

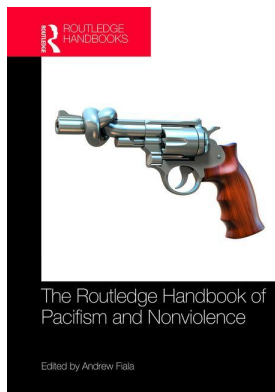
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Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



The Routledge Handbook of Pacifism and Nonviolence

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Peace

Publication details

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315638751-11>

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Published online on: 21 Feb 2018

How to cite :- David Boersema. 21 Feb 2018, *Peace from: The Routledge Handbook of Pacifism and Nonviolence* Routledge

Accessed on: 21 Aug 2019

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315638751-11>

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PEACE

Negative and Positive

David Boersema

If asked to define “peace” most people end up saying something along the lines of it being the absence of war or violence. But this conception places violence as the central, basic concept, with peace being a secondary, derivative one. While concerns about being free *from* hostilities are, of course, important for peace, they reflect only what philosophers of peace call “negative peace,” that is, peace in the sense of the absence of hostilities. But at least as important is “positive peace,” the conditions for being free *to* fulfill one’s potentials. Living in a state of poverty or prejudice or fear or degradation are forms of experiencing a life that is not peaceful. Murder is violent, but so, too, is starvation, at least for the person who is starving. Psychological, emotional, and economic abuses are experienced as violence just as much as physical blows are. To this extent, and for this reason, peace—especially peace as freedom *to* and not merely as freedom *from*—is intimately related to justice. Any genuine attempt to understand and promote peace requires addressing issues and questions of injustice, as both a form of violence and a cause of violence. This can include the pain that results from failure to fulfill one’s potentials and aspirations, sometimes caused by direct harm or even injustice perpetrated by others that prevents that fulfillment.

One component that is relevant to understanding and addressing the complexity of peace is seeing the interrelations between *interpersonal* peace—peace with others—and *intrapersonal* peace—peace within oneself. It is difficult to have inner peace (within oneself) if one lives in a context of threats, intolerance, or discrimination. At the same time, it is difficult to get along with others and respond to conflict nonviolently if one lives in an inner state of confusion, humiliation, or rage. As Mohandas Gandhi noted, “It has always been a mystery to me how men can feel themselves honored by the humiliation of their fellow beings” and “I claim that human mind or human society is not divided into watertight compartments called social, political and religious. All act and react upon one another” (Gandhi 2017). To have a fuller understanding of peace in both the negative and positive senses, it is necessary to flesh out various conceptions and forms of both peace and violence, as well as to see how they relate to issues of justice, rights, and needs.

Basic Conceptions of Peace

In exploring the nature of peace, it is useful to distinguish three terms: conflict, violence, and force. Conflict involves incompatible desired outcomes. When two chess masters sit down to

face each other, each one wants to win, but only one will; they have conflicting desired outcomes. This is conflict, but not violence nor force. Violence is one response to conflict, one form of behavior among many. There are others, such as negotiation, cooperation, compromise, changing perceptions, and even (nonviolent) persuasion. Nonviolent action can be forceful and, indeed, has been, as is witnessed by the work of Mohandas Gandhi in India and Nelson Mandela in South Africa. Violence is a form of force, but only one form; force is an energy or power used to bring about some change. While there is no single definition of violence with necessary and sufficient conditions, there are generally accepted and acknowledged aspects to violence: violence is force (whether physical or non-physical) used in a harmful or destructive way against some being that has an interest in not being harmed or destroyed. If one included the notion that, say, violence can be done to the environment, then having an interest in not being harmed or destroyed would need to be understood not in the sense of having an explicit, cognitive interest, but in the sense of being capable of suffering because of harmful or destructive actions.

Commonly, peace is typically taken to be a “secondary” concept, a derivative of the more primary concept of violence. That is to say, “peace” is typically defined as the absence of violence, rather than the other way around. Peace theorists have long spoken of peace as the absence of violence in a variety of ways. For example, they have distinguished between organized violence and unorganized violence, with peace subsequently defined along those terms. Organized violence, of course, includes war, whether between states or within them. Unorganized violence includes such direct, physical, personal violence as interpersonal killings, assaults, rapes, abuse, etc. In addition, there is structural violence, conditions or actions that are aspects of social structures or social institutions that—intentional or not—might harm people by preventing them from meeting their basic needs or interests. Such structures can be prevailing attitudes or practices, such as sexism, racism, ageism, etc., or they might be in the form of specific institutional policies or practices, such as discriminatory laws (e.g., ones that prohibit interracial marriage or require documentation of individuals based on religious affiliation).

The term “negative peace” is used, then, to speak of a state of affairs in which there is an absence of such violence, whether it is organized or unorganized. For instance, some would claim that, say, Canada is at peace today because it is not at war (that is, it is not engaged in organized violence). Others, however, claim that Canada is not really at peace because, although, yes, it is not explicitly at war with any other state, there still exists plenty of unorganized violence there. Not being openly at war, then, might be one form (or perhaps, let’s say, a necessary condition) for Canada to experience negative peace, but it is not sufficient, because there is still a level of unorganized violence in Canada so that full negative peace does not exist there.

As we all know, however, there are other forms of violence besides and beyond direct, physical, personal violence. There are also indirect forms of violence that either shorten the life span of persons (or moral agents and patients) or that indirectly reduce the quality of life for them. There might be, for instance, social or economic structures in place that harm—directly or indirectly—the quality of life of persons (again, the notion of structural violence). This could be organized, in the sense of, say, restrictions of civil liberties or civil freedoms, or it could be unorganized in the sense of, say, a culture of racism or social practices that curtail opportunities for some persons. The term “positive peace” is used when speaking of the absence of these forms and types of indirect violence.

Underlying these two types or notions of peace—that is, negative peace and positive peace—are the works of the noted Norwegian peace theorist Johann Galtung. As a point of departure in speaking of peace, Galtung defines *violence* as a state in which “human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations” (Galtung 1969: 167–191). Peace, then, would be a state in which those potentials are actualized.

This definition, or at least characterization, is the underpinning of the earlier notions of negative peace and positive peace. For Galtung, one's potentials are not realized, perhaps not even capable of being realized, in the context of war or other direct, physical violence. In addition, they are not realized, or perhaps even capable of being realized, in the context of social injustice and other forms of structural violence. People are no more at peace if they are threatened, intimidated, inappropriately discriminated against, barred from economic or educational opportunities, etc. than they are if they are physically attacked, for Galtung.

In addition to identifying violence as the differential between one's potentials and one's realizations, Galtung spells out six dimensions of violence that he claims can comprise this differential. One dimension is that of physical and non-physical (what he specifically identifies as psychological) violence. We all know that threats can be just as effective at times as actual attacks in influencing someone's behavior and actions. If a schoolyard bully can acquire another child's lunch money with a threat rather than with actually hitting and taking the money, the result is the same and the victim is just as much a victim (and, for Galtung, is just as much lacking in being at peace).

The second dimension of violence, for Galtung, is what he calls a negative vs. positive approach to influence. This is his way of speaking about negative vs. positive reinforcement, with negative reinforcement being punishment and positive reinforcement being reward. As with threats vs. attacks, rewards for "good" behavior (or policies) can bring about the same result as punishment for "bad" behavior. If the "good" behavior is in fact behavior that promotes (or fails to reduce) the differential between one's potentials and one's realizations, then that person, for Galtung, is not fully at peace.

A third dimension of violence focuses on whether or not there is an object that can be hurt. No one need actually be hurt for there to be a state of violence. Again, in cases of threats, no actual harm need occur for relevant agents to be subject to violence. Galtung remarks that the balance of power doctrine is based on efforts to obtain precisely this effect.

His fourth dimension is the flip side of the third; it focuses on whether or not there is a subject that acts to cause the violence. There might well be no specific actor or agent that causes the harm, even though harm is caused. For instance, economic structures and practices might well result in specific persons or groups being disadvantaged (and, hence, harmed in a way) without anyone (again, whether specific person or group) orchestrating the disadvantage. As Galtung puts it: if people are starving, violence is experienced, whether or not someone is trying to starve them.

Directly related to this concern is Galtung's fifth dimension of violence, namely, intended vs. unintended violence. As is often said, the road to hell is paved with good intentions. Some violence is and can be intended; other violence is and can happen even when not intended.

Finally, for Galtung, there is manifest and latent violence. Manifest, of course, is open, recognizable violence. Latent violence, on the other hand, is not open or directly recognized. As we all know, the prevalence, say, of biases or stereotypes can be latent yet harmful.

Action and Agents

Just as one speaks of negative peace as the absence of something (violence) and positive peace as the presence of something (conditions for the fulfillment of potentials), so too can one speak of positive and negative actions. A positive action is a case of something that is actually done or committed, whereas a negative action is a case of something not being done or committed. For instance, if one chooses to cast a vote during an election, that is a positive action, but if one chooses not to cast a vote during an election, that is a negative action. There are forms of not acting that are not the same thing as a negative action. If one does not cast a vote because one is a two-year-old child, that is a form of not acting, but it is not a negative action because casting

votes is not within the arena of actions for a child. For an adult to choose not to vote, however, is a negative action. In the case of the adult, it is a choice to refrain from committing a positive action.

Positive actions are often referred to as acts of commission and negative actions are often referred to as acts of omission. The connection to peace and violence is that violence can occur—peace can be thwarted—by acts of omission just as much as by acts of commission. For example, if one strikes a child, that is an act of physical violence, or if one verbally berates a child that is an act of psychological or emotional violence. But if one simply ignores the physical or psychological or emotional needs of a child, that is also an act of violence, but an act of omission rather than an act of commission. Both moral theory and legal theory wrestle with acts of omission with respect to whether one can be found responsible (and to what extent) for such negative actions. If one commits a crime, for example, we assume that one is morally and legally responsible. But what if one “merely” witnesses a crime and does nothing about it? Again, how this relates to peace and violence is whether and to what extent violence can be a matter of not doing something (that is, omitting) as opposed to doing something (that is, committing).

Just as questions about the nature of actions (positive or negative) are relevant to peace and violence, so too is the question of who are the agents involved in those actions. Clearly, we identify particular individuals as relevant agents. Again, if I strike another person that is an act of violence that I have committed, or if I fail to help another person in a moment of need, that could be an act of violence that I am responsible for, since I omitted making a helpful positive action. However, we also identify other agents besides particular individuals, such as institutions or groups of people or whole nations or social structures. For instance, some have claimed that the legal system is structured in a way that is biased toward certain people. If this were true, it would be the system that is the agent of violence, not merely specific individual judges or other legal authorities. Or when we say that nations go to war, we do not mean specific individuals, but the social collective that we call “the nation.”

With respect to peace and violence, just who the relevant agents are can obviously be important. The same action committed between two people might be one of violence depending upon who is involved. An insulting remark made by an adult to another adult could have a very different effect than that same insulting remark made by an adult to a child, and hence be an act of violence in one case but not necessarily in the other. This speaks to the importance of perspective as an element of peace and violence. The meaning of an action can be quite different depending upon context and upon the agents involved. We all recognize the difference between how an action is intended and how it is received. For example, one person might intend to say something as a joke, but the person hearing it might be offended. This can also be the case for acts of omission; one person might not greet another person upon meeting because that person is preoccupied, but the other person might take that failure of greeting as a snub. In both cases, the intended meaning is not the same as the received meaning. Where this can be relevant to peace and violence is in recognizing that an action—whether one of commission or omission—can be received as being violent even if it is not intended as such. And this relates back to agents of violence (or of peace). For instance, an institution—say an organization—in its hiring practices might not intend to be racist or sexist, but could be perceived as such because of who it actually hires over time.

Rights

A common and important approach to understanding peace and violence today is to relate these issues to the notions of rights and justice. With respect to rights, they fundamentally are the means we use to identify and secure either protections for us from the (possible) offenses of others, or empowerments for us to engage in the world. In the former case, rights function to

say what others do not get to do; they protect us (for example, the right to be free of unreasonable search and seizure), while in the latter case, they function to say what we get to do; they empower us (for example, the right to freedom of expression). As will be noted later, these two functions relate directly to what are called negative rights and positive rights as well as to negative peace and positive peace.

We never merely “have a right,” but we always have a right to something or other. That is to say, there is always some content to a right. That content involves some opportunities or goods or services. For example, if you have a right to the pursuit of happiness, it is understood not that you have the right to be happy but that you have the right to the opportunity to be happy. Or, to say that you have the right to be president of the United States someday really means that you have the right to try to become president. However, when we say that you have the right to an attorney, we do not simply mean that you have the right to try to get an attorney; rather, we mean that you have the right to the services (at least some) of an attorney. Likewise, if you have a right to an education, we do not simply mean that you have the right to try to get an education, but rather that you have the right to have some goods and services provided for you (such as books and teachers). Or if you have the right to health care, this is usually understood to mean not just that you can try to get health care, but that some goods and services need to be provided to you.

Rights entail duties on other agents; they regulate other agents’ behavior. When your rights place a duty on other agents (or regulate the behavior of other agents) in the sense of requiring those other agents not to interfere with you, this is usually referred to as a negative right. All that this means is that other agents have the duty not to interfere with you; they just need to leave you alone. So, if you have the right to worship as you please, then the duty placed on others is to not do anything to interfere with you with respect to that. This is called a negative right because, in effect, the duty on others is negative; negative in the sense that nothing must be done (except to leave you alone).

By contrast, sometimes people claim that one agent’s rights place duties on others that require some positive action by those others in order for that right to be realized. For example, earlier we noted that having a right to an attorney requires that others (in this case, the state) provide the right holder with the services of an attorney. In this case, it is not enough to simply leave the right holder alone and do nothing. Doing nothing is not the same thing as providing an attorney. This sort of right, in which something must be provided to the right holder, is usually said to be a positive right. It is said to be a positive right because some positive action, not mere noninterference, is required in order for the right to be realized.

There are various kinds or levels of right, with some referred to as basic rights. That is, there are some rights that are fundamental and necessary in order for other rights to be meaningful and even possible. For example, I have the right to vote, but that right presupposes and relies upon some other rights such as the right to self-determination and freedom of movement. But even those rights presuppose the more basic right of physical security. I cannot really exercise my right to vote if my personal security is at risk. I can talk about having a right, but enjoying that right is something else and requires physical security. While most everyone has argued for physical security as a basic right—and has seen physical security as a negative right, since the duty on you is simply to leave me alone—many have gone on to say that subsistence, or some minimum level of food, shelter, etc., is also a basic right. Subsistence rights are basic for exactly the same reasons that physical security rights are basic: no other rights are possible without them. The philosopher Henry Shue has remarked:

No one can fully, if at all, enjoy any right that is supposedly protected by society if he or she lacks the essentials for a reasonably healthy and active life. Deficiencies in

the means of subsistence can be just as fatal, incapacitating, or painful as violations of physical security.

Shue 1996: 32

Subsistence rights, of course, are positive rights. Something (beyond noninterference) must be provided to an agent in order for those rights to be realized. This issue of subsistence rights relates back to matters of actions and agents. While, of course, everyone needs physical security and subsistence, some agents—for example, children or severely handicapped persons—especially need them, because they are not capable of securing them on their own. Such matters are, of course, related to issues of peace, both negative and positive. Security rights are directly related to negative peace in the sense of agents not being harmed by acts of commission (such as being killed) and subsistence rights are directly related to positive peace in the sense of agents not being harmed by acts of omission (such as being prevented access to basic needs for survival). If peace in a full sense is to be attained, or even pursued, then these various kinds of rights need to be realized.

Equality and Justice

As with the issue of rights, it is clear that equality and justice relate to peace and violence, especially with the understanding and realization of positive peace. But also, as with the issue of rights, the notions of equality and justice are complex. There are various concepts of equality. For example, there is the concept of numeric equality, meaning simply the same number. Where numeric equality matters to people might be in cases when something is to be distributed among a group and we believe that everyone should get the same as everyone else; that is, an equal distribution is a fair distribution. However, numeric equality is not always what we believe is fair, or a sense of equality that is important to us, because we might claim that one person deserves more than another. For instance, if one worker does a better job than another, we might well say that the first worker deserves higher pay than the other. Recognizing that numeric equality does not fully capture what we think is important, philosophers speak of the difference between *treating equally* and *equal treatment (or, equal consideration)*. For instance, suppose that there are three children in a family. The parents want to be sure not to show favoritism for any of the three, so for every child they give the exact same birthday present, say, a basketball. One of the children loves to play basketball, one is neutral about it, and one hates playing basketball. There is a sense in which all three children are treated equally by the parents; they all receive the same thing, a basketball. However, from the perspective of the children, there is not equal treatment; the gift of a basketball has very different meaning for each of them. In such a case, treating equally—that is, numeric equality—is not the same thing as equal treatment. There is not equal consideration of the different interests among the children, and so it is not received as being equal, whether or not it is intended as being equal.

Related to the distinction between treating equally and equal treatment (and simple numeric equality) is the issue of equal *in what respect*. Two people might be equal in various ways and unequal in various ways. It is not simple equality or inequality that matters, but equality that is relevant to certain concerns. For example, in both moral and legal contexts, we believe that people should have equal rights or equal opportunities. However, even this notion is not uncontroversial. For instance, some rights apply to only some people, not to all people. As an example, there are special legal benefits set aside for veterans, such as special low-interest loans from the government. Or there are parking spaces that are reserved only for handicapped people; in effect, they have the right to park in them, but no one else has that right. This case points to the fact

that equality is one moral and social value, but it is one that we balance along with other moral and social values.

Equality is closely connected with justice, though not identical with it. As the previous examples show, there are cases in which we believe that inequality, or at least unequal treatment, is just and fair—as with providing special parking spaces for some individuals or special low-interest loans for some individuals. In particular, we relate equality both to *procedural* justice (that is, having fair procedures) and *substantive* justice (that is, fair outcomes of those procedures). For instance, if two teams receive equal treatment by the referees or umpires in a game, then whatever the outcome is (that is, whoever wins the game) is seen as just—because there was equal treatment in terms of process, although there was an unequal outcome (one team won and one team lost).

Procedural justice has to do with a just process. We think that a process is unjust if it is biased or skewed in some way or on some basis that we think is inappropriate or irrelevant. A just process is one that is not unjust. As was just mentioned, if we are playing some game and the referees or umpires seem to be favoring one team over another (say, by calling fouls on only one team even when both teams perform the same actions), then we think that this is unjust; that is, we think the rules of the game are not being applied to both teams justly. Or, in an election, if we think that some ballots or voters are being excluded for inappropriate or irrelevant reasons, we think that there is an injustice happening. (Not all exclusions would necessarily be unjust; if a particular person has failed to register to vote, then that person's ballot might be excluded, but this would not necessarily be an injustice.) As another example, if some law were applied differently to different persons for what seem to be inappropriate or irrelevant reasons, then, again, we would say that there is an injustice with the legal process (the law is not being applied in a just way). While procedural justice often involves upholding some sense of equality—for instance, treating like cases alike or weeding out irrelevant biases—equality of outcomes is not necessary for justice.

Besides procedural justice, the other broad sense of justice is substantive justice. This has to do with the substance, or outcomes, of interactions. Within substantive justice, there are several forms of justice. One form is called *distributive* justice. Distributive justice involves the just distribution of goods or services or other things of social value. Goods and services (say, money or objects or opportunities for education) can be distributed among people in many different ways. For instance, one person could own or possess all of them, or everyone could have exactly the same amount of each good or service, or there could be some other distribution. What would make the actual distribution just or unjust? What standards or criteria would determine whether a particular distribution of goods and services is just or unjust? Philosophers and others have given many different answers to these questions. One criterion that has been suggested is merit. As long as you deserve what is distributed to you, then the distribution is just. This, of course, depends on what counts as merit. Another criterion that has been suggested is luck. For instance, if two people play the lottery and one of them wins, it is not because that person deserves to win, but is lucky; however, since the process was fair and equal (it was a random drawing of numbers), then the outcome is just, at least not unjust. Another criterion that has been suggested is utility. This view is that whatever distribution of goods and services leads to the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people is the just distribution. Yet another criterion that has been suggested is need. This is the view that goods and services should be distributed in order to meet the needs of people. Of course, what those needs are would have to be made clear, as well as why some things are legitimate needs (as opposed to wishes or luxuries). In addition, there is the issue of how to justly distribute goods and services if there are not enough to meet everyone's needs (so that, by itself, need would not suffice).

The other major form of substantive justice is called *corrective* justice (sometimes called *retributive* justice). This form of justice has to do with what happens once an injustice has occurred. While distributive justice is focused on what we consider to be a fair distribution of goods and services, corrective justice is focused on what to do when an injustice has taken place. If we think that someone has acted in ways that violate accepted rules, then we might think of that as an injustice, either in terms of procedural justice or in terms of distributive justice. For instance, if someone commits a crime, we might think of that as a violation of social rules (hence, a violation of procedural justice) and as a result of that crime an unjust distribution of goods or services would be brought about (such as stealing someone else's money, resulting in a redistribution of goods). Other people claim that the criminal must be "brought to justice" and be given some form of punishment so that "justice can be served." This sense of justice, again, is corrective justice (or correcting an injustice that has happened).

The two broad forms of substantive justice, distributive and corrective, often overlap and speak to the notion of restorative justice. For instance, issues of reparation or affirmative action involve both forms. In the case, say, of past discrimination against minorities, there was an unjust distribution of goods and services (minorities were unfairly discriminated against). Acts of reparation (that is, repairing the damage, so to speak) or practices of affirmative action are steps toward corrective justice, toward correcting the injustice that occurred in the past.

These various forms of justice are, of course, related to the varied and multiple aspects of peace. Galtung argued that structural violence itself was injustice. To suffer injustice, whether procedural or substantive, is to suffer a form of violence. Again, one can be harmed by acts of commission that are procedurally unjust, such as being subject to laws that are inappropriately discriminatory (for example, having voter registration laws that take race into account) as well as by acts of omission (by not having fair voter registration laws upheld). Likewise, one can be harmed by acts of commission that are substantively unjust (for example, permits for public assembly that discriminate on the basis of religious affiliation) as well as by acts of omission (by not having such unfair permits overturned). Acts and forms of injustice are fundamental harms to agents and significant forms of violence.

Promoting Peace

It is important, of course, to recognize the varied facets and dimensions of peace—for example, the differences and interconnections between negative and positive peace, and interpersonal and intrapersonal peace—as well as the multiplicity of related issues and concerns: actions and agents, rights, equality and justice. But recognizing and understanding these are only one step. Also important is addressing the reduction or elimination of violence and the promotion and realization of peace. With respect to negative peace, one long-standing approach, at least in terms of international conflicts and nation-states as the relevant agents, has been to cope with the threat of violence. One means of coping has been in the guise of deterrence. An example of this was the policy of Mutual Assured Destruction during the Cold War of the late twentieth century between the United States and the Soviet Union. Here the means of coping with violence, and hence maintaining peace, was to threaten the opponent with severe retaliation of violence. While supporters referred to it as "peace through strength," critics often referred to this policy as the MAD doctrine and argued that this resulted at best in a state of negative peace, but that it did not promote positive peace. *Détente*, not deterrence, was said to be a better means toward reducing or eliminating international violence and threats of violence. Preventing conflict and violence, rather than merely coping with them, led, for example, to arms control talks and agreements. Where arms control or disarmament might reduce the means of conflict

and violence, preventive diplomacy is claimed to reduce the incentives or causes of conflict and violence.

Peace theorists have noted that these same concerns and approaches also apply to interpersonal peace, that is, where the agents are not nation-states, but individuals or groups of individuals. Gene Sharp, in *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, enunciated numerous ways in which individuals could respond to conflict nonviolently: peaceful protests, efforts at persuasion, symbolic acts of demonstration, petitions, lobbying, picketing, marches, withholding relevant funds, strikes, economic boycotts, etc. Some of these ways apply also to international agents; for example, instituting economic sanctions against an aggressive regime rather than (threats of) military strikes (Sharp 1973).

With respect to promoting and realizing positive peace, more needs to be said and done. First, recognizing that positive peace has to do with quality of life, not merely the absence of overt violence, points to a variety of steps. For example, because economic hardships detract from positive peace, working on eliminating those hardships is paramount. Likewise, because social stigmatization, isolation, and stereotyping can detract from positive peace, working on eliminating racist, sexist, and other forms of disrespect are crucial. Because lack of adequate health care detracts from positive peace, working on providing such health care is important. While these points can seem obvious, almost to the level of seeming to be trite, they are basic and true. Preventing harm is important, but so, too, is helping. They reinforce the notion that peace is a verb, not a noun. That is, peace is a state to be achieved, both intrapersonally and interpersonally. As Duane Cady has remarked: pacifism is not passivism. Genuine peace, both negative and positive, comes about through active engagement with one's social and natural environments (Cady 2010). This includes acknowledging that acts of omission—failing to do something—can sometimes be a form of violence, just as much as direct acts of committing violence. It also includes acknowledging that peace is ineliminably intertwined with matters of rights and needs, as well as the need to address social justice and equality.

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