a mode of fighting which depends on such force. (Gandhi 1909, p. 223)

Such an idea approaches the question of peace, pacifism, and nonviolence from a quite different perspective than do more secular advocates of pacifism. Secular pacifism is not concerned with soul force as a spiritual power.

For the most part, secular advocates of peace, nonviolence, and pacifism will have less lofty aspirations than to develop a beloved community. And they tend to shy away from calls for spiritual renewal and transformation. This is not to say that secular pacifists are not interested at all in spiritual transformation. I mentioned Russell's hope that a "new spirit" would come into the world. Indeed, most pacifists will recognize the need for some kind of transformation, since they are arguing against the violence, militarism, and war of the status quo. Russell suggests that this is sometimes lonely work, since those who imagine a better world will be at odds with the present (Russell 1917, chp. 8). And for a secular critic of the status quo such as Russell, there is no religious community to fall back on when looking for support. In my own work on this topic, I have articulated an account of pacifism that I describe as "transformative pacifism". But my notion of transformation is more closely linked to the kinds of transformations imagined by critical theories of society such as feminism than to the sorts of spiritual transformations imagined by religious thinkers. This is more about education and critique than it is about ritual practice, prayer, and faith. And yet there are similarities. In my other work, I explained: "Transformative pacifism should be understood as a broad, critical theory that aims at moving the world in the direction of harmonious coexistence, non-violent conflict resolution, genuine dialogue, and mutual respect" (Fiala 2018, p. 22). There is a modest notion here of positive peace. But the method of this transformation is critical theory. It involves a critique of violence and of those structures, systems, and modes of thought that sustain and promote violence. This is philosophical work, not connected to religious faith. It is also secular work, that relies upon the creation of institutions that promote toleration, diversity, and liberty. From this vantage point the transformation needed is not spiritual renewal or the growth of faith. Rather, what is needed is the growth of reason and the development of more reasonable political institutions. And the work is ongoing.

## 6. Secular Philosophy

Let me pause here to further clarify the idea of the secular and secularism that I am speaking of. By secular, I mean directed at this world, without reference to any religious scheme. Secularism is not anti-religious. One need not be an atheist to embrace secularism. Indeed, religious communities thrive under secular systems, since those systems are officially tolerant, which means that they allow religious beliefs to exist in their plurality. In order to understand the notion of the secular that I have in mind, it might be useful to imagine a more atheistic and dogmatic approach to the world that is decidedly anti-religious—perhaps what was found in the former Soviet Union. But it is easy to see that anti-religious systems will not promote peace. Rather, they will be oppressive and intolerant. By contrast, the version of secular philosophy that I have in mind is liberal and tolerant. Toleration in this context means that religious liberty is protected and diverse religious peoples can live together peacefully.

In describing the thinkers mentioned above—Rousseau, Kant, Bentham, James, Addams, Russell, Dickinson—as secular this does not mean that they are atheists. Rousseau and Kant, for example, tended in the direction of Enlightenment "deism". To be sure, Russell was an outspoken atheist. But even he was sympathetic to the spiritual power of people like Tolstoy and Gandhi (See Fiala 2017, 2018). James was similarly situated. He was curious about religious experience and he discussed Tolstoy's religiosity, which he described in tragic terms (James 1917, Lecture VIII). Addams travelled to Russia to meet

Tolstoy, who had become in his old age a mystical prophet of non-resistant Christianity (she also visited Gandhi's ashram in India while Gandhi was in jail) (see Knight 2010, chp. 7). But none of these thinkers spoke of the need for spiritual transformation in the way that Gandhi or King did. One recent article on Jane Addams's interaction with Gandhi, by Elizabeth Agnew, makes this point by claiming that while Gandhi spoke of soul-force, Addams spoke of "moral energy" (Agnew 2020). An important point for Addams was that she did not emphasize the need for "self-suffering" in the way that Gandhi or Tolstoy did. The kind of ascetic spiritual power of Tolstoy and Gandhi was transformed in Addams into a social practice of care for others. This social activism was present in Gandhi's work as well. But with Addams it becomes more secular: it is focused on service to the community without the spiritual overtone of enlightenment and liberation through self-abnegation.

Again, a firm distinction between religious and secular ideas is difficult to sustain. The secular authors were interested in the ideas and spirituality of religious thinkers—and sometimes they waxed religious and poetic in describing their project. Consider Dickinson's vision of peace: it had interesting religious overtones including the fact that he announced the advent of a "religion of peace". But this idea is more of a metaphor connected to a vision of peace than it is a work of religious dogma, practice, or exegesis. Dickinson spoke of "the religion of peace" saying, "To the man who has the religion of peace, the supreme value is love" (Dickinson 1917, p. 57). This likely has some connection with Christian doctrine—and connects to ideas King will develop later. But Dickinson is not talking about traditional religion. Rather, Dickinson saw peace as the highest good—a kind of absolute or intrinsic value (see Fiala 2022). Dickinson located the foundation of other social goods in the value of peace, including friendship, love, and civilization itself. He suggested that other social values—justice, charity, and love—were good to the extent that they promoted peace. Dickinson explained his vision of pacifism as follows:

> Pacifists who have a positive and passionate attitude to life have also at bottom a love for certain feelings and activities. What they like and desire is free friendship, where men co-operate or compete as independent individuals, not as passive creatures of a mass movement. The activity they prize is that of reasonable will, not that of irrational instinct. And they find their conception of the highest life in voluntary creation, in political and social work, in science, in speculation, and in art. (Dickinson 1917, p. 53)

This vision points in the direction of positive peace, despite the fact that Dickinson's concrete proposal for a league of nations was more focused on negative peace. But again, the vision is not of harmonious brotherhood. Rather, it a vision of peace as the voluntary friendship of creative individuals.

This kind of vision of peace is articulated in secular terms. It need not be grounded in an eschatological vision of religious proportions. In other words, it is possible to articulate a vision of peace from within a secular worldview that is both comprehensive and intelligible from a humanistic vantage point. I make this point as a rejoinder to those who are quick to dismiss pacifism as a naïve, idealistic, utopian, and religious way of thinking. The vision of secular pacifism is of a world organized around law and justice and the "moral energy" and creative life of the individual. This includes a secular defense of religious liberty. Dickinson explains that liberty and peace are opposed to war and coercion (Dickinson 1917). The purpose of war (and of violence more generally) is to force another to conform, obey, or be destroyed. But peace and liberty operate in a different sphere. At any rate, the secular vision of peace does not require subordination to the will of God. It does not require uniformity of religious belief. It does not require that human beings become saints or that they cultivate ascetic practices of self-abnegation. Rather, that vision typically arrives out of the application of reason to human problems. This includes the development of technologies of economics, society, and politics that serve the purposes of peace. It also includes the development of international systems that can prevent and resolve conflict—a move toward multilateral disarmament. It does involve a transformation of the human spirit—toward a more rational and less aggressive psychology. But this transformation is

not going to occur by divine intervention. Nor is it woven into the metaphysical structure of reality. Rather, this transformation will be cultivated by humanistic education in which liberty and rationality are developed and in which the folly of violence and war are exposed through the practice of critical justificatory argumentation.

## 7. Conclusions: On the Plurality of Religious and Secular Pacifisms

I mentioned at the outset that pacifism is often viewed as a simplistic and narrow religious idea. I have shown here that this is not true. One obvious point to make is that there are secular versions of pacifism, which shows that pacifism is not merely a religious idea. But even if we grant the supposition that pacifism is religious for the sake of argument, as any scholar of religion will tell you, religion is not one thing. Not only are there diverse religious traditions but there is also diversity within faith traditions. This means that there is no such thing as "religious pacifism", *simpliciter*. There will be religious pacifism(s) in the plural because religion contains a plurality. When thinking about pacifism, this diversity becomes quite obvious, since pacifism is often viewed as a radical, nonconformist form of religiosity. This is especially true within the Christian tradition, where the idea known as "just war" was typically espoused by the mainstream—and where pacifism was viewed as heretical and unorthodox and where pacifists were often persecuted. A similar dialectic can be observed in other traditions. In Hinduism, for example, the idea of *ahimsa* and Gandhian satyagraha occurs in tension with Hindu justifications of violence and the violence of Hindu nationalism (see Rambachan 2017). And in Islam, there are debates among Muslim scholars about the meaning of *jihad* and about what it means to say that Islam is, as some say, "a religion of peace" (see Kalin 2005; Schwartz 2008; Jahanbegloo 2017; or essays in Cole 2021).

Christian pacifism has been widely discussed (see Dombrowski 2017, 1991; or Douglas 2019). These discussions typically focus on the development of Christian pacifism in Anabaptist traditions that trace their roots through protestant movements such as the Mennonites and Quakers and on back to their conception of the pacifism that they find in the teachings of Jesus and the original Christian communities. There are a number of important and influential authors in the Christian pacifist tradition who have contributed to the development of Christian pacifism in the past two centuries. We might plausibly include in this tradition: Adin Ballou, Leo Tolstoy, Dorothy Day, Albert Schweitzer, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King, Jr., James Lawson, Daniel Berrigan, Thomas Merton, Desmond Tutu, John Howard Yoder, Stanley Hauerwas, and even Pope Francis. The point in writing out this list is to note that there is internal diversity here: the recent pacifism of the Catholic tradition as found in Pope Francis is different from the nonviolent activism of someone like James Lawson. And so on. There are similarities to be sure—including a shared sense of exegetical and metaphysical commitments. But there will also be differences in practice, ritual, and in the role of argument in divergent "Christian" traditions.

The idea of "religious pacifism" becomes even more complicated if we recognize that there are pacifist traditions in other religious lineages. In Islam, advocates of nonviolence trace the idea to the Prophet Mohammed's nonviolent practices in Mecca before the *hegira* (see Abu-Nimer 2000). We can find pacifist ideas in Islam especially in Sufi traditions or in the Jakhanke tradition and in contemporary authors and activists such as: Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Muhammad Raheem Bawa Muhaiyaddeen, Jawdat Saeed, Ashgar Ali Engineer, Wahiduddin Khan, Ali Shariati, Chaiwat Satha-Anand, and Siti Musdah Mulia. Pacifism and nonviolence in South Asian religious traditions can be found in Jainism, Hinduism, and Buddhism, where the concept of *ahimsa* is central value. Mahavira (the founder of Jain tradition) and Gautama Buddha (the founder of Buddhism) each advocated nonviolence as a path to enlightenment. Key figures in these traditions include: Mohandas K. Gandhi, Thich Nhat Hahn, and the Dalai Lama (Tenzin Gyatso).

Moreover, while each of these traditions is internally diverse and complex, these religious pacifist traditions often overlap and influence one another. This has been especially true during the past couple of hundred years. One example of this mutual influence

involves the way that Adin Ballou and the American transcendentalists influenced the thinking of Tolstoy, which influenced the thinking of Gandhi, which in turn influenced the thinking of Abdul Ghaffar Khan and Martin Luther King, Jr., who was influenced by and influenced Thich Nhat Hahn. As stated, there are complexities within each tradition that we must be sensitive to. There is a tendency in some discussions of religious diversity to view things from a vantage point of what I call "reductive pluralism", which seeks to downplay difference in favor of finding similarity. This idea has advocates among the religious thinkers discussed here: Gandhi and the Dalai Lama are well-known as seeking a kind of harmonious convergence among religious traditions. That kind of pluralism is an important part of interfaith peace work. This is especially important as part of the effort to eliminate religious violence and reduce religious hatred and intolerance. But the differences are as significant as the similarities.

This is also true when we turn to the question of secular pacifism. Given the diversity of religious pacifisms, it becomes apparent that if there were such a thing as "non-religious" pacifism, this idea would be equally diverse—since any non-religious idea may have to be articulated as a response to a given notion of religion: if "secular" is understood as "anti-religious", this may need some qualification and specificity in terms of what the supposed secular idea is reacting against. What I mean here is that secularism in an Islamic context may be different from secularism in the context of Judaism or Hinduism. Now we might think that the secular approach develops independently of the religious conversation, as a set of arguments that are articulated without reference to an exegetical tradition, metaphysical and eschatological system, of set of rituals and practices. But such a claim is historically false. Secular pacifism is a tradition that has evolved in conversation with religious pacifism. Again, there is specificity in this evolution, which means that secular pacifism in the Christian world may be different from secular pacifism in some other context. To make this concrete in terms of what we discussed here, I pointed out that secular pacifism has evolved in conversation with the secular just war theory, which is a theory that is itself in conversation with the Christian just war tradition. And the Christian just war tradition was itself a theory that evolved as a response to early Christian pacifism. Such a conversation might look different if it evolved a response to Islamic notions of jihad or in a culture that views the Bhagavad-Gita as a touchstone. And so on.

Given all of this complexity, it might seem that the effort to distinguish between secular and religious pacifism will be futile. But that is not the point of this paper. Rather, the implication of the account presented here is that we must avoid any overly simplistic effort to make such distinctions. I began the paper with a dismissive quote that sought to reduce pacifism to a caricature as a naively religious ideal. I hope that the present paper has made it clear that such a caricature is inapt and unjust. I also hope to have clarified that there are some useful concepts that can help us analyze forms of pacifism (such as the difference between positive and negative peace). And I made use of five themes that are useful for interpretation: the role of exegesis; the importance of justificatory argument; the metaphysics of peace; ritual, community, and practice; and eschatology and hope. With these themes and context in place, other scholars can perhaps proceed further in attempting to understand the specificity of pacifism in both secular and religious contexts. Further research should consider both (1) ways in which religious and secular pacifisms are to be distinguished from one another and (2) the ways in which these different approaches have evolved and developed in conversation with one another.

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## Note

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