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Special Issue Reprint

War and Peace in Religious Culture

Edited by
Douglas Allen

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Guest Editor

Douglas Allen

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About the Editor

Douglas Allen

Douglas Allen, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy, University of Maine, served as President of the international Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy and is the Editor of the Bloomsbury Book Series of Studies in Comparative Philosophy and Religion. His areas of specialization include the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi; comparative philosophy and religion; phenomenology (especially the phenomenology of religion, symbolism, and myth); the phenomenology of Mircea Eliade; Asian philosophy and religion (especially Hinduism and Buddhism); and political philosophy (especially the philosophy of Karl Marx). Author and Editor of 17 books and 150 book chapters and scholarly journal articles, he has authored five Gandhi-informed books, including *The Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi for the Twenty-First Century* (2008), *Mahatma Gandhi* (2011), and *Gandhi after 9/11: Creative Nonviolence and Sustainability* (2019). His other books include *Structure and Creativity in Religion* (1978), *Coming to Terms: Indochina, the United States, and the War* (1991), *Religion and Political Conflict in South Asia: India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka* (1992), *Culture and Self: Philosophical and Religious Perspectives, East and West* (1997), *Myth and Religion in Mircea Eliade* (2002), *Comparative Philosophy and Religion in Times of Terror* (2006), and *Issues in War and Peace in Religious Culture* (2025). A peace and justice scholar–activist, Doug Allen has been active in the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam Antiwar Movement, the Anti-Apartheid Movement, and many other struggles resisting violence, war, class exploitation, imperialism, racial and gender oppression, and environmental destruction.

Preface

Focusing on "War and Peace in Religious Culture," this Reprint's subject matter is supremely significant, challenging, and relevant to current readers, the contemporary world, and the future of human and other planetary life. In turn, the Reprint has a very wide-ranging scope, examining how concerns about issues of war and peace have been central to religions and religious cultures for thousands of years and continue to be essential in the contemporary world.

In this volume, ten distinguished international scholars have contributed diverse, creative, challenging studies that express in-depth examinations, formulations, and interpretations of many religious and nonreligious cultures. The articles are addressed to specialists in philosophy, religion, comparative religions, cultural studies, peace studies, Asian studies, and other disciplinary fields, but they are also addressed to highly motivated general readers who will understand the significance of the subject matter for their own values, for their individual, social, and cultural lives, and for the future, survival, and flourishing of humankind and the planet.

The aim, purpose, and motivation for the years of dedicated work that have resulted in this volume have been raising theoretical awareness and engaging in contextually significant practice focusing on how religions and religious culture reveal an essential universal unity and interconnectedness, but also how they have been very diverse and often contradictory, with positive and negative perspectives expressing internal and external conflicts, divisions, doctrines, institutions, and rituals. This volume aims to raise a greater understanding of how religious culture has interpreted, rejected, and/or promoted and justified war, alongside how it has interpreted, rejected, and/or promoted peace, inner and outer peace, the integral relations of peace and justice, and world-engaging or world-transcending peace. Regarding the major subject of religious culture, and taking questions of war and peace as its focus, this volume contributes to a greater understanding of whether there is a universal religious culture, an essential religious culture that can be clearly distinguished from nonreligious culture, and/or only many diverse, separate, and contextualized religious cultures.

Finally, this Reprint, with its major focus on war and peace in religious culture, is of the greatest significance for understanding the deep existential crises that threaten contemporary existence, providing constructive life-affirming solutions for the future.

I want to acknowledge my gratitude to the Editors at *Religions*, who invited me to serve as Guest Editor of this Special Issue on "War and Peace in Religious Culture" and with whom I have worked cooperatively over the years; to the ten scholars who worked cooperatively as colleagues in proposing their topics and then formulating, developing, and revising their draft articles in response to internal and external reviews, critiques, and suggestions; and, finally, to my major contact and editor, Gloria Qi, and others at the *Religions* Editorial Office, who have been so cooperative and of such great assistance in allowing me to complete this challenging research project.

Douglas Allen
Guest Editor

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Article

Gandhi and Buber on Individual and Collective Transformation

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Abstract: A virtual encounter between Buber and Gandhi articulates where they differ and where they touch common ground. They developed a transformative thinking that opened up the individual and collective ego to others. Only recently have scholars paid full attention to Buber's theo-political thinking. Gandhi's article "The Jews" made his way of thinking irrelevant for many Zionists over the decades. The relative neglect of Buber's political thought and of Gandhi's contribution to conflict resolution in Israel/Palestine explains why studies systematically comparing Buber's politico-religious thinking with that of Gandhi are rare. The present article wants to fill this gap. Gandhi and Buber's religiosity impacted upon spiritual, social, and political life. Their transformational perspectives could shed new light on how to deal with violent conflict situations.

Keywords: Gandhi; Buber; transformation; satyagraha; theo-politics; dialogue; violence; nonviolence

Gandhi and Buber developed a transformational thinking that has relevance for individuals and for society as such. As inclusive and dialogical thinkers, they strove to create a peaceful society that promoted diversity in unity. They were profoundly religious thinkers who perceived divine sparks/Brahman in everybody.[1] Their religious-political mindset clashed with nationalistic tendencies in their respective countries. Zionism and *swaraj* were an infinite task: their success depended upon the recognition of cultural and religious others. Cohabitation, cooperation, and equality were at the heart of their socio-political thoughts. Power alone did not determine the course of history.[2] For Buber, the success of Zionism depended upon the creation of a real community and upon Jewish rapprochement with the Arabs. For Gandhi, *swaraj* from British *raj* was a spiritual renewal. In their ethical-religious orientation, they believed that human beings could be transformed by the spirit. Buber's dialogical philosophy, in which the individual or collective I is relational, comes close to Gandhi's *satyagraha*, which strives to convert people through critical, constructive communication. They believed in the interdependency of all. Gandhi's nonviolent resistance to the forces of evil was a self-transforming religious act, intending to bring about a less violent society. Buber's dialogical thinking was steeped in a humanistic interpretation of early Hasidism.[3]

The research on Buber's theo-political thinking is a rather neglected field. Only in recent publications do these thoughts receive due attention as being against a political theology, à la Carl Schmitt.[4] Buber's relative absence from contemporary political conversations has been explained by the fact that his politics were perceived as an application of his dialogical philosophy and theology. It is argued that Buber was better understood from his Biblical exegesis, his *Path of Utopia*, and his occasional writings on Zionism (Brody 2018, p. 86). Gandhi's thought is admired, but considered irrelevant for life in the Near East. His problematic 1938 article "The Jews" made his way of thinking irrelevant for many Zionists over the decades.[5] The relative neglect of Buber's political thought and of Gandhi's contribution to conflict resolution in Israel/Palestine explain why studies systematically comparing Buber's politico-religious thinking with that of Gandhi are rare (Murti 1968). The present article wants to fill this gap. Buber and Gandhi did not meet physically, but a virtual encounter between these two giants of the spirit could articulate where they differ

and where they touch common ground. They developed a transformative thinking that opened up the individual and collective ego to others, in order to get engaged in dialogue as a dimension of depth in human life.

After pointing out some differences and commonalities (Section 1), I describe how they aimed at transforming the individual as well as society. Their religiosity impacted upon spiritual, social, and political life (Section 2). I deal with Buber's critique of Gandhi's *satyagraha*, paying attention to their differences on the use of violence and the adoption of nonviolence in given situations (Section 3).[6] Only after this discussion do I return to the question of their practice-oriented dialogical religious views and their dialogical hermeneutics of sacred Scriptures (Section 4). Finally, I offer some Gandhian and Buberian transformational perspectives on the conflict in Israel/Palestine (Section 5).

1. Differences and Common Ground

The lifestyles of Buber and Gandhi differed greatly. The one was married, and the other vowed celibacy in 1906 after being married at a too young age.[7] The first was a well-to-do man, living in beautiful houses in Heppenheim and in the rich Rehavia borough in Jerusalem. He enjoyed a comfortable life. The other lived in modest dwellings in South-Africa and the Indian sub-continent, conducting an austere lifestyle. Buber did not share Gandhi's excessive asceticism and religious penance nor his rather negative view of sexual life that is not for procreation. On death, they developed opposite ideas.[8] In fact, Gandhi was ready to become a public sacrifice for the sake of a more peaceful India. Buber did not share Gandhi's self-sacrificial actions, albeit he knew that the Suffering Servant mentioned in Deutero-Isaiah had to take upon himself the heavy burden of others. Suffering Servants created a meaningful, hidden history.

Like Henry Polak, Gandhi's close friend, Buber pled for Jewish self-defense during the Hitler period. Gandhi principally cleaved to *ahimsa* and did not advise people to take up weapons against Nazism and fascism, at least not initially. Moreover, for Gandhi, Zionism was a colonialist movement. Buber developed a spiritual Zionism that aimed at the unification of humankind. Gandhi thought that nonviolence was a panacea, applicable in almost every situation, although with time he underwent an evolution. The efficacy of action was not his primary consideration. Buber was more inclined to justify proportionate violence against brute aggression. Gandhi rejected violence as a means, although in certain situations he asserted that violence was allowed as the best nonviolent option. Responding to a madman or to menacing monkeys, for instance, violence was the most nonviolent option: it was considered as *ahimsa* (Allen 2019, p. 33).

Beyond substantial differences, there are remarkable affinities between Buber and Gandhi. Murti rightly remarked: "[. . .] the differences between Buber and Gandhi are not as important as the philosophic unity in their dialogue" (Murti 1968, p. 607). Gandhi's *satyagraha* is, indeed, similar to Buber's dialogue. His method of *satyagraha*, including nonviolent non-cooperation, penance, and voluntary suffering, was the way dialogue was realized. With *satyagraha* as universal love, Gandhi tried to transform the conflict between India and England into a dialogue. Similarly, Buber's religious thinking had relevance for the reconciliation between Jews and Arabs (Murti 1968, pp. 607–13). Murti concludes: "There is an unmistakable unity of spirit between Buber's *dialogue* and Gandhi's *satyagraha*. Both of them supremely recognized the divine mission of human existence" (Murti 1968, p. 611).

In their desire to hallow everyday life, Buber and Gandhi were practice-oriented. Nothing was exempt from sanctification. Buber frequently used the term *Bewährung*, "putting to proof in action" (Green and Mayse 2019, p. 61; Shonkoff 2018, p. 276). In Mendes-Flohr's words: he had a "non-noetic conception of faith" (Mendes-Flohr 2001, p. 686). For Buber and Gandhi, spirituality had to be verified in daily life, including in the political realm. They showed the relevance of religion for politics. At the end of his autobiography, Gandhi writes: "To see the universal and all-pervading Spirit of Truth face to face one must be able to love the meanest of creation as oneself. And a man who aspires

after that cannot afford to keep out of any field of life. That is why my devotion to Truth has drawn me into the field of politics; and I can say without the slightest hesitation, and yet in all humility, that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means" (Gandhi n.d., p. 555).

As men of peace, Buber and Gandhi profoundly believed in the unity of humankind.[9] They confirmed the existence of religious and political others in their country. Against Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who endeavored to create a separate state, Gandhi—being the Mahatma—wanted to be in humble service of all the inhabitants of the land, irrespective of race or religion. Similarly, Buber desired coexistence between Arabs and Jews: both had to "serve" the land. Diverse people belonged to the land: they did not own the land, the land owned them. Gandhi and Buber opposed two separate states in their country and strived to preserve unity in multiplicity. In *Brit Shalom* (1925–1933), Buber and his friends pled for the coexistence of Jews and Arabs in Palestine. In 1942, his *Ichud* party advocated the union between Jews and Arabs. Gandhi did everything in his power to avoid the rift between Hindus and Muslims. Both thinkers were obsessed with the idea of unity: Palestine was not only for Jews and India not only for Hindus. Gandhi and the Muslim Congressman Maulana Abul Kalam Azad opposed the separation of the Muslim League, headed by Mohammed Ali Jinnah. In addition, he did not favor the separation of the *Dalits* (the oppressed), headed by Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, from the Congress. Buber pleaded together with Magnes for a binational state, a co-dominion over Palestine.[10] They favored unity with Muslims.[11] History turned out differently: partition brought self-determination, but also ethnic conflict and violence, as foreseen by Buber and Magnes as well as by Gandhi and Azad. Jonathan Greenberg calls this history of partition "tragic" (Greenberg 2004, pp. 12–13, 24).

2. Transformation of the Self and of Society

2.1. Relational Thinkers

Gandhi and Buber considered the self not as an atomistic, isolated I, but as relational. They reflected on interrelatedness, on how people affect each other. Each human being was called to become part of a community. For Buber, this meant that everyone had to turn, to become "I-thou" and to get involved in the creation of a dialogical society. For Gandhi, it implied developing self-restraint, becoming nonviolent, and contributing to a predominantly nonviolent society.[12] The illusionary and violent ego had to be replaced by a truthful deeper self, the Self or Truth. Unlike Marxists with their class struggle, they put the accent upon nonviolence and upon the personal in a non-revolutionary process. Gandhi mastered the art of compromise, and in many, even painful, situations, continued to communicate with others. In a parallel manner, in Buber's "return", all depended upon the relationship between human beings.

In his Hasidic stories, Buber formulated an anthropology that showed the way to individuals (Buber 1963). All are called. In one's answer to the call, one has to start with oneself. However, one is summoned to go beyond oneself and become involved in the world. Personal self-transformation and transformation of society went together; interpersonal relations and inter-communal relations were hand in glove (Werner 2018).

Buber emphasized that there is only one way: one's own way. Therefore, he did not recommend a uniform way for living. One had to evolve without any fixed code. Similarly, Gandhi proclaimed that each way was unique, a particular perception of the Truth. He wrote about his "experiences" of Truth.[13] One only could have "glimpses" of the Truth. The Gandhian philosopher and peace and justice activist Douglas Allen specifies that, for Gandhi, relative truths were a limited understanding of the Absolute Truth that functioned as the "regulative ideal" (Allen 2019, p. 51). It would be a misunderstanding to think that Gandhi was "inflexible, coercive and abusive in relating to his family, striking workers, satyagrahis, and others" (Allen 2019, p. 50). Although not always, Gandhi was generally flexible in his views, and he recognized a plurality of visions. Although the relative truth was the partial access to the Absolute Truth, diversity was not forgotten (Allen 2019,

pp. 47, 54). Gandhi went from one relative truth to a greater relative truth. His adoption of the Jain *anekantavada* or many-sidedness prevented him from developing a dogmatic view, although he did not always succeed (Allen 2019, chp. 8). Both Buber and Gandhi had no fixed doctrines but judged each situation at a given time according to their understanding of it. Buber said that he does not have a teaching but carries on a conversation. He showed the way with "I–Thou": he does not demonstrate (in *apodeixis*), but points (in *deixis*) (Mendes-Flohr 2011).[14] Gandhi, too, engaged in conversation, rather than developing stringent philosophical thoughts. He paid special attention to the downtrodden, who had to be freed by actively changing their destiny. By depersonalizing evil, he also desired to be in contact with the oppressors, who had to be freed from their violence, exploitation, and greed. All were involved in the nonviolent revolution.

To Buber's mind, recognition preceded cognition. Acknowledgment and trust were more important than knowledge or experience in time and space. Buber and Gandhi trusted that the human being is capable of entering in dialogue, which made the Divine manifest. Encounter (Buber: *Begegnung*) and service were more elevated than self-affirmation. In the words of Gabriel Marcel: not having but being was decisive. Buber explicitly opposed a philosophy of existence that refers to "a self-contained or self-sufficient principle of existence" (Mendes-Flohr 2011, p. 253). Buber and Gandhi enjoined people to become partners in a continuous dialogue with others. For Gandhi, the nobility of the I consists in its relatedness to the other as a manifestation of Brahman. He had no foes and could even address Hitler as "dear friend", distinguishing between the man and his monstrous deeds. He put the accent upon service to the other. In non-cooperating with oppressors and in nonviolent resistance against unjust laws, Gandhi sometimes left this dialogical attitude. Yet, ultimately, the dialogue with all and the liberation of all remained his declared aim. In Buber's dialogical thought, the human spirit was not in the isolated individual, but always "between" (*zwischen*) human beings.

In his *I and Thou*, Buber urged the human being to become dialogical. This transformation had to be personal: the I could become "I–Thou" and insert meaning into existence that was not reducible to the "I-It" sphere. The "I–Thou" was the humanizing element in humanity. A human being cannot exist without an instrumental, utilizing, categorizing, functional approach. Yet, what made the human humane was his or her ability to relate. Everyone had to return to their fellow human being. Buber celebrated the marvel of relatedness. In this, he followed Hermann Cohen, who perceived the correlation of God and the human being as actualized in the correlation of human beings. The "next man" (*Nebenmensch*) had to become a "fellowman" (*Mitmensch*). If this does not take place, the "next man" (*Nebenmensch*) unavoidably becomes the "opposing man" (*Gegenmensch*) (Cohen 1972, pp. 86, 113–14; 1919, pp. 100–1, 132–33). For Cohen, "the isolated self exclusively engaged in thinking cannot be an ethical self. For this [ethical] self, there exists no I without a Thou" (Cohen 2013, p. 218; 1924, p. 275)[15]. For Buber, "The extended lines of relations meet in the eternal *Thou*. Every particular *Thou* is a glimpse through to the eternal *Thou*; by means of every particular *Thou* the primary word addresses the eternal *Thou* . . . The inborn *Thou* is realized in each relation and consummated in none. It is consummated only in the direct relation with the *Thou* that by its nature cannot become *It*" (Buber 1938, p. 91; Buber 1958a, p. 75; 1970, p. 123). Gandhi, too, considered the I as relational. His concern was the connection to a deeper nonviolent Self or Reality that could be discovered behind the constructed violent self.

2.2. Religiosity, Sociality, and Politics

Buber was not interested in daily prayers and rites. Gandhi, in contrast, had regular prayer services and religious chants. However, what united them in their religiosity was their common desire to conceive politics as a field that had to be influenced by a religious spirit. One's entire life had to be hallowed, including the political dimension. In a time when religions became largely privatized in the West, Gandhi and Buber brought religion into contact with politics: no compartment of life was disconnected from religion that

interpenetrated all spheres of life. Buber strived for a radical change, without becoming a revolutionary.[16] In his novel *Gog and Magog*, he opposed an apocalyptic politics and refused to interpret Napoleon as preceding the messianic times (Buber 1944; 1958b). His adagio was "turning", not overturning, slow change, not revolution. Redemption would not come from apocalyptic visions and false Messiahs, who want to hasten the end of times, but rather from patient work in history. With their extraordinary religiosity, Buber and Gandhi became involved in politics and pleaded for a change from power to service. Buber was a Jew and a humanist, and Gandhi thought that he was "as much a Christian, a Sikh and a Jain" as he was a Hindu, and that "[r]eligion does not teach one to kill one's brother however different his belief" (CWMG 1999, vol. 85, pp. 276–77). Buber would agree with this ethical interpretation of religion.

In their inclusive religiosity, they emphasized the underlying unity of religions. Buber's thoughts on religiosity as distinguished from concrete religions run parallel with what Gandhi called "religion beyond religions" or "true religion" (CWMG 1999, vol. 52, pp. 219, 269, 311–12). Moreover, Gandhi's utterance "Truth is God" and Buber's dialogical philosophy allowed atheists to join the liberation struggle.

For Gandhi, unity is more important than what divides: it is the deeper reality. For Buber, dialogue or the inter-human is the highest reality. Both were acutely aware of the stains in their own religion. In a way parallel to Buber, who did not believe that God demanded from king Saul to kill, Gandhi interpreted the Gita not as an outward war, but as a struggle in oneself. It was further *adharma* to believe in the distinctions of high and low in the *varnas* (CWMG 1999, vol. 80, pp. 222–24). Although he supported the *varna* system in general, Gandhi did not understand how one could consider it *dharma* to treat the depressed classes as untouchables. For Hindu orthodoxy, he went too far in his proximity to the *Dalits*, whereas others wanted to go further. Gandhi and Buber criticized institutional religion but were profoundly religious men. Buber did not visit synagogues; Gandhi was not a temple goer. Yet, with their all-encompassing, universal religiosity, they challenged people to rethink traditional institutional religion.

Both were enthusiastic about experimental cooperative village communities, kibbutzim and ashrams (Buber 1956).[17] Buber highly appreciated the interrelatedness and equality of all in the kibbutz, preferring this social organization above the arrangements of the state. These communitarian forms of life, inspired by a dialogical non-halakhic Hasidism, could lead to a renaissance of Jewish life (Shonkoff 2018).[18] Buber and Gandhi developed a trustful attitude towards human beings; they deeply believed in unity and propagated a communitarian view of life.

With their religious vision, Buber and Gandhi criticized a narrow nationalism that was at the expense of others outside their own nation. They were self-critical and worked on reconciliation. In their thinking and acting, they wanted to transform people, in whom they recognized the divine image. They worked not with might, but with a trust that was the basis for cooperation and coexistence. They believed in the changeability and perfectibility of human beings.

Gandhi's *satyagraha* was a special kind of nonviolence. It was "love-force" or "truth-force" that aimed at reducing political, economic, social, and structural violence. Interconnectedness reduced divisiveness and produced a more harmonious society. Buber too opposed violence and did not accept any violence described in the Bible that could motivate Jews in his days to perform violent acts. He followed the proverb "Its ways [of the Torah] are ways of pleasantness and its paths are peace" (Proverbs 3:17). To his mind, the return of the Jews could not be realized at the expense of the Arabs living in the land. Just as the kibbutzim could be confederated, Jews and Arabs in the land could live together in a binational state. Gandhi wanted the nation to be built from the bottom, from the villages, in ever widening circles. Avoiding economic and political oppression and creating a decentralized, self-contained economy of *swadeshi* could bring about a less violent society. In his utopic socialism that combined the social and the personal, Buber too saw the kibbutzim in Palestine as basic forms of the inter-human (*das Zwischenmenschliche*), where

a vital, nonviolent, and spiritual Judaism, inspired by the prophets, was reborn (Corset 1988).[19] Gandhi and Buber taught people how to build bridges in the midst of troubled waters. They never referred to violent passages in their religious sources in order to back violence on the ground. On the contrary, with their peaceful hermeneutics, they countered violence. They wanted the freedom of all, not only of their own group. Confronted with violence and vengeance, they held high the hope of coexistence and interrelatedness.

For Gandhi, the force of love was greater than the force of arms. History was the interruption in the course of nature: "Soul-force, being natural, is not noted in history" (CWMG 1999, vol. 10, p. 90). The force of love was the hidden force in the world. In front of oppressors and unjust rulers, one had to overcome the fear that lends power to the powerful. Buber did not share this teleological view, but he too believed that the power of relatedness and the dialogical lifestyle, hidden in an undercurrent Judaism, could change the world.

They loved their country, in which plurality was essential, but belonged to the world as such. They avoided egocentric patriotism that did not care for the wider world. Buber proposed a binational state: the land was a land for two people. In his Hebrew humanism, dialogue and meeting were essential. Similarly, Gandhi favored unity that does not neglect diversity.

Gandhi and Buber echo each other on the subject of the state. The former followed Henry David Thoreau, who started his "Civil Disobedience" (Thoreau 2013) by wholeheartedly agreeing with the motto: "That government is best which governs least". Following Thoreau, Gandhi did not disrespect the state with its laws and courts but adopted a higher point of view. As a lawyer, he knew about the importance of laws, but he followed a higher Law and a higher Truth, anticipating what today we call the universal rights of human beings. Not unlike Gandhi, Buber followed the law of love and trust. They believed not in a centralized controlling government, but rather in communities that could become interrelated. The state was a necessary structure, but communities and the alliance between them were more important. They did not think about the state in a territorial way, but rather as a conglomeration of communities.

Gandhi's actions paralleled Buber's concern for human rights. His constant care for making compromises to come to better situations does not imply that he was a relativist nor that he dogmatically imposed his view on others. Many of his compromises served to continue his dialogue. Buber and Gandhi were men of the spirit, suspicious of centralized state power. They believed in the quiet revolution of dialogue that would reduce state power to its minimum. In an interview with Nirmal Kumar Bose, Gandhi said that the state "represents violence in a concentrated and organized form. The Individual has a soul, but as the state is a soulless machine, it can never be weaned from violence to which it owes its very existence" (CWMG 1999, vol. 65, p. 318).[20] Political life had to be transformed. In their anarchism, Buber and Gandhi criticized state structures and their violence. Yet, since states were unavoidable, their centralized power had to be reduced to a minimum.

3. Buber's Critique of Gandhi

3.1. "Gandhi, Die Politik und Wir"

In his article "Gandhi, die Politik und Wir" (Buber 1962, pp. 1081–87),[21] Buber is appreciative but also critical of Gandhi. He calls Gandhi's 1930 Salt March a "pilgrimage" that codetermines how the human being in independent India will be.[22] "What will be *swaraj*", he writes, "if it will only bring a change (*Umwandlung*) of institutions, and not of the human being" (Buber 1962, p. 1087).

In the article, Buber explicitly deals with Gandhi's nonviolence. He refers to Thoreau's treatise on the duty of civilian disobedience, written in 1849 (Thoreau 2013). He admires Gandhi, but not blindly. Gandhi is for him first of all a religious man, who makes experiments with himself and his friends, in an attempt to insert religion in politics. With Gandhi, he writes, there is hope for change and return (*Umkehr*). He quotes the Mahatma, who was convinced that if India wants to be independent, this is only due to divine assistance.

Gandhi loved those who act in truth and nonviolence. He believed in nonviolence, not out of weakness, but of strength. His attitude was really religious ("eine religiöse [Haltung] im echtesten Sinn [. . .]") (Buber 1962, p. 1083). He struggled with the snake of politics outside, but also with this snake amidst his own followers. Buber appreciates how Gandhi self-critically takes upon himself rigorous purifications when the snake inside triumphs. Yet, he distances himself from extreme mortifications. He even writes on the "*tragic* character" (his italics) of the contradiction between Gandhi's unconditional mindset and the conditionality of the masses. This tragic situation, he continues, is overcome in the slow and not "successful" path of the Divine through history (Buber 1962, pp. 1084–85). In slow transformations, one progresses towards the always unattainable goal. Was he thinking about proceeding slowly in order to bring the Kingdom of Heaven instead of following the revolutionary, tragic way of his anarchist friend Landauer, who was murdered in his attempt to establish the Munich Republic?

Buber approvingly mentions that Gandhi did not want an insertion of politics into religion, but of religion into politics. With the term "religion", Buber of course did not mean a cult, but rather the steady change, the return, in which one experiences *how much* belongs to Caesar (Buber 1962, p. 1087).[23] "The word", Buber writes, does not triumph in purity or in political success. He distinguishes between political successes and "the word" that struggles with concrete situations (Buber 1962, p. 1083). A passage in *I and Thou* may shed light on this statement about "the word" as born in "return" (*Umkehr*): "It is in return that the word is born on earth. In spreading out it enters the chrysalis of religion; in a new return it is reborn with new wings" ("In der Umkehr wird das Wort auf Erden geboren, in der Ausbreitung verpuppt es sich zu Religion, in neuer Umkehr gebiert es sich neu beflügelt wieder") (Buber 1938, p. 101; Buber 1970, p. 165). Transformational religious acts are, therefore, not to be confused with political successes.

Moreover, one way cannot be universally prescribed. Buber highlights that one may learn from Gandhi, but that "[w]e can only work on the kingdom of God through working on all spheres of man that are allotted to us. There is no universally valid choice to serve the purpose". One could not simply follow in Gandhi's footsteps. There was no universal validity of *one* way.

Buber much appreciated Gandhi's combination of ethics and politics. Gandhi's nonviolent resistance was for him "an act of worship, [. . .] an act of self-transformation" (Buber 1957a, p. 132). Gandhi's *swaraj* implied not only the transformation of institutions, but foremost the transformation of people (Buber 1957a, p. 132). Buber's article of 1930 was appreciative but also critical of Gandhi, whose rather universalized nonviolent technique returns and receives even more weight after his letter to the Jews in *Harijan* of 26 November 1938, to which Buber sharply reacted.[24] Apparently, Gandhi had no clue about the specific, cruel conditions in which the Jews lived in Germany in the thirties, when he advised the Jews to adopt *satyagraha* in Germany as well as in Palestine.[25]

3.2. Gandhi's Article "The Jew"

In answer to Gandhi's counsel to the Jews in offering *satyagraha* to Hitler, Buber reacted that this was not the way Nazism could be withstood. He accused Gandhi of not being able to imagine that what was helpful and right in the Indian situation was ineffective and destructive in the situation of Nazi Germany. The martyrdom would go unobserved. At the same time, he wrote that Zionism was not only in the heart; it was connected to a concrete land. Yet, Jews and Arabs had "two vital claims" to the land and "a union in the common service of the land" is needed. Jews and Arabs had to develop the land together: they loved the land, and so "a union in the common service of the land must be within the range of the possible".

Guha, Gandhi's biographer, deems that in his reflections on the Jews, Gandhi was naïve. He had referred to the Jews as the "untouchables" of Christianity, but was "hopelessly out of touch with the rapidly developing situation in Europe" (Guha 2018, p. 559). The situation of the Jews in Germany was not akin to the situation of Indians in South

Africa. He observes: "The Buber-Magnes pamphlet was posted to Gandhi in India. Yet there is no sign that he ever received it. Did it get mislaid on its way across the seas? Did it get mislaid in India, while being redirected from Segaon to wherever he was? Did one of his secretaries (surely not Mahadev) not show the pamphlet to Gandhi because the criticisms were so direct? We shall never know. Had Gandhi seen the letters, he would almost certainly have replied to them" (Guha 2018, p. 558).

Buber disagreed with Gandhi, who wanted the Jews to be *satyagrahis* in Germany. Justice was important for both, but in a quite different manner. Whereas for Gandhi *satyagraha* came first, Buber thought that *satyagraha* would not work against the Nazi threat. Contesting the efficacy of Gandhi's advice to the Jews in Nazi Germany, he wrote: "We should be able even to fight for justice—but to fight lovingly" (Buber 1957b, p. 146). Gandhi himself upheld a position of nonattachment to results, which does not mean that he was not at all concerned with results. He insisted that nonviolence was the right attitude to adopt. Opposing armed resistance, he proposed *satyagraha* to the French, the Czechs, the Poles, and the Norwegians. The British had to not go to war. With time, however, he supported the British war effort. He was conscious that not everyone had faith in nonviolence (Guha 2018, p. 659). In the long run, however, nonviolence would triumph. Guha writes that suffering opens up a channel of communication with adversaries: "To be sure, satyagraha could not be used against Hitler in Germany. But in normal times, normal places and against normal rulers, as a means of protest it was always more moral, and often more effective, than violence" (Guha 2018, p. 569). When Gandhi suggested that Herbert Fischer return to Germany and start a *satyagraha* campaign against the Nazis, the latter answered that Hitler was not Judge Broomfield, who called Gandhi a saint when he sentenced him to jail. In 1940, Gandhi did not believe that "Herr Hitler" was as bad as portrayed. He urged the British and the Jews not to rely on the force of arms, but to be nonviolent and to be ready to be slaughtered, if necessary. Gandhi advocated a nonviolent policy, not shared by Nehru, the British, and the Jews (Guha 2018, pp. 613, 622–24).

Gandhi did not favor the massive Jewish ascendance to Zion. However, meeting Hermann Kallenbach in May 1937, after 23 years of separation, he appreciated the Jewish desire to establish a homeland and offered to mediate between Jews and Arabs. Later he abandoned the idea. Shimon Lev remarks that Gandhi was positive on Sion in an interview with the son of Eliezer ben Yehuda, Itamar Ben-Avi, in 1931. He contends that most of the Jewish pioneers in Palestine repeated what R. Z. Klitzel wrote after a 10 min meeting with Gandhi: "Great, yet foreign to us—that is Mahatma". According to Lev, Gandhi's 1938 article "can demonstrate clearly the turning point in the attitude to Gandhi and his irrelevancy to the Jewish national movement in Palestine" (Lev 2022). This is true, but a broader perspective opened by Gandhi could show the great relevance of his nonviolent thought and practice for the entire Zionist project, as I will show in the last part of this article.

In 1938, Buber disagreed with Gandhi on the use of violence: "An effective stand may be taken in the form of nonviolence against unfeeling human beings in the hope of gradually bringing them thereby to their senses; but a diabolic universal steam-roller cannot thus be withstood . . . If there is no other way of preventing the evil destroying the good, I trust I shall use force and give myself up into God's hands". As time went by, it became more and more urgent to defeat Nazism. To this end, dirtying one's hands was necessary. In order to deal with Nazi violence, self-defense was indispensable. In this case, the end justified the means. In order to save lives, one had to destroy lives. Lives were commensurable.

Following Tolstoy, Gandhi in his letter rejected violence as a means. His nonviolent experiments intended to weaken the eternal vicious cycle of violence. In certain cases, however, he allowed violence to be the lesser evil and said this could be a form of *ahimsa*. Gandhi was not an absolute pacifist. He abhorred cowardice and knew that, from a psychological viewpoint, helplessness and a lack of courage provoke violence. When it came to the threat of a Japanese invasion, he supported the idea that the British army

remained in India. In 1922 he even declared: "Have I not repeatedly said that I would have India become free even by violence than that she should remain in bondage?" (quoted by Buber 1957b, p. 146). At the same time, he was aware that violence, including deceit and corruption, frequently provoked greater violence. He believed in "love force", in challenging the enemy by one's nonviolence. For Buber, it was impossible to convince Hitler. Given the extreme suffering of the Jews under the Nazi regime, violent resistance was the better means. Violence against Hitler's violence was justified since it prevented greater evil. Indeed, violence is not absolutely bad, and all depends upon the context (Runkle 1976). Never to be glorified, violence has to be evaluated on the basis of the expected results in order to save lives.

In Gandhi's article "The Jews", results were secondary: what counted was the purity of *ahimsa* as the eminent means for the end of love and truth. His opinion was "purely based on ethical considerations and is independent of results".[26] Efficacy was not his main concern. Gandhi thought that Jews in Germany had to adopt nonviolence as a form of strength and not of weakness. The efficacy of this action was secondary.

In 1938, both Buber and Gandhi combined justice and peace, but in a different manner. In his dissent with Gandhi, Buber put his finger on Gandhi's lack of understanding of the specific situation of Jews in Germany. Not fully bearing in mind Gandhi's evolution concerning the use of violence, Braj Sinha writes about "the violence in the Gandhian nonviolence" (Sinha 2020). Gandhi held on to his view, even after the Shoa.[27] He deemed that *satyagrahis* did not have to be attached to the result of one's action. Sinha asks the question if his silence was a strategic silence or the silence of a tormented soul, one who had to deal with Buber's objections (Sinha 2020, p. 17). However, it is highly improbable that Gandhi received Buber's letter without answering. Further on, in a broader perspective, Gandhi frequently assessed his experiments with truth as complete failures because they were not effective.

In his 1938 article, Gandhi also thought that Palestine belongs to the Arabs and did not prescribe *satyagraha* for the Arabs in Palestine. Only the Jews did he ask to act with nonviolence. Sinha writes that Gandhi refused to limit his *satyagraha* principle. It remained valid without considering the specific context and situation of the Jews in Germany: "Gandhi was not willing to put any restrictions or conditions on his principle of Non-violence and Truth Force" (Sinha 2020, p. 20). Buber, on the other hand, "proposed to temper the law of Non-violence with the principle of Justice. Herein lies Martin Buber's significant contribution to the conceptual framework within which the questions of principle and practice of Gandhian Non-violence in the contemporary global context need to be explored" (Sinha 2020, p. 21).

With the principle of justice and his thoughts on self-protection, Buber put a limit on an absolute nonviolence principle (Sinha 2020, p. 14). Justice understood as legitimate, proportional self-defense was the way to attain peace (Buber 1957b, p. 145). He cleverly referred to Krishna's reproach to Arjuna, who was not willing to fight against injustice (Sinha 2020, p. 14). One had to resist evil in the world, just as one had to resist the evil in oneself (Buber 1957b, p. 146). It was impossible to follow Gandhi's advice in cruel Nazi Germany.

For Gandhi, the term *ahimsa* did not only denote the refusal to harm; it was active love that promoted life (Parekh 1989, p. 113). He did not oppose all violence in order to protect others. However, in the case of the Jews in Nazi Germany, he disregarded the concrete situation of the Jews and held on to his principle of nonviolence without compromise. Agreeing with Buber's position, Sinha labels Gandhi's nonviolence as violence. An ideologically construed truth had to take into account "the context and circumstances within which it is applicable. [. . .] I suggest that violence of Gandhian Non-violence lies in its black of sensitivity to and non-acceptance of the concreteness of the context of human existence" (Sinha 2020, pp. 14–15). Sinha's critique of Gandhi's position in 1938 is right but cannot be generalized since Gandhi's view evolved with time.

Recently, Butler has famously problematized the term self-defense (Butler 2020). She criticizes the use of the word in the mouth of war mongering or discriminating politicians. She makes the readership conscious that behind the word "self-defense", violence and aggression frequently hide. Yet, this makes self-defense not a void word. Buber thought that self-defense was a duty for Jews against Nazi brutality. Gandhi and Buber were acutely conscious of the necessity of justice. Yet, in 1938, they differed on how to achieve it. Gandhi persisted with *ahimsa*: peaceful goals asked for peaceful means. For Buber, Gandhi's advice was counter effective. It was not enough for the struggle against the anti-democratic powers. For Gandhi and Buber, nonviolence was intertwined with justice, which in this specific context was understood in different ways. Gandhi was alarmed by the thought that legitimate violence would too easily turn into its general justification (Parekh 1989, p. 128). Not a complete pacifist, he allowed for violence in some cases. *Ahimsa* permitted some *himsa*, but he did not advise proportionate violence in the situation of Jews in Germany (Parekh 1989, p. 112). He anticipates Butler's criticism of a state that too quickly becomes violent and undertakes violent actions, although all lives are grievable.

Gandhi knew that life was impossible without violence. One harmed life by simply inhaling germs, for instance. Jains, who opposed agriculture because it involved violence and who therefore depended upon others for their survival, were for Gandhi hypocritical (Parekh 1989, p. 118). He was conscious that if one did not allow harm, one finally had to kill oneself. Social order had to be preserved against invaders by means of war (Parekh 1989, p. 109). Out of compassion, one could kill a calf that was badly maimed and in acute, incurable agony (Parekh 1989, pp. 120–21). It was better to be violent against oppressors than to be a coward, whose fear only fed the aggression of the oppressor.

Unlike Gandhi, Buber did not believe that in the context of Nazi Germany, love would vanquish everything. It had to be balanced by justice understood as the protection of life, eventually by using violence. Justice implied the use of violence in the face of the enormity of Nazi state terror. He disagreed with the Mahatma in his perception of *satyagraha* as an unshakable principle. Sinha notes that Gandhi persisted in his opinion, even after WWII.[28] Gandhi cleaved to an idealistic, utopic thinking that was not embedded enough in the concrete situation of Jews under the Nazi regime. Different from Gandhi, Buber combined idealism with a realistic view that took into account circumstances, time, and places.[29]

There is a testimony that Gandhi replied in a postcard, in which he told Buber he regretted that he did not have time to write a reply (Sinha 2020, p. 11, note 18). We do not have this postcard and one wonders if it does not stem from one of his aids. Sinha notes that Buber felt betrayed by Gandhi: the prescription of *satyagraha* to the Jews was not an appropriate way of dealing with the extreme violence of the Nazis (Sinha 2020, p. 12). With the Nazi state violence, transformation of the Germans through Jewish *satyagraha* was fruitless. Buber wrote: "We have not proclaimed, as did Jesus, the son of our people, and as you do, the teaching of non-violence, because we believe that a man must sometimes use force to save himself or even more his children. But from time immemorial we have proclaimed the teaching of justice and peace; we have taught and we have learned that peace is the aim of all the world and that justice is the way to attain it" (Buber 1957b, p. 145). For Buber, self-protection and justice were interconnected. He wrote that "if there is no other way of preventing the evil destroying the good, I trust I shall use force and give myself up into God's hands" (Buber 1957b, p. 146).

The foregoing historical analysis of the Buber–Gandhi controversy in 1938 cannot be complete without reference to the broader framework of Gandhi's later positions on *himsa* and *ahimsa*. In order to do justice to Gandhi's overall approach, we have to take into account the evolution of Gandhi, who gradually recognized in certain circumstances the necessity of violence which could be counted as nonviolence.

On the question of Zionism, Sinha refuses to explain Gandhi's opposition to the Zionist enterprise as stemming from his partiality towards the Muslim cause in India and from his support of the Khilafat movement (Sinha 2020, pp. 16–17). Yet, Gandhi was much preoccupied with the internal unity of India and with Jinnah's plans to found a separate

state. In my view, this also explains, at least partly, his stubborn position on Zionism after the Shoa. Gandhi already opposed Zionism at the time of the Khilafat movement. He disagreed with Zionists who made common cause with the British imperialists.

In his reaction to Gandhi, Buber emphasized that communication with the Nazis was out of the question. The Nazis could not be persuaded to change their attitude, their hearts could not be melted, so that Gandhi's power equalization or reduction in the inequalities of power and his expectation of the conversion of opponents was an impossibility. The Nazis would act only more cruelly when confronted with Jewish nonviolent protesters. Buber, therefore, thought that Gandhi was unjust towards the Jews. I already quoted Buber's words: "There is nothing better for a man than to deal justly –unless it be to love. We should be able even to fight for justice- but fight lovingly" (Buber 1957b, p. 146). Refusing to become a *satyagrahi*, Buber deemed that it was unrealistic to appeal to the conscience of Nazis. Their brutality could not be compared by that of the British imperium.

Wolfgang Palaver notes that after Hitler started the war, Gandhi gradually and self-critically admitted that absolute or unconditional pacifism was not always possible. With time, he argues, Gandhi developed a more balanced view of nonviolence. So, for instance, he backed Poland's defense against the Nazis, defining this defense as almost nonviolent. Palaver sides with René Girard, who demonstrated the contagious, fire-like nature of violence. Against the mimetic dynamic of violence, one could progressively substitute force with nonviolence (Palaver 2021).

Douglas Allen, too, insists that, for Gandhi, one had to be "as nonviolent as possible" in permanently striving to the Absolute Truth of nonviolence (Allen 2019, p. 33). Gandhi was a human being, who made mistakes and misjudgements. However, with all his blunders, he remains, in Allen's words: "a complex, sometimes contradictory, remarkable human being [. . .]" (Allen 2019, p. 16). In his sympathetic reading of Gandhi, Allen does not forget how Gandhi misjudged situations and even supported situations that led to violence. Yet, he emphasizes Gandhi's changing positions towards violence and his gradually deeper and more radical understanding of this complex phenomenon.

With his Gandhi-inspired perspective, Allen allows us to criticize Gandhi's standpoints in concrete historical contexts and, concomitantly, to reformulate new contextualized Gandhian visions. In a broader perspective, Gandhi was indeed aware of the limitedness of his views. In many cases, he regretted his failures and learned from them. He experimented with the Truth and did not think that he was in possession of the Truth, which was only partially perceived by humans. The Truth could be approached experimentally and open-endedly in life-confirming love, in interconnectedness, and in self-transformation and the transformation of others. Gandhi frequently revised and rejected earlier positions and improved them. Only when we take into account his evolution, his permanent self-criticism, and his overall vision may we develop an interpretation of Gandhi that offers an alternative for violent situations today. From this perspective, his active nonviolent resistance and courageous attempt to escape permanent violence is relevant for those who live in Israel and Palestine, as I will show in the last section of this article.

3.3. Nonviolence as Communication

Gandhi and Buber put communication central in their thoughts. They wanted a dialogue with opponents and reform in society. Both looked at the world through dialogical lenses. In 1938, Buber's way differed from Gandhi's deed-oriented Karma Yoga, without attachment to the results. Martin and Varney have called Gandhi's *satyagraha* a "principled nonviolence", in which the effectiveness of nonviolent action is secondary (Martin and Varney 2003, p. 214).[30] They distinguish between "principled nonviolence", as exemplarily lived by Gandhi, and "pragmatic nonviolence", epitomized by Gene Sharp, in which nonviolent action is viewed as more effective than other means of action (Sharp 1973). I do not share Martin and Varney's viewpoint that Gandhi's nonviolence was "principled", but the point I want to make here is that their study creatively approaches nonviolence as

communication. They express their surprise that nonviolence researchers have rarely used communication perspectives (Martin and Varney 2003, p. 213).

Similar to Gene Sharp, Chenoweth and Stephan conclude their book on civil resistance by writing that "historically, nonviolent resistance campaigns have been more effective in achieving their goals than violent resistance campaigns" (Chenoweth and Stephan 2013, p. 220).[31] In the long run, nonviolent civil resistance campaigns would be more successful. du Toit and Vosloo share this standpoint and explain that in Gandhi's religiously inspired ontology, soul-force or love-force is the underlying power in everything (Du Toit and Vosloo 2021, pp. 5–6). Gandhi was indeed convinced that in the end, the love force would vanquish.[32] This Gandhian reading of history is, however, not necessary. As mentioned, Buber did not share Gandhi's teleological thought. Yet, similarly to Gandhi, he believed that dialogue or holistic, loving interaction with others could change the world.

Gandhi's *satyagraha* was not always effective. During the Salt March of 1930, the police did not alter their violent behavior. The reactions of Britain and the United States brought the Indian cause to the world's conscience. Not through communication, but through the mobilization of third parties, through international support, was the campaign successful.[33]

Notwithstanding the shocking lack of Gandhi's understanding of the Jewish situation in Nazi Germany, his nonviolent perspective remains a challenge for today. His actions and views in favor of the transformation of the individual and society, and more particularly his thoughts on *swaraj* or self-rule as related to a nonviolent way of life beyond mere independence, are most actual. In Allen's words: it is a "radical paradigm shift" (Allen 2019, pp. 14, 34).

3.4. Faltering Dialogue?

Crane has written on Buber and Gandhi's religious rhetoric. Gandhi and Buber had political views that were inspired by religion. Yet, whereas Buber's religious thinking worked with commandments, Gandhi talked about conversion. Crane deems that Buber's reference to commandments did not echo in Gandhi's mind, whereas Gandhi's talk on conversion did not resonate in Buber's heart.[34] Buber worked with the command to be in the land where a just civilization had to be built. Gandhi wanted Jews to stay in their countries, where they only recently were accepted as citizens, and convert to *satyagraha*.

Crane analyzes why Gandhi's 1938 article shocked Buber. Gandhi had called for mass martyrdom and voluntary suffering under political oppression, —something which was almost nonexistent in Jewish life for the last two thousand years. With his faith in *satyagraha*, he did not see military action as a justified option. The Jews could "convert German hearts, and perhaps redeem the reputation of 'the German name'". Yet, Jews did not seek such a conversion. In addition, in Palestine, Jews were advised to become *satyagrahis*. Gandhi did not endorse Palestine as a Jewish homeland. It belonged "to the Arabs in the same sense that England belongs to the English or France to the French". Crane notes that Gandhi, who pleaded for diversity in India, did not see that diversity was a possibility in Palestine. For Gandhi, the Jewish call for a homeland would give Germans a justification of treating the Jews badly. The Jewish aspiration for a homeland clashed with the Arab right to Palestine. For Gandhi, "according to the accepted canons of right and wrong, nothing can be said against the Arab resistance in the face of overwhelming odds". He judged the Arabs "according to the accepted canons of right and wrong", but applied universal standards to the Jews. He interpreted their divine election as the ability to practice *satyagraha*: Jews could gain the respect from the world "by being man, the chosen creation of God, instead of being man who is fast sinking to the brute and forsaken by God". Gandhi envisioned a slaughter of Jews that would convert the Arab hearts.

Buber accused Gandhi of not fathoming the cruelty of the Nazi regime. Whereas Gandhi had his "motherland", he denied the Jews such a land, praising the Jewish dispersion. Crane incisively writes: "For one, a body politic need not exist in space but only in time; for the other, a body politic cannot exist except in the confluence of time and space" (Crane 2007, p. 45). Buber's concern was the self-preservation of the Jewish people. Crane

concludes that Buber and Gandhi's religious tropes were "patently distinct and perhaps potentially incommensurable" (Crane 2007, p. 49).

From what Crane calls a "faltering dialogue", one may learn that the language one uses should be understandable to the partner. Indeed, from the standpoint of a developing dialogical theology, one should be attentive to the different mental framework and the specific vocabulary of one's partner.[35] From an inter-worldview perspective, it is a sign of peace when one understands and uses the terminology of the other in order to shape a common world. Yet, is Buber's "turn" so far removed from "conversion"? Are they not rather synonymous? Moreover, is Gandhi's practice of taking vows and formulating them in a command-like language not parallel with Buber's sense of obeying commandments? In many passages—Allen reminds me—Gandhi emphasizes that vows should not be taken lightly and that they should be obeyed and never broken.

In their peaceful thinking, Buber and Gandhi developed a liberation theology that aimed at the liberation of all and that started with what the first called "return" and the latter "conversion". Starting with the individual's transformation, they did not stop there: they envisioned a connection with many others in society. Dialogue was at the center of their religiosity.

4. Dialogical Hermeneutics and Religious Thinking

4.1. Dialogical Hermeneutics

Gandhi succeeded in giving a charitable reading to a multitude of religious sources. He interpreted the Gita, his favorite sacred text, in a nonviolent way, making it relevant for today. Douglas Allen said about the Gita: "Those who wrote the epics were profound spiritual and moral teachers but they didn't believe in non-violence. So, Gandhi, here, is trying to purify the texts to make it more spiritual and ethical for the 20th century".[36]

In Gandhi's nonviolent hermeneutics, the Pauline verse "the letter kills, the spirit gives life" (2 Cor. 3:6) played a role (CWMG 1999, vol. 64, p. 75)[37]. Hindu and other texts influenced Gandhi in reading Scriptures nonviolently. Paul's verse was one of the elements that allowed him to give a nonviolent interpretation to sacred texts such as the Vedas, the Gita, the New Testament, the Quran, or the Christian hymn "Abide with me". Significantly, Gandhi attributed this Pauline saying to Jesus himself. (CWMG 1999, vol. 40, p. 315).

Thanks to the freedom of his non-literal, figurative interpretation, he could avoid the use of Scriptures for violent aims.[38] It was forbidden to use texts for violent purposes, for instance, in defending untouchability or denigrating and discriminating women. The yardstick for the right use of sacred texts was if they stand the test of Truth and *ahimsa* (CWMG 1999, vol. 33, p. 355). *Ahimsa* was active, life-promoting love. Truth and *ahimsa* were two sides of the same coin (CWMG 1999, vol. 72, p. 31). Texts were important in as far as they were instrumental in bringing about nonviolence. In Buber's exegesis, too, killing could never be a divine command. He illustrated this with the example of the Binding of Isaac (Meir 2002). More generally, Buber and Gandhi shared a reading of Scriptures that promoted a nonviolent society. They refused to accept violence based on holy Scriptures, which received a nonviolent interpretation in light of the divine *Raj*/Kingdom.

One may critically ask if Gandhi himself stands up to his own criterion of reading specific texts with the eyes of those who live from these texts (CWMG 1999, vol. 64, p. 420). With his spiritual interpretation of Jerusalem as in the heart and not as physical reality, he rather misunderstood the place of Jerusalem in the Jewish tradition and the lived reality of Zionism. Buber was there to remind him that Jerusalem in the Jewish mind was not only in the heart, just as India was not merely spiritual for Hindus.

By using 2 Cor. 3:6 as a cipher for the right use of Scriptures, Gandhi could, of course, offer a figurative, nonviolent reading of the Gita. This is the advantage of putting the accent upon the freedom of the interpreter and on the functioning of texts in different contexts. However, by using this text as the basis for his exegesis, Gandhi also inherited the Christian reading of the verse. As is well known, the verse has a difficult *Traditionsgeschichte*

in Christian history, which opposed a literal reading of the Old Testament and preferred a figurative, Christian one in a supersessionist move (Noort 2022, p. 8).

Gandhi's interpretation of the verse in Paul's letter to Corinthians returns in his explanation of a verse in the letter to the Galatians. He quotes the verse "For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, 'Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law and do them'" (Gal. 3:10) and concludes that "Mere bookish souls can never attain moksha" (CWMG 1999, vol. 12, pp. 405–7)[39]. With this conclusion, he also inherited a kind of Christian supremacy.[40] In the letter to the Galatians, Paul freely quotes the verse of Deut. 27:26, writing, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Torah". Paul contrasts this with the verse of Habakuk 2:4: "the one who is righteous will live by faith (*tsaddiq be-emunato yihye*". Gandhi loved the idea that one must perform the Torah, but, concomitantly, he insisted on the problem of living according to a "Book", although this term is a clear Pauline addition to Deut. 27:26. As in the case of his interpretation of 2 Cor. 3:6, Gandhi's interpretation of Gal. 3:10 contrasted a Jewish, literal reading and a Christian, symbolic one, repeating an age-old Christian bias. Jewish tradition is replete with figurative readings, but Gandhi inherited a longstanding tragic Christian history of interpretation that intended to make a contrast between Jewish literalists and Christian spiritualists.

Gandhi's prejudice did not stop him in permanently looking, with Buber, for justice in religious sources. They developed a broad perspective on religions. Buber had great interest in Asian religions and had restrictions towards Christianity. In his *Two Types of Faith*—which is, in my view, a regression compared with his *I and Thou*—Buber makes a sharp distinction between "believe that" and "believe in". He even opposes both, as if "believe that" is unlinked to "believe in". Gandhi, too, was critical of Christianity, which did not follow the example of Jesus. Both men differentiate between the Jesus of history and the Jesus of the Christian faith. Gandhi criticized a Christianity that perpetrated crimes, for instance, against the Zulus (CWMG 1999, vol. 68, pp. 272–74). Buber was critical of a Christianity that had forgotten the basic attitude of trust and did not link faith to every sphere of life.[41] He was more attentive to the differences between Judaism and Christianity, whereas Gandhi differentiated less between religions. Gandhi accepted a multi-perspectivism that testified to the always unreachable Truth, without, however, neglecting differences. Beyond all theological differences, Buber and Gandhi searched for what religions may teach to mend the world and to strive for a less violent world, through justice, mercy, and love. They offered a transformative exegesis of the ancient Scriptures, and by doing so, invited the reader to participate in the creation of a more communicative society.

4.2. Dialogical Religious Thinking

Buber and Gandhi developed a dialogical and self-critical religiosity (Meir 2018; Meir 2021). For Buber, rabbinical-Halakhic, ritualistic, and rational Judaism concealed the authentic, dialogical religiosity.[42] He wanted Jews to rediscover the dialogical element in their tradition. Gandhi wanted his fellow Hindus to see nonviolence as the way of uncovering Brahman in the world. Their dialogical religiosity asked for a political transformation that was immediately linked to personal transformation.

Buber and Gandhi also contributed to interfaith dialogue. In a time when religions had a sometimes-violent comeback, Guha's words are actual: "With the rise of Islamic fundamentalism around the world, and in neighboring Pakistan and Bangladesh as well, and with the political ascendancy of Hindu fundamentalist forces within the country, Gandhi's commitment to interfaith harmony is more relevant than ever before" (Guha 2018, p. 905). For Gandhi, the various religions were like the many branches on a tree or like different paths to the top of the mountain.

Buber and Gandhi gave priority to the practice and were critical of immutable religious utterances and dogmatic references to Scriptures. With his karma-yoga, Gandhi was more

interested in Truth than in theology: he wanted less theology and more Truth. He referred to Andrews, who gave up theology to live the gospel.

In Gandhi's view, Jesus was a political figure, a *satyagrahi*, who knew about love-force. Although Buber did not follow Gandhi's view on Jesus and was more critical of the New Testament, he considered Gandhi a prophet in the field of theo-politics.

Gandhi was more concrete than Buber in his attitude to Muslims. He was closer to Muslims in their everyday life. He called the Indian Muslims "blood-brothers"; he was not their enemy (CWMG 1999, vol. 72, p. 133). In his endeavor to reconcile Hindus and Muslims in India, he supported the Khilafat movement and took on its views, against his own pacific values. The Gita and the Qur'an belonged together. He defended interreligious harmony. Or better: he developed a humanist religiosity, binding all together. Hindus and Muslims forged bonds. Buber and Gandhi both favored unity of non-Muslims and Muslims. They did advocate one single state with several nations. With their vision of universal brother and sisterhood, they trusted that non-Muslims and Muslims could live peacefully together.

5. Gandhian and Buberian Perspectives in Israel and Palestine

Buber was greatly interested in Gandhi's theo-political thoughts, but the latter's article "The Jews" and his non-response to Buber pushed Gandhi to the background for many Zionists. However, Buber's call for cohabitation between Jews and Arabs and for reconciliation is not dissimilar to Gandhi's call for unity. Their calls are highly actual. Buber's reflections on intersubjective and public dialogue as well as Gandhi's nonviolent civil resistance remain inspirational. Leaving their comfort zones, they reached out to their own people and to others in order to transform them.

The heritage of a largely forgotten Buberian moral Zionism furthers an alternative, more covenantal Zionism that challenges the present one. Buber imagined a Zionism that does not stop with the right of living in the state of Israel but promotes an ethical life with equality for all and a transformation of political structures. Against Carl Schmitt, for whom politics was amoral, and working with the distinction between friends and foes, Buber did not separate politics and religion, which covered all spheres of life. Politics was not a secluded realm. Moreover, society had to be transformed through I–Thou relations. Buber contested the dichotomy of friend–foe and corrected conflictual situations through dialogue; the experiment of a dialogical community was at the antipode of Schmitt's theory (Morgan and Guilherme 2010, pp. 10–12). A relation with the Divine was not possible "without a relation to the body politic" (Buber 1965, p. 76). Friedrich Gogarten, Schmitt's theological ally, had a "theological version of the old police state idea" (Buber 1965, p. 77). In his theology, the ethical became the political, and redemption would come from grace alone. Contesting the concept of political theology with apocalyptic overtones (Schmitt 1922), Buber developed a theo-politics, in which the Kingdom of God was palpable in everyday life, including in the politic (Buber 1990); a slow, gradual working in history and in the concrete world would bring redemption, not a tragic apocalyptic and revolutionary messianic politics that wants to hasten redemption. The "Kingdom of God" was not a confusion between politics and religion, neither did it totally separate them. It was a permanent reminder that redemption is not yet here and that it involves hard, daily work in the always harsh reality. Israel's faith was necessarily "religio-political" (Buber 1990, p. 117). Buber's discussion of the "Kingdom of God" and its criticism of *Realpolitik* as well as of an apocalyptic messianic politics is of importance in the present-day state of Israel. For Buber, Gandhi's *satyagraha* and Hasidic *kavvana* (inner intention) had in common a "philosophy of action that makes doing integral with being and rejects any ethic that is less than a claim on the whole person. This also means that we ought not to deny or neglect action for the sake of inwardness. We cannot achieve wholeness by going inward and leaving the outward secondary and inessential, anymore than we can achieve it by going outward and neglecting the inward".[43] Refusing the split between inner and outer, Buber wanted the transformation of the human being and of society as such. Aware of two

opposite interpretations of the national rebirth, he plead not for a normalization, but for a return, a spiritual reawakening of Israel (Biemann 2002, pp. 220–21).

Brody has elucidated the reception of Buber's political thought during his lifetime. He distinguishes between three moments, respectively linked to Theodor Herzl, Gustav Landauer, and Hans Kohn. In the first moment, Buber is perceived as enthusiastic, immature youth. In the second moment, he is considered a feminine thinker and is rebuked by Landauer for his German patriotism. He is on the same page as his friend in the Munich revolution and sees the problem of a state that usurps the direct divine Kingdom. He also develops a "theo-political commitment to an anarchist covenant theology that interprets divine kingship as prohibiting all permanently institutionalized coercive human authority" (Brody 2018, p. 96). Transposing Landauer's anarchism to Palestine, Buber's anarchist Zionism does not favor the creation of a nation-state. In the third moment, Hans Kohn leaves for the US. Whereas Buber is dismissed as a dreamer and idealist, he does not withdraw from messy ethical situations "for the sake of purity"(Brody 2018, p. 98).

Brody's refined analysis can be complemented by describing the reception of Buber after his death. In my view, Buber's dialogical transformational thinking provides us with a kind of Zionism that has interaction with the non-Jewish Arab world as its aim. Zionism was not another political nationalism, a "Judenstaat mit Kanonen, Flaggen, Orden".[44] In Zion, society as the mere conglomeration of people had to be transformed in organic communities of interrelated and caring human beings. These communities would form a genuine *Gemeinschaft*, a dialogical society for which political sovereignty was not enough. Gandhi too was never content with mere political independence. More was expected from India, whose inhabitants had to be transformed.

Notwithstanding Gandhi's "Himalayan blunder" when he advised the Jews to resist Hitler nonviolently, he is highly inspirational in Israel/Palestine. Like Buber, he believed in a hidden reality that could bring change. History was not only driven by political success or by power. Truth was to be accomplished and trust was focal. Communication and dialogue made the Divine visible.

In a Gandhian-informed perspective, Allen confronts Gandhi's writings with his own insights and selectively appropriates what is significant in Gandhi for our own lives. Following his non-essentialized, contextualized, and open-ended rereading of Gandhi, we may reapply what remains insightful in Gandhi's writings as significant for today. To reformulate and reconstruct a Gandhian philosophy and practice in its relevance for Israel/Palestine is the task of the day.

From a Gandhian perspective, one becomes aware of the relativity of one's standpoint. The situation in Israel is not black and white; to know one side is not enough. We may carefully listen to the narrative of the other and learn what are their needs and feelings, their frustrations and aspirations. We may go to the roots of violence and learn that our own views and the views of the others are relative and mutually conditioned. Not becoming active and merely accepting the situation as it is means continuing the present violence.

From a Buberian-Gandhian perspective, Israeli and Palestinian nonviolent resistance is a testimony to the divine Kingdom. In "Roots", Ali Abu Awwad and Rabbi Hanan Schlesinger work together. Rabbis for Human Rights help Palestinians to plant trees and to pick olives. The "Bereaved Families Forum" brings together Israeli and Palestinian parents who lost their children in the conflict. There are signs of alternative views on the conflict. Both parties in the conflict could march together, fast together, have sit-ins, and organize public meetings and peaceful demonstrations. One could become conscious that there are two legitimate claims to the land and that truth results from the deep listening to and the recognition of each other's narrative. Fear and blame could be replaced by Gandhian and Buberian nearness and presence. A Buberian moral Zionism could lead to more equality and perhaps to federated states with open borders and residency. It could prepare a change in power structures.

A Gandhian perspective on the conflict in the Near East challenges dominance, violent actions and reactions, while stimulating self-criticism and self-control and producing

more interrelatedness. Gandhi's transformative approach to all kinds of violence implies active involvement in the improvement of economic, social, psychological, and political conditions. It implies facing the roots of violence in the present situation, recognizing one's own complicity, and acting in *sarvodaya*, for the good of all. Instead of justifying terrorism and anti-terrorism, one could create the conditions for a less violent, more secure Israel and Palestine.

Gandhi is often appropriated for un-Gandhian purposes. It is not helpful, for instance, when Indians simply repeat Gandhi's 1938 statement that Palestine belongs to the Arabs, also after the normalization of relations with Israel by India on 29 January 1992. On 17 September 1950, the Jewish state was recognized. I agree with P.R. Kumaraswamy, who writes that Gandhi's understanding of Judaism and Jewish history was very limited and that one cannot continue to quote Gandhi's statement without re-examining it in the post-normalization phase (Kumaraswamy 2020). To quote Gandhi "has now become helpful to rebuke suggestions that India had abandoned the Palestinians in favor of its newly–found friendship with Israel" (Kumaraswamy 2020, p. 778). The recognition of Israel is seen as un-Gandhian. Kumaraswamy criticizes this way of thinking. Zionism is not purely religious, as Gandhi thought. Neither is it purely political. Israel has to be recognized, but a Gandhian-inspired self-critical reflection on the Zionist project could lead to the betterment of Israeli society and the improvement of relationships between Jewish-Israelis and Arab-Israelis, as well as of relationships between Israel and Palestine. A collective ego-driven view and divisiveness could gradually make way for a dialogical practice and interconnectedness.

There are attempts to revive the binational spirit of men such as Buber, Magnes, and Weltsch and to make it relevant for today (Russell 1990). Any political arrangement, however, will fail if the inhabitants of the land do not transform themselves in recognition of the other and if they do not return from a national chauvinism. What is at stake is nothing less than the moral character of the Zionist enterprise.

We need Gandhi-informed deeds, a sympathetic interpretation of Gandhi's nonviolence, a dialogical hermeneutics, and a way out of the present terrible situation, in which mimetic violence reigns. In view of a viable Zionism, Gandhi's dialogic and communicative nonviolence provides us with a remedy against extremist and exclusivist nationalisms. We could learn from his opposition to Vinayak Damodar Savarkar and to the nationalistic ideology of Hindutva. His ideas of *swaraj* or self-rule as including personal as well as sociological, economic, and political dimensions could lead away from a false ego-driven and isolated individual and from a solipsistic collective self to the creation of dialogical persons and of a dialogically conceived Zionism that gives up alienating domination and embraces coexistence.

Buber and Gandhi were two non-traditionalist thinkers. They were social activists, who developed a theo-politics in which religion and politics were not separated: communication, trust, and dialogue were at the core of their thoughts and acts. Power and mere self-interest did not have to dictate politics. Since the profane and the sacred were not separated, politics was the concrete reality in which the truth, linked to morality, had to be realized. The Kingdom of God had to penetrate all the spheres of life, in interpersonal relationships and in political life. It entailed personal and collective transformation.

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Notes

1 Buber was more dualistic than Gandhi, although his early writings contain clear non-dualistic statements, for instance, on the "realization" of God. Friedman mentions a non-dualistic position in Buber's *Ecstatic Confessions* and observes that Buber's *I and Thou* is neither dualistic nor non-dualistic (Friedman 1976, pp. 413–14).

2 Buber talked about "the most pernicious of all false teachings, that according to which the way of history is determined by power alone . . . while faith in the spirit is retained only as mere phraseology". See Buber's speech in 1958, referred to by (Leon 1999a, p. 44).

3 For comparisons between Buber and Gandhi: (Murti 1968; Crane 2007).

4 (Mendes-Flohr 2008; Morgan and Guilherme 2010, pp. 3, 9–12; Brody 2015; Brody 2018; Lesch 2019). At an early stage, Robert Weltsch and Paul Mendes-Flohr were attentive to Buber's prophetic politics (Weltsch 1967; Mendes-Flohr 1985).

5 Buber and Magnes's responses to Gandhi were published in (Buber and Magnes 1939) 1939. Buber's reference to self-defense clashed with Gandhi's ill-informed, naïve, and problematic view of the situation of Jews in Germany, Europe, and the Near East (Meir 2021).

6 For scholarly attention to this theme, see (Runkle 1976; Brody 2015; Sinha 2020).

7 Gandhi not only became a *brahmachari*. He was obsessed with *brahmacharya*. He tested his abstinence of all sexual relations by sharing his bed with his grandniece Manu Gandhi and remaining passionless. Through this problematic experiment, much criticized by some of his oldest disciples, he wanted to overcome violence in himself. With this extreme self-purification, he linked the imperfections of the outside world to his own imperfections, which he wanted to overcome (Guha 2018, pp. 809–25). Although Gandhi called his celibacy declaration *brahmacharya*, it was actually *vanaprastha*, i.e., the third stage of life according to the Hindu Vedic system.

8 Buber disagreed with Gandhi's radical penance and self-imposed fasts that could lead to death.

9 Buber and Gandhi's worldviews underwent changes in the course of their life. Buber's thought developed from a mystical viewpoint into a dialogical philosophy, from that of a German nationalist, called "Kriegsbuber" by Landauer, to that of a philosopher of dialogue, who favored Jewish-Arab coexistence in Palestine. Gandhi, too, underwent a metamorphosis, from a Hindu to an English gentleman and further to a *satyagrahi* and *bapu* of India. He convinced many people to make a personal turn to the other, to adopt a simple lifestyle and become a *satyagrahi*.

10 On binationalism, supported by a minority in the Zionist movement and rejected by the Arab national movement: (Leon 1999b; Butler 2018).

11 On the legacy of partition in the post-War period of Japanese and British decolonization: (Greenberg 2004).

12 Nicholas F. Gier deems that the term "communitarian liberalism" is the most appropriate label for Gandhi. He describes Gandhi as a communitarian, embracing all religions and cultures, with a strong emphasis on the individual and their moral obligations. Nonviolence was for Gandhi not only a personal, but also a civic virtue (Gier 2003).

13 Gandhi's autobiography is entitled The Story of My Experiments with Truth.

14 Mendes-Flohr follows N.N. Gatzer in using the word "co-existentialism".

15 Cohen maintained that selfhood stemmed from the interaction between I and you. Pondering on the meaning of "thou shalt love thy neighbour as yourself" he referred to *re'akha* (your neighbour) as the one who is like you, the Thou of the I. Buber and Rosenzweig also translated the love commandment as "thou shalt love thy neighbour who is like you" (*liebe deinen Genossen dir gleich*; Lev. 19:18) (Cohen 2013, p. 218; Cohen 1924, p. 275).

16 P. Mendes-Flohr notes that Buber had a genuine sympathy for the revolutionaries of 1918–1919, but eschewed apocalyptic politics (Mendes-Flohr 2014).

17 Buber writes that the cooperative movement in Palestine is not the result of utopian fantasies, but rather is "topical" and "constructive", leading to changes (pp. 133–34). He does not refer to merely consumers of producer cooperatives, but to "the full cooperative" (p. 133). The vital Jewish village commune, the *kvutza* is an experiment that did not fail. It wants the creation of "a new man and a new world" (p. 135). It is brought about by an elite of *halutzim* (pioneers), whose work in the village commune influenced the evolving society. In the everyday life of the commune, everything depended upon one's openness to one's fellow man. This relationship amounts to "a regular faith" (p. 138). Buber highlights the non-doctrinarian way of this life in cooperative settlements, which have a common cause and a common task. Much as Gandhi's ashram, the *kvutza* is an "experimental station" (p. 139). As the kernel of the new society, the *kvutzot* tend to federation. Moreover, in the kibbutzim or collectivist movements, a community comes into being. Both *kvutzot* and kibbutzim strive for "communitas communitatum" (p. 140). In the article, Buber remains aware of flaws and the lack of neighbourly relationships, of setbacks and disappointments. However, he writes on a "signal non-failure", not "a signal success" (id.), highlighting the permanent task in these forms of living together.

18 Shonkoff explains how Buber, in his retelling of Hasidic stories, interpreted the Hasidic lifestyle as an embodied, "sacramental" second-person relation, moving away from philosophical, abstract thinking. This sacramentality is not limited to particular halakhic acts, but to whatever one is engaged in at every moment.

19 Buber coined the term "das Zwischenmenschliche": (Buber 1979).

[20] The interview took place 9/10 November 1934.

[21] The article was first published in *Die Kreatur*, 1930, Jg. 3, H. 4.

[22] The same religious language was used by Martin Luther King, who, upon arriving in India in 1959 on Nehru's invitation, told reporters that he did not come as a tourist, but as "a pilgrim". He came to study with some of Gandhi's disciples and paid tribute to the Mahatma (Colaiao 1984, p. 7).

[23] This interpretation of religion as the path of God in history is clearly described in the third part of *I and Thou*: "The history of God as a thing, the way of the God-thing through religion and its marginal forms, through its illuminations and eclipses, the times when it heightened and when it destroyed life, the way from the living God and back to him again, the metamorphoses of the present, of embedment in forms, of objectification, of conceptualization, dissolution, and renewal are one way, are *the* way" (Buber 1938, p. 98; 1970, p. 161). In this passage, religion is called *the* way to God. However, Buber was also aware that religion may lead away from God. This potentiality of religion is the potentiality of human beings, who may create dialogical relationships with each other and realize a community in the center of which they find the eternal Thou (Buber 1938, p. 100; 1970, p. 163).

[24] See note 5.

[25] Simone Panter-Brick distinguishes four stages in Gandhi's involvement in Palestine: defense of the Caliphate (1918–1936), offer to mediate (1937), the letter to "The Jews" (1938), and self-imposed silence (1939–1947) (Panter-Brick 2009).

[26] Sic in a statement given to Kallenbach in July 1937, Central Zionist Archives, S. 25.3587.

[27] Sic in an interview with Louis Fischer in June 1946 (Sinha 2020, p. 15, n. 28). He also repeated his position in his article "On the Jewish Question,'" *Harijan* 22 May 1939, in response to Hayim Greenberg, (CWMG 1999, vol. 75, pp. 415–16).

[28] See his answer to Louis Fischer.

[29] For a peace strategy that combines both: (Mollow et al. 2007).

[30] Yet, according to Lev, Gandhi advocated "conditional pacifism" in the case of the Boer War and the Zulu Rebellion (Lev 2022). Gandhi participated in the British wars against the Boers and Zulus.

[31] Quoted by (Du Toit and Vosloo 2021, p. 1).

[32] Gandhi's *satyagraha* as "truth force" or "love force" comes close to the expression in Zachary 8:19 "Love truth and peace" (*ve-ha-emet ve-ha-shalom 'ehavu*).

[33] (Martin and Varney 2003, pp. 214–15), in reference to (Weber 1993).

[34] Crane notes that Gandhi used the word "conversion", which for Buber had missionary overtones (Crane 2007, p. 49). Yet, Buber's use of the German word "Umkehr" (turn/return) is not far from conversion or change.

[35] Noteworthy in this context is the title of H. Gordon's article "A Rejection of Spiritual Imperialism: Reflections on Buber's letter to Gandhi" (Gordon 1999).

[36] In an interview to thestatesman.com on 25 April 2019. https://www.thestatesman.com/exclusive-interviews/calling-him-mahatma-makes Gandhi irrelevant: Prof Douglas Allen (accessed on 2 June 2022)

[37] For a discussion of Gandhi's use of Paul: (Noort 2022, pp. 7–11).

[38] For examples of a literal, violent reading of the Hebrew Bible: (Meir 2019, pp. 106–8).

[39] in a letter of 4 December 1914.

[40] According to Mt. 5:2 and 5:17–19, Jesus did not remove one iota of the Torah and he did not come to abolish the law, but to realize it.

[41] Alan Brill has justly written that Jews and Christians are from the same family, just as there is the same fundamental *dharma* in Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism, and Buddhism (Brill 2012).

[42] Yemima Hadad forges the term "*Dialogvergessenheit*" (parallel to and different from Heidegger's *Seinsvergessenheit*) to characterise Buber's critique of a formalistic and rational Judaism that concealed true religiosity (Hadad 2017).

[43] Quoted from (Buber 1947) in (Friedman 1976, p. 424).

[44] Sic in a letter to S. Zweig of 4 February 1918.

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Article

The Voice of Peace: Philosophical Musicality as a Promoter of Peace in Confucianism

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Abstract: The main focus of this article is the explanatory power that music has in Confucianism according to the *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語) and *The Classic of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記), which is reaffirmed in the Song Dynasty by Zhou Dunyi in the chapters on music in *Tongshu* (通書, *The Penetrating Book*). The article suggests that *Tongshu*'s chapters on music demonstrate the non-linear and non-metaphysical musical nature of Confucianism. According to this suggestion, the chapters introduce a dynamic, living model for the Confucian Way, on its own terms. This musical model supports the early Confucian vision of a multifaceted person, progressing in a multi-dimensional Way within a multi-layered polysemic world. Progressing along the Way, self-cultivation appears as one's task to develop the various musical potentialities inherent in her or himself. The article opens with the epistemological idea of "musical knowledge" acquired by attuned hearing that winds up in a creative, peacemaking heart. Next, it introduces the ontological idea of a government that models cosmic harmony, depicting the leader as having an orchestral conductor's aptitude; last, it presents a pragmatic perspective on the idea of musical education through the rules of propriety, depicting the practitioner as a skillful music player.

Keywords: music; harmony; peace; perception; Confucianism; *Analects*; Zhou Dunyi; *Tongshu*

> Music is the language of the spirit.
> It opens the secret of life bringing peace, abolishing strife.
>
> Kahlil Jibran

1. Introduction

Exactly five weeks after he took office, Israeli prime minister Yair Lapid faced his first security crisis. Needing a boost to the credibility of a leader who had no military record or experience in senior security posts, with elections nearing again, he proved his ability; the Gaza Strip was attacked again, and in return, sirens cut the daily hustle of Tel-Aviv as well as other communities around the country, warning of approaching missiles and bringing us back to the shelters as a matter of familiar summer routine. They called this military attack "Breaking Dawn"—how much more cynical can politics be regarding human life?

While these days make it seem impossibly naïve to imagine a politics that is based on a musical model and guided by harmony and peacemaking rather than strife and victory, it can be beneficial, at least, to reflect on this Confucian suggestion. It might be considered utopian, but this utopia is in fact extremely practical and requires daily attunement in every minor decision; while the aspiration is an ideal that cannot be fully attained, striving toward it through human daily deeds is an essential requirement, and the realization of such an ongoing striving is in human hands.

This article presents the Confucian suggestion for a politics with no cynicism that is based on music and harmony leading to peace. Broadly speaking, it presents the Confucian understanding of auditory perception, in particular through music, as enhancing harmony and promoting peace. As suggested here, in the Confucian world, the Way (*dao*, 道) inherently conveyed as music (*yue*, 樂) and modeled on harmony (*he*, 和), works wonders in the cosmic, socio-political, and personal realms.

The focus of this article is neither how music is treated in Confucianism nor its conceptions in China, nor the wide range of texts on music, their cultural and political significance, the uses of music for state unification or imperialism, or how music is related to religious, cultural, and medical practices in China.[1] Rather, it is the musicality of Confucianism being suggestive of all times. The article takes its cue from early Confucian sources, mainly the Confucian *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語 1936) and *The Classic of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記 n.d., hereafter abbreviated *Rites*). It then moves on to the chapters on music in *Tongshu* (通書, *The Penetrating Book*) by Zhou Dunyi, 周敦頤 (1017–1073) (Zhou 1937), the so-called "pioneering neo-Confucian," who reaffirmed Confucian ideas in the China of the Song Dynasty (960–1279) using systematic terminologies and discourse. The rest is organized in three parts: The article opens with the epistemological idea of "musical knowledge" acquired by attuned hearing that winds up in a creative, peacemaking heart. Next, it introduces the ontological idea of a government that models cosmic harmony, depicting the leader as having an orchestral conductor's aptitude; last, it presents a pragmatic perspective on the idea of musical education through the rules of propriety, depicting the practitioner as a skillful music player.

2. An Epistemology of Auditory Knowledge in a Hearing Heart-Mind

Music, as a form of knowledge that is based on audition rather than vision, plays a major role in the Confucian art of peace. Indeed, proper hearing is a precondition to the musical understanding that following the Confucian Way necessitates. When Confucius says that "hearing the Way in the morning, one may die in the evening" (朝聞道，夕死可矣, *Analects* 4:8), he accentuates the uniqueness of knowledge attained through hearing (*wen*, 聞) becomes evident. When the Way fills him, Confucius truly hears; that is, he hears beyond words and sounds. As we shall see in the next sections, he attunes his ears to heaven and earth, where cosmic, harmonious creativity inspires peacemaking through acting according to propriety in the world under heaven. Therefore, despite the fact that other Chinese words (most commonly *zhi*, 知) denote knowledge, and notwithstanding the centrality of the Way, which is naturally depicted through visual images, "hearing" is the ultimate way of knowing, and, in particular, it is the only way that opens up to the musicality of knowledge, as the graph of "sage" (*sheng*, 聖) implies, having "ear" as the radical (*er* 耳) next to "mouth" (*kou*, 口), which, together, crown a "king" (*wang* 王).

The *Rites* say that when an exemplary person hears musical instruments, he does not hear only the sounds that they emit; rather, there are associated ideas that accompany these sounds (*Rites* 19.42).[2] Indeed, appreciating music is appreciating the complexity of ideas brought by sounds, sequences, arrangements, and structures, as well as the creative temporal aspects of the auditory experience. Music demands hearing in a way that abstracts from environmental influences and from the specific sources of its sounds (Scruton 1997, pp. 2–3). We then experience sounds in a way that is "detached from the circumstances of their production" and reach profound meanings (Hamilton 2007, p. 58).

The varieties and spans of hearing In Confucianism appear in *Analects* 6:9, when Confucius asks his disciple, Zigong, about his abilities as compared with those of Yan Hui. Zigong honestly replies that Hui hears one point and knows all about a subject, while he only knows a second. Apparently, Zigong differentiates his own linear analysis, which takes him from one point to the next, from the expansive musical hearing of Hui that brings him to full understanding. True hearing expands direct auditing activity, in particular, in the context of learning and self-cultivation. The ability to truly hear what one listens to is not a trivial attainment; rather, it demands ongoing practice, nurturing, and refinement, as acknowledged by Confucius' description of his own progression along the Way. Starting at fifteen by setting his heart on learning, and then, at the age of thirty, establishing his base and being able to take a firm stand, followed, at forty, by freeing himself from doubt and establishing trust; later on, at fifty, he knows heaven's mandate, and only at the age of sixty has his ear became attuned (*ershun*, 耳順). The relatively late achievement of Confucius should not be taken as coincidental; the nuanced ability of the ear is an attainment

that goes beyond specific verbal expressions or tunes, which then allows one to follow the heart without transgressing the moral boundaries set by propriety (*Analects* 2:4.). The ability to truly hear what one listens to is an attainment reached in the ongoing process of self-cultivation and is not an easy task. Attuned hearing demands awareness of the source of the sound and is loaded with information that has to be deciphered regarding that which has been heard.

This Confucian understanding is particularly interesting when compared with the world of Western philosophy, in which we tend to discuss epistemology mainly through the role of vision; for example, just think of Plato's Allegory of the Cave or Descartes's light of reason. Generally speaking, the philosophy of perception is the philosophy of visual perception. While seeing is considered fundamental to our perception of an object or event, hearing is almost completely neglected in familiar epistemological doctrines. The Confucian philosophy of the Way suggests that auditory perception reaches nuances that are beyond vision. Hearing *extends* vision-based impressions and *challenges* vision-based claims; it improves cognitive sensitivities, it refines the heart-mind's (*xin*, 心) feelings and sensitivities, and it contributes to a comprehensive understanding. An example of this comprehensiveness appears in *Analects* 7:14, describing how music influenced Confucius when he visited Qi, and after hearing the Shao music, he was unable to taste meat for three months. His reaction was that "it is inconceivable that music reaches this height." Indeed, without 'conceiving,' music affected him immensely; it went directly to his heart-mind and touched his innermost feelings.

While we tend to refer to the sounds we hear as *sensations*—internal and private—we do hear *things* in the world by hearing their sounds. Sound and hearing reveal that perceiving involves the awareness of sensations in the first instance and only indirectly the external world. Perceiving through hearing is also focused on that which is present, and in this sense, a sound is "purer" than a vision (cf. Nudds 2001). Moreover, experienced sounds have temporal characteristics, as they persist through time and require time. While vision's objects are extended in space and are individuated and recognized primarily by virtue of spatial characteristics, audible ones are extended in time and are perceptually individuated and recognized primarily by virtue of temporal characteristics (see, e.g., Bregman 1990; Kubovy and Van Valkenburg 2001). We may then learn about space on the basis of hearing in a more intimate way: For example, I can say if some sound is close or at a distance; I can even be guided by sound when I hear a siren and know whether an ambulance is asking for yielding and giving way or the alarm system went off, directing us to find shelters; an orchestral sound may teach a trained ear about the size of the room in which it is played and its material. Knowledge through sound is concrete and yet always leaves some mystery unresolved, some secret to keep aspiring to. In music, there is an understanding that is beyond direct sounds.

An impressive example of the time that is present in music and the learning of things through hearing can be found in the *Family Sayings of Confucius* (*Kongzi Jiayu* 孔子家語 n.d.). The story goes that when Confucius arrived at the great Master Xiang for learning to play the Qin, 琴, he did not progress after ten days. Master Xiang then said, "You must practice more." Practicing more, Confucius was able to master the melody, yet the Master remarked that his technique was still insufficient. After improving the technique with more practice, the Master guided him to try another direction; this time, Confucius kept practicing in order to grasp the interpretation of the work. When Master Xiang said: "You master the interpretation, you have to try more," Confucius replied that he had not yet grasped the personality of the creator. With more practice, Master Xiang acknowledged Confucius's depth of thinking and of understanding, when Confucius said:

> I have grasped the personality of the creator. He is dark and tall, and strives to distance himself, as if he wanted to reign over the four winds. This is the work of King Wen.
>
> Master Xiang got up from his rug and bowed twice and said, "The great teachers believe this is King Wen's creation. (*Kongzi Jiayu*, p. 35)

Skillful listening to music arouses feelings, develops nuanced sensitivity, and brings decorous conduct. As Hall and Ames note, unlike words, music does not represent; it presents. It is a primary mode of communication that allows a deeper understanding of language and communication (Hall and Ames 1987, pp. 275–76, 281). The music itself tells everything we wish to know if we hear it with an *attentive* heart.

Taking up from the description of how music influenced Confucius, the emotional impact of music is resounded in *Tongshu* 17, focusing on the effect of the sound of music on the human heart-mind. The emotional influence of music having a pragmatic value of striving for the realization of harmonious living is depicted in the chapter, when Zhou follows the early idea in regard to the moral model that music proposes, with particular regard to its educational virtue. The intentional formation of music by past sages connects present practitioners to the way of ancient kings, who modeled harmony by creating music that influences people in all times. The chapter provides an explanation of how music is created and how it affects the human spirit and moral mind:

> [t]he sound of music is mild and harmless, harmonious and not seductive, enters the ear and moves the heart-mind. . . . It becomes mild and harmonized. Moderate—it pacifies heart's desires; Harmonious—it relieves an unsettled mind. Calmness and moderation, are the height of virtue. (ibid.)

According to Zhou, balanced and moderate music penetrates the heart-mind, moves emotions, and advances one's well-being. This is even more obvious when one realizes that music, through sound, tone, and pitch, touches the human heart in ways that words and intellect can never attain. *Tongshu* 19 also refers to the emotional effect of music and its straightforward influence on peacemaking, defying politics that encourage dispute and struggle:

> When the sound of music is mild, listening to it pacifies the heart-mind.
>
> When the lyrics of music are good, then those who sing are respectful.

The power of music lies in its unique ability to attune the human heart-mind. Music regulates emotions when they are excessive, releases tensions, directs imagination, and brings joy. The fact that "music" (*yue*, 樂) and "joy" (*le*, 樂) share the same Chinese graph is an indication of the association of harmony with its immediate manifestation, as actualized in the human deed and not in a remote future outcome of the deed (Hall and Ames 1987, pp. 275–76, 281). Importantly, joy, as the immediate response to music, functions in Confucianism as a sign for morality, whereas, according to Confucius, a benefit can be reaped as secondary (*hou*, 後), only after completing the act (*Analects* 6:20), and is unwished for and unnecessary, as it increases conflict, according to *Mengzi* 1A (see Patt-Shamir 2005, pp. 455–76). When the essence of Confucian humanism is fully depicted in musical terms, the exclusiveness of "musical knowledge" (distinguished from knowledge of music) for social balance, and the moral mind is vibrant.

As we will soon see, according to *Tongshu* 19, when later generations exchanged sounds for seductive ones, they lost music that follows harmony and were led to growing lust that increased a lack of satisfaction and, therefore, amplified pain and strife. First, rulers abandoned ancient music; then, harmonious ways of governing were replaced by severe and arbitrary punishment, and the people were oppressed and suffered. Then, on top of the pain caused by law, people abandoned their families, lost relatedness, disgraced life, rebelled against their non-musical rulers, and, thus, inflicted on themselves more pain. The loss of a hearing heart is, thus, a loss of the Way. Zhou then offers a comparative critique of then—the times in which music prevailed—and now—the time of its absence. The harmonious music of ancient times brought peace to minds. In the past, music inspired and transformed minds in contrast to present times, where it is reduced to a tool in service of lust that increases unease (ibid.). The implied recommendation is that music can serve as a model of proper world order.

Accordingly, the only model that works to fully understand the multi-dimensionality of the human creative mind is a musical model that cannot accept the inner paradox of

stagnantly ruling dynamic living beings. The dynamism of music gives hope and pacifies the heart. The chapter ends with a way of attaining a harmonious world in which both one's heart-mind and social relationships are balanced: "To hope for perfect government without restoring ancient propriety and returning to music is a far cry" (ibid.).

3. An Ontology of Cosmic Harmony as Musical Governing

The significance of hearing and, in particular, hearing music becomes evident in political life as rooted in heavenly harmony. *Tongshu* 18 opens:

> Music is root for government.
>
> When a government is moral, the people are at peace, then the hearts-minds of all under heaven are harmonious.[3]

Before moving on, in accordance with the passage, as to the effects of music on moral conduct and on the harmony of the inner self of "all under heaven" (*tianxiazhi xinhe* 天下之心和), one has to inquire: How can music be a root for government? Responding to the question requires us to acknowledge the implicit presupposition that the Confucian Way inherently conveys music as the primary manifestation of harmony in the cosmic, sociopolitical, and personal realms (See Randel 2003, pp. 260–62). According to the Confucian view, music influences the person and can be used to educate, teach, and transmit values that benefit the moral and social development of individuals, societies, and governments, and it can then lead the multitudes in non-coercive, voluntary ways.

The relatedness between the cosmos and government is already found in the early *Classic of Rites*, referring to music as the cosmic harmony between heaven and earth (*Rites*, 17.I: 19.23). Accordingly, the natural flow of heaven and earth ensures creation and change, and moral virtues follow from this natural order such that moral deeds are the human manifestation of spring and growth (*Rites*, 17.I: 19.28). As moral order is based on appropriate relationships, harmony best depicts it; harmony reflects relationships with consonant pitches that are perceived as pleasant, euphonious, and beautiful in contrast to dissonant relationships. Music can serve, in this way, as a model for human morality, which, like the Chinese pentatonic scale, admits no "off-key" situation as part of the paradigm.[4] Accordingly, when the whole is in harmony, each pitch—representing a single person, event, or conduct—derives its special significance from the entirety of the music.

Importantly, it is the nature of harmony to require plurality and diversity, which allow a proper place for each individual component; a single note or pitch is meaningless alone, yet each is crucial in making music. As harmony involves a plurality of instruments, sounds, techniques, and players, which, together, create one resonating whole, we read in *Rites* about a "great stew" (*dageng*, 大羹), the view that a harmonious creation is self-sufficient and self-sustained (*Rites* 17.I: 19.6). According to *Analects* 13:23: "the exemplary person considers harmony and not uniformity, while a petty person considers uniformity rather than harmony."[5] Pointing to the significance of each person in creating appropriate relationships within the whole, harmony requires the knowledge to set the variety of different ingredients in proper order, which enriches and empowers each individual, as distinguished from uniformity (*tong*, 同), in which there is no variety and, hence, no mutual enrichment. *Yanzichunqiu* 晏子春秋 captures this beautifully:

> Harmony is analogous to a stew. The cook uses water, fire, vinegar, minced meat sauce, salt and sour plum to cook fish and meat over firewood. The cook harmonizes these ingredients and orchestrates them by means of flavors. He accentuates the slight and attenuates the excessive. When a man of noble character consumes it, it calms his heart-mind. (*Yanzichunqiu* 7.5, Li 2006, pp. 585–86)

Taking up from the "great stew" in the *Rites*, this passage emphasizes the leader's role by depicting the leader as a graceful cook who orchestrates the ingredients into one harmonic dish. The harmonious stew gives special significance not only to the plurality of ingredients but, moreover, to the cook as a caring leader who seeks the education of his people:

> Thus we see that the ancient kings, in their institution of ceremonies and music, did not seek how fully they could satisfy the desires of the appetite and of the ears and eyes; but they intended to teach the people to regulate their likings and dislikings, and to bring them back to the normal course of humanity. (*Rites*, 17. I: 19.10, Legge 2003, p. 96)

The ancient kings taught the people the art of regulating the various "social ingredients." This higher concept of harmony functions, as explained here, in a way that none of its individual ingredients can achieve: Only when all of them together are regulated by a sagely musical leader can harmony then be attained as an emergence. According to Confucianism, this is *Tianrenheyi*, 天人合一, the interaction between heaven and mankind that generates the Oneness of heavenly and human realms. In this line, Confucius's disciple Zigong describes the leader's relationship with his people:

> . . . [h]e would lead them on, and they will follow him; he would bring them peace, and they will return, he would stimulate them, and they will respond in harmony. (*Analects* 19:25)

In a harmonious community of this kind, there is trust, well-being, and confidence, and, as Cheng Chung-ying explains, there is neither doubt nor fear.

[t]he individual self is cultivated to make changes in one's behavior toward others with the vision that when everyone does this, the society will be transformed into a state of mutual respect and reciprocal empowerment. It is a social vision in which the harmony of the society is created from the *ren* -motivated individuals and the potential of an individual will be fully realized in a state of this human mutuality. It is a state of harmonization by mutual comprehension in which no misgiving, no fears and no doubts will arise, for the conditions for their manifestation will be eliminated in the process of mutual transformation (Cheng 2000, p. 33).

The Confucian ideal of harmony and reciprocal empowerment defines human relatedness (*ren*, 仁), guided by a caring leader who has the ability to harmonize and bring his people to mutual support and balance with no dissonance.

Turning back to *Tongshu* 18, it reaffirms the old idea that harmony unifies all parts of the world, this time with a clear ontological flavor. Harmony is the unifier of *qi*, 氣, the "vital energy that functions as the essential matter that constitutes everything that exists":[6]

> Therefore, the sages created music to free hearts-minds in harmonious tune. Penetrating heaven and earth, the *qi* of heaven and earth is moved by it and becomes greatly harmonized. When heaven and earth are in harmony, then the myriad things are in accord.

The rootedness of government to music is explained here through the connection between cosmic harmony and human harmony as one *qi.* Accordingly, music is the creation of human sages to follow cosmic harmony in the sphere of myriad things (*wanwu*, 萬物), among which, all humans live. When a government is led by a musical virtuoso, the harmonious action of heaven and earth can be modeled by the multitudes. Moreover, when the chapter importantly adds that humans model heaven and earth, human harmony then affects the motion in heaven and earth so that sagely created music can move *qi* itself and take an active role in creation. In the way a good conductor leads the music, both as a manifestation of *qi* and as a catalyst of it, so does a musical government lead the state. Music, in this way, not only reflects heavenly harmony but it also creates earthly accordance, transforms unfavorable circumstances, and is, thus, revealed as a leading force to which the world responds.

Relating the earthly–political with the cosmic and non-human in one harmonious continuity of nature and environment allows everyone to know their places and realize themselves accordingly. Inspired by cosmic harmony, the leader-as-conductor sets the tempo, ensures correct entries and exits, interprets the score in a way that reflects specific indications, and constantly keeps attunement as the most basic musical demand. In line with

this understanding, music was performed in the royal court and regarded as a symbol of good and stable governance (Jie 2011, pp. 6–7).

4. Pragmatics of Attaining Order through Skillful Ritualistic Practice

In *Analects* 1:12, the Confucian disciple Youzi says that harmony is the most valuable in adhering to the rules of propriety (*li*, 禮)[7], as followed by sage kings in matters great and small, and adds that it is impossible to attain harmony without following propriety. Apparently, the ontology of harmony, tightly related to an epistemology of hearing, receives its practical significance through the practice of propriety. To obtain a fuller picture of the human ways of applying cosmic harmony to the socio-political realm, we are called to delve deeper into the Confucian understanding of the rules of propriety and Confucian ritualistic education.

Tongshu 13, titled "Propriety and Music" (*Liyue*, 禮樂) takes up the idea of cosmic harmony as an order (*li*, 理)[8] that is modeled through propriety and music in the social realm to create social harmonious order. Opening by stating "propriety is Order; Music is harmony" (*liliye yueheye*, 禮理也 樂和也), Zhou brings the relatedness of cosmic regularity and human practical stability to the forefront. The defined rules of propriety reflect the boundless cosmic order, and human-created music reflects endless cosmic harmony embedded in the finitude of human life. As every ritual has its own music, it has an instrumental role in socio-political, practical, and emotional harmonies. According to *Tongshu* 13, through the ongoing practice of propriety, harmony is attained in concrete social and political relationships such that "a governor is a governor, a minister is a minister, a father is a father, a son is a son, an elder is an elder, a younger is younger, a man is a man, and a woman is a woman" (ibid.).

The practice of propriety enables human self-realization, as it keeps the dynamic balance of various roles, types, and classes, bringing everyone to their proper positions. When a ruler performs his duty in a moral way and conducts himself appropriately, his officials, and all people under him, follow. Any diversion from this "social music" disturbs the harmony and destroys the desired order. Through propriety, music acts as an actual harmonizing force. According to the text, as the cosmic process is singular, it culminates with various realizations such that the myriad things are harmonious when each attains its order: "therefore propriety is first and music follows" (ibid.). *Tongshu* 17 expands the significance of propriety in the context of music, reflecting ideas of self-realization, balanced feelings, and the human spirit in terms of motion and rest, which leads to harmonious living. Grounded in the polar (*Yinyang*, 陰陽) ongoing motion of *qi*, it introduces the practical perspective of music and its power to influence society, exemplifying the Confucian mindset as set by the rules of propriety, referring to an ideal past in which harmony prevailed at all levels of human existence:

> In ancient times, the sage-kings established the rules of propriety and perfected self-cultivation. . . . The people were in great harmony, the myriad things moved smoothly. (*Tongshu 17*)

The Confucian placement of the utopian society in the past opens the ideal past to the present and allows it to penetrate the living world.[9] By inciting action, it reminds practitioners that re-attaining harmonious socio-political organization is within the reach of humanity's ability; as it once existed, it can be reconquered by following the rules of propriety, if only we invest ourselves in realizing this embedded harmony. While Cosmic harmony is natural, the human world requires a human deed for its realization. If the cosmos is spontaneous, in the human world, harmony can only exist as intentional, as an outcome of human-created propriety paired with music. Through propriety, music models greater harmony in the human world. The moderation and balance that music brings forth characterizes, according to the next lines in the chapter, the moderate and balanced way of sages:

> When the world transforms and attains centrality,[10] then government is supreme. This is the significance of saying that when the Way accords with heaven and earth, it is the climax of past generations. (ibid.)

The achievements of musical living are depicted above as analogous to living according to the Way. The attainment of centrality (*Zhong*, 中) is naturally associated with harmony as the essence of Confucian spirituality, as originated in the *Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhongyong*, 中庸).[11] In this way, centrality, together with harmony, elucidates that, in the Confucian world, musicality manifests human beings as integral components of nature. Zhou then presents a warning through a critical perspective on the outcome of governments that did not follow ancient music, which thereby led to social chaos.

> Later generations did not refine their methods of propriety. Governmental penal law became harsh and disordered, and they even let their desire go without restraint. The people below, were afflicted and suffered. Rulers said that ancient music is not worth listening to. It was replaced by new sounds, seductive and resentful, which aroused desires and increased sadness. Therefore, there were those who rebelled against their rulers, discarded their fathers, did not care about life, and ruined human relations with no ability to stop. (ibid.)

Abandoning music is explained in the passage as neglecting propriety, which amounts to neglecting morality. The deviant present, ruled by disharmony and arbitrariness, brings about suffering and loss of the Way, and it then responded with penal law (*xing*, 刑), which increases pain.

To understand the roots of this line of thought, let us first turn to the *Rites*, according to which animals know sound and human beings are sensitive to tones, yet only the exemplary person (*junzi*, 君子) understands music itself (*Rites* 17.I: 19.7). Attributing music to the exemplary person alone demands musical skillfulness from a practitioner of a musical instrument. In this context, a distinction has to be made between the Western notion of music and Chinese *yue*, 樂, which, already in the Zhou Dynasty, was conceived as "mixed art," connected with words and actions as both instrumental and vocal, and often associated with ritual performances and dancing (Huang 1963, p. 50; Fei 2002, p. 3). "Hearing" Confucian music is, therefore, a multi-dimensional task that includes other senses too.[12] Confucius considered "elegant music" (*yayue*, 雅樂) proper music, that is, morally uplifting, keeping social balance and political stability, and essential in cultivating and refining the person.[13] Music, paired with the rules of propriety as ritualistic practices, was a performative art and an integral part of the Confucian moral structure.

The *Analects* offer an "education program" to reach the complete effect of music: "Be stimulated by poetry, take your stand on propriety, and be perfected by music" (*Analects* 8:8).[14] Beginning with learning poetry, one refines linguistic competence, which is the accepted human means of understanding. Lyrics, in addition to the harmonious sound, cultivate aesthetic–poetic sensitivity, which provides humans with skills that require special attention to the subtleties of language, including syntax, rhyme, similes, and analogies. Beginning with poetry and developing linguistic aesthetics, learning continues with propriety as Confucian "rule-following" and only then perfects with music. The practice of propriety serves as a foundation for the desired musical convention, and it is acquired in this way as Confucian "knowhow." Significantly, the *Analects* consider music and propriety as equally constituent elements, without which, human moral relatedness cannot be complete (*Analects* 3:3). The *Rites* elaborate on this idea by saying that "music comes from within, and propriety from without" (*Rites*, 17.I: 19.17). Music expresses inner feelings and is initiated within us to be integral to us (*Rites*, 17.II: 19. 9–10); propriety completes its workings by moving inward from without. Also see (Barry 2012, p. 7). Music and propriety form, together, an ongoing and inseparable dynamic, with one supporting the other.

Accordingly, socio-political life attains order through propriety and music, which free governments from the use of penal law and coercive sanctions. As Confucianism acknowl-

edges the significance of political order, it does not completely defy penal law as being second best. However, as stated already in the *Analects*, the flourishing of propriety and music is a precondition for penal law to be effective. Accordingly, when propriety is not practiced, music is forgotten, and penal law that is stagnant and blind prevails such that "the people are not able to move hand or foot" (*min wusuo cuo shouzu*, 民無所措手足) (*Analects* 13:3). Law sees apparent order as being prior to subjects and brings about an apparent order by punishing after the deviation is committed, in contrast to propriety, which reflects harmonious cosmic order by acting together with music as preventive care, as rooted in *Analects* 2:3, which says that people avoid law and punishments, while they naturally go along with virtue and propriety. As propriety opposes law, music opposes punishment and cures its damage; while law manipulates by inflicting punishment, propriety educates through music. This idea is, in fact, inherent to the dynamism of Confucian humanism: Penal law operates mechanically, manipulating rather than educating; it can organize society but does not transform one's personality; it enforces ways to overcome conflicts but does not solve them, and societies are left open for generations of war and strife. Musical propriety facilitates self-transformation and reflects morality; it reflects heavenly order and harmony, and it educates people to have better personalities through change rather than force. The musical self is, therefore, a creative source of values, whose musical deeds bring an internalization of harmony and lead to peace.

5. Finale

In Confucianism, music directly reaches the soul and goes from heart to heart, directly influencing how we perceive the world. Confucius hears the Way, discusses propriety and music as alternatives to penal law, and believes in the possibility of harmonious governing. Zhou Dunyi reaffirms the Confucian Way with an onto-cosmological standard of creative cosmic harmony that inspires leadership; an epistemological–aesthetic perspective as musical knowhow through rules of propriety; and a moral-psychology-based on heart-mind attentive attunement defined by peacemaking.

Musical thinking is not a simple task to attain. It requires a composer's creativity; a conductor's harmonious leadership; an auditor's attentiveness to sounds, instruments, and melodies; and a player's ongoing practice, which includes rule-following, skillfulness, and technique mastery. Following all of the above will lead to moral musical virtuosity and more nuanced understanding. Accordingly, a more musical attitude to life may bring better attentiveness to human orchestral faculties and virtuoso leadership.

Coming back to the brief opening of this article, I want to say that it is not just Prime Minister Lapid's leadership being tested in the disturbing, disharmonious acts in Gaza, but the entire vision of Israel's government, and in this sense, Israel is not alone. Thus, I believe that Confucian musical understanding is more pertinent than ever in the present times of political turmoil in Israel and Palestine, the USA, China and Taiwan, Ukraine and Russia, and throughout the world. At least as a source of hope.

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Notes

1 For a comprehensive discussion on the various perspectives of music in early China, see (Brindley 2012).

2 The passage employs *ting*, 聽, for "hearing," which demands a direct presence unlike the more abstract *wen*.

3 *Tongshu* translations are mine.

4 While the Western term "harmony" derives from the Greek ἁρμονία, *harmonia*, meaning agreement, concord, or "join," similarly to Chinese *he*, 和, it has special significance in the Chinese context of the pentatonic scale, which, by definition, has no dissonant intervals (as there is neither a triton nor a seventh, which are both dissonant intervals and are non-harmonious).

5 In this context, Li Chenyang distinguishes the harmonious system as echoing a plurality of sounds from a uniformity (*tong*, 同) (Li 2006, p. 584).

6 Trying to capture its essence as a substance that is not solely physical, *qi* has been rendered as "ether" (T'ang 1956; McMorran 1975), "matter energy" (Needham 1956), y "essential matter" (Chow 1993), "passion-nature" (Legge 1961), "material force" (Chan 1963), "vital force" (Huang 1968), "ether of materialization" (Metzger 1977), "pneuma" (Henderson 1984), and "psycho-physical force" (Smith et al. 1990). For more, see (Patt-Shamir 2020, pp. 2–3).

7 *Li*, 禮, is one of the Chinese notions that resists translation into Western languages since there is no word that embodies the multi-dimensionality that *li* arouses. In general, I use "propriety" or "rules of propriety" to translate *li* (stressing moral–practical aspects), but in some cases, it is my choice to stress the ritualistic perspective by translating it as "ritual" or "ritualistic practice." When I quote from Western translations, I follow the translators' choices. In addition, I use the accepted translation of *Liji*, 禮記, as *The Classic of Rites*. See (Patt-Shamir 2007–2008, pp. 156–73). The next section focuses on the idea of rules of propriety.

8 *Li*, 理, is translated hereafter as "order". This choice of translation seems to best reflect both the metaphysical and moral aspects of the idea of an organization, which is in accordance with rules, principles, and intentions. It is a pattern in both normative and constitutive senses, as well as "reason" itself and "form" in its Aristotelian sense. For more on translations of *li*', see (Needham 1956, pp. 557–58). In addition, see (Patt-Shamir 2020, pp. 245–52).

9 For more on the Confucian ideal, see (Patt-Shamir 2005, pp. 455–76).

10 I follow Tu Wei-ming's translation of *zhong*, 中, as centrality; see (Tu 1989).

11 Accordingly, as a state of equilibrium (in which emotions are not yet aroused), centrality functions as the foundation of the universe (*Zhong Yong* 中庸, pp. 19–21). Humans are endowed with centrality by nature—the most refined quality of the universe. Heaven endows the person with the task of transforming cosmic processes into their actualization as a "center" for the continuity of being (Tu 1989, pp. 114–17). See *Zhong Yong* 1.11–18 (Plaks 2004, p. 65).

12 Moreover, in the early Chinese context, musical mastery aligns with the understanding of music as one of the Six Arts (*liuyi*, 六藝, including propriety, music, archery, charioteering, calligraphy, and mathematics), which were introduced to ancient China as, primarily, the mastery of artistic techniques that produce creativity.

13 *Ya*, 雅, refers to "song-texts" used in court and collected in *The Book of Poetry* (*Shijing* 詩經). The term *yayue* appears in *Analects* 17:18 in contrast to corrupting popular music. Proper music involves instruments correlating to the five phases of nature and bringing harmony to nature. The pentatonic scale was derived from this system (see Ko et al. 2003, p. 85).

14 One should note that, according to Confucius, it is poetry, propriety, and music, as recommended by the respective classics.

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Article

Issues of War and Peace: Is Religion More of the Problem and What Are Mahatma Gandhi's Insights?

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Abstract: When examining the history of religions and dominant religious narratives, institutions, cultures, ideologies, and practices in the contemporary world, one is tempted to conclude that religion is more of the problem in relating to diverse issues of war and peace. Dominant religions and religious cultures seem overwhelmingly to be causes, express systemic structures, and provide ideological, theological, and philosophical justifications for violence, war, militarism, intolerance, divisiveness, oppression, injustice, hatred, environmental destruction, and anti-democratic hierarchical domination. Can religious culture also be a positive force for nonviolence, peace, love, compassion, justice, tolerance and mutual respect, and harmonious and sustainable relations with human and nonhuman life, nature, and the cosmos? A universal, phenomenological, structural model of the dialectic of the sacred and the profane allows us to understand how and why religious culture has been such a negative force, but also how it can develop as a positive force. In that regard, Mahatma Gandhi, the best known and most influential proponent of nonviolence, offers a complex and insightful approach to religious culture in ways that are most significant for relating issues of war, peace, and religious culture today. What I propose to show, by focusing on the phenomenology of religion and the insights of Mahatma Gandhi, is that the full picture of religious culture, violence, war, and peace is complex, nuanced, and contradictory, and there are structural and contextualized openings for understanding ways that religious culture can be a positive force for nonviolence and peace.

Keywords: violence; nonviolence; war; peace; religious culture; phenomenology; sacred; profane; Gandhi

1. Introduction

Over the decades, issues of violence and war have often dominated the news, and when this essay was written, issues of violence and war continue to dominate the news. We are aware of the daily tragic reports of war violence, gun violence, and other kinds of violence; of the bombings and terrorizing and deaths of innocent civilians; of the weaponization and militarization of "normal" everyday living; and of the economic and political basis and ideological justifications for violence and war. These daily ongoing expressions of violence shape our dominant narratives.

These reports, issues, interpretations, and explanations of violence and war are often connected with views of religion and religious culture. When it comes to understanding contemporary violence and war, is religion a primary cause? Or is religion a secondary symptom? Or is religion not really a significant contributor?

When examining thousands of years of the history of religions, as well as the dominant religious narratives, institutions, cultures, ideologies, and practices in the contemporary world, one is tempted to conclude that religion is more of the problem rather than the solution in relating to diverse issues of war and peace. Dominant religions and religious cultures seem overwhelmingly to be causes, express systemic structures, and provide ideological, theological, and philosophical justifications for violence, war, militarism, intolerance, divisiveness, oppression, injustice, hatred, environmental destruction, and anti-democratic hierarchical domination. One can easily conclude that addressing the problems of so

much violence and war necessarily involves opposition to religion and contemporary religious cultures.

The question remains whether religion and religious culture can also be part of the solution in confronting issues of war and peace. Can religion be a force for nonviolence, peace, love, compassion, justice, tolerance and mutual respect, and harmonious and sustainable relations with human and nonhuman life, nature, and the cosmos?

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869–1948, better known as Mahatma Gandhi) is the best known and most influential proponent of nonviolence (*ahimsa*). His view of nonviolence informs his approach to war and peace. He also offers a complex and insightful approach to religious culture that challenges traditional, hierarchical, immoral, violent, untruthful, institutionalized religions. Gandhi does not provide the exclusive, absolute, prefect solution or even all of the most adequate solutions. Nevertheless, I propose that our selectively and creatively rereadings, reinterpretations, and reapplications of Gandhi's insightful approach offer significant ways for relating issues of war, peace, and religious culture in positive, meaningful, contextualized formulations today.[1]

2. Violence and War

"Violence" is always central to any examination of issues addressing war and peace. In its extremely broad and often vague uses, we may clarify two meanings of the term violence. First, there is the descriptive meaning of violence as a force that is strong, intense, immoderate, fierce, and rough. It is often presented as value-free or value-neutral. Such accounts are claimed to be descriptively accurate in allowing us to describe factually and objectively a human and nonhuman world that expresses violence. Indeed, some maintain that such violence, far from being opposed to "peace", is necessary for peace. Second, there are definitions of violence with strong negative meanings. Violence is a rough force that involves assault, aggression, harm, and violation. It is opposed to peace. Peace involves minimizing the negative forces of violence and maximizing the positive forces of nonviolence.

As we shall see, we need to broaden and deepen our understanding of violence (and nonviolence) beyond the usual narrow meanings of violence as overt physical force. In examining the issues of violence, war, and peace, we'll see the need to address inner psychological violence, economic and political and social violence, cultural and religious violence, and other interconnected dimensions of violence. While often granting that religion is being expressed as an overwhelmingly violent negative force today, we shall also see how Gandhi and religious cultures challenge us to consider nonviolence and religious nonviolence as expressing forces that refrain from violence and are the strongest, active, positive, moral, truthful, transformative forces needed for addressing issues of war, violence, and peace.

As with "violence", the term "war" also has several diverse and often vague meanings. In more common, narrow, clear senses, war is declared by nations, although sometimes not explicitly declared, and involves the use of force of arms and other violent forces of nations against other nations. This narrower sense also involves the use of such armed force and other violent forces within nations as evidenced in civil wars. There are also many broader and often vaguer senses of war that involve active hostility, conflict, and violence. For example, since the 1980s, citizens in the USA have been repeatedly told that they are involved in the "war on drugs". Over the decades, a dominant U.S. narrative has invoked the "war on terrorism" and the even vaguer "war on evil". In 2022 in the polarized political situation in the USA, members of the Republican Party have been socialized by the broader, hostile, violent, war narratives with the need to declare war on and destroy the other political party as threatening patriotic true America and its true, white, Christian, exceptional, superior, foundational past and its exceptional superior future that is under attack.

In this regard, religious culture over the centuries and continuing today expresses both the narrow and the broad senses of narratives and practices of war. Many dominant

religions declare war on the evil doers and the sinners within their religions, on the evil believers of the other religions, and on the evil secularists who reject religion. In the broader senses, religions today declare war on those upholding reproductive rights and the right to abortion and equal rights for women; those opposed to the death penalty of capital punishment and opposed to the proliferation of nuclear weapons; those recognizing the rights of homosexuals and transgender persons; those focusing on the need for educational and other awareness of the history of slavery and institutionalized racism, antisemitism, Islamophobia, and the genocide of Indigenous peoples; those focusing on climate change and environmental destruction, and more.

It is revealing and sometimes shocking to antiwar nonviolent proponents and admirers of the nonviolent Mahatma Gandhi to learn that he often uses the language of violence and war, albeit in figurative, symbolic, mythic, and allegorical ways. For example, he often refers to his *Satyagrahis* and other followers as peace warriors, and he repeatedly formulates his philosophy, movements, campaigns, and practices as wars and battles against immorality, evil, violence, and untruth.

When asked, most people easily grant that war is violent, harmful, unfortunate, and undesirable. War is easily contrasted with peace that is usually regarded as positive, nonviolent, and desirable. We would like to live in peace. Nevertheless, just as most people agree that violence is sometimes necessary, they qualify their views of war so that war is sometimes regarded as necessary to realize peace. In addition, just as we noted the need to broaden and deepen our understanding of violence (and nonviolence), we shall emphasize the need to broaden and deepen our understanding of war (and peace). For example, in examining issues of war, peace, and religion, we must address how war is multidimensional extending beyond overt, physical warfare to include economic warfare, psychological warfare, cultural warfare, and more.

This section is entitled "violence and war". We may clarify some of the relations between these two terms. Violence is the much broader term. War is always violent (overtly, covertly, structurally, relationally, multidimensionally, morally, ontologically), but most violence extends far beyond the defining characteristics of war. For example, various religious cultures and various nonreligious cultures regard our existential human condition in the world as violent, our human nature as partially or completely violent, our contextualized situated need to provide adequate food, housing, natural resources, and labor power as violent, and more. All war is violent, but most violence is not war.

3. War and Peace

At the first most transparent level of expression, war and peace are diametrically opposed. When we are engaged in war, we are not at peace. Some of the strongest and most dramatic scriptural teachings of the Biblical Hebraic Prophets, the Christian Sermon on the Mount and Social Gospel, the foundational texts of Islam, and in other religious cultures uphold the ideals, values, and practices of peace and the need to limit or refrain from war that is violent, immoral, and evil.[2]

Nevertheless, the use of the term "peace" is often self-serving, vague, diversionary, and questionable. When asserting that peace is not war, such views of peace are usually expressed as the absence of war, especially overt violent war. However, such views of peace do not guarantee a deeper, broader, and more adequate expression of peace. For example, as seen in broadening and deepening our understanding of multidimensional violence, nonviolence, war, and peace, so-called "normal" conditions of peace as simply not war can be very violent and unpeaceful.

In addition, just as war is multidimensional with many diverse meanings, so is peace. Throughout history and continuing today, political, economic, religious, and nonreligious contextual expressions of peace as the absence of war may be completely devoid of the experiences and expressions of inner peace, class and caste relations of peace, gender and racial relations of peace, cultural and religious relations of peace. Often what is presented as "peace" is what Martin Luther King, Jr. and others analyze as a "negative peace", a

peace expressing injustice, which is no peace at all.[3] As Gandhi and others repeatedly tell us, what we often express and uphold as "peace" is a rather passive acceptance and even complicity with contextualized situations of violence, immorality, hatred, divisiveness, and injustice. That is why it is central to Gandhi's philosophy, ethics, spirituality, and action-transforming practices that we nonviolently intervene, challenge, and disrupt the far-from-peaceful status quo. Such educating, organizing, selfless sacrificing, resisting, and courageous disrupting are necessary for positive peace, real peace, the deeper and broader senses of peace shaped by morality, justice, nonviolence, and truth.

I propose such an approach to peace, war, violence, and religion, as informed by the writings and action-oriented practices of Gandhi and King and others, for challenging many dominant religious cultural perspectives. We are often instructed that if we adopt the true religion, the true religious teachings and rituals and other practices, we are guaranteed absolute inner peace, often in this world and definitely in heaven or the next world. This is often the same dramatic claim by many promoting the guaranteed results of complete inner peace if we adopt their specific forms of meditation, yoga, prayer, and other practices. By contrast, our approach to religious culture and peace attempts to disrupt such guaranteed perspectival claims. If we live in a world of overwhelming violence, hatred, oppression, poverty, inequality, and war, we should be alarmed, disturbed, engaged, and called to action. Indeed, inner peace and outer peace are both essential, are dialectically related, as they mutually interact and mutually shape each other. As previously stated, there is no peace, inner or outer peace, without justice, just as there is no justice without peace.

In this section on war and peace, similar comments can be made regarding religious and nonreligious cultural orientations toward war. As seen in the formulations of "greater jihad" and as found throughout religious cultures, in our embrace of true peace, we are engaged in our inner war with the immorality, hatred, greed, egotism, violence, and other impurities and evils within each of us (and within our religion). This inner war is dialectically interconnected with our outer war. We increase our awareness, become greatly disturbed, disrupt our passivity and complicity, resist, and engage in the outer war of transforming the world of so much violence, suffering, and lack of inner and outer peace. Such a peace-oriented inner and outer war is needed to transform and overcome the dominant multidimensional and structural values, theories, perspectives, and practices of war as destructive negative force promoted by religious cultures.

4. Religion as a Negative Force

Eleven years ago, I was invited by the editors of a book, entitled *Patterns in Philosophy and Sociology of Religions*, to submit a manuscript. My submission, entitled "Religion and Violence in the Contemporary World", was published as Chapter 1. I noted at the time how the complex and troubling expressions of violence often expressed interconnected relations with religion. These violent relations frequently dominated the daily news. These violent relations, often expressed as religious violence, frequently dominated the tragic lives of suffering and death of many hundreds of millions of human beings. They challenged us with the alarming prospects of a very dangerous, insecure, and unsustainable future. Noted were such examples as the many forms of terrorism, Afghanistan and the Taliban, Iraq and Shia, Sunni, and other religious and ethnic conflicts, Palestine, Israel, Pakistan, India, and more. I also noted that when it came to issues of violence and religion, the USA was not an exception. Indeed, some of the most dangerous forces of violence and religious violence existed and were increasingly empowered in the United States.[4]

Has the situation in 2022 improved? Far from it: If anything, the alarming situation has worsened. The Taliban have regained power as the rulers in Afghanistan. Russia is increasingly involved in violence and war. Violence, conflict, war, and lack of nonviolence and peace characterize life in Ukraine, throughout the Middle East, Syria, Turkey, Yemen, Hungary, Poland, Myanmar/Burma, the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Mali, and much more. The alarming situation in the USA involving many of the most dangerous expressions of violence and religious violence has greatly worsened: the

rise and dominant power of Christian fundamentalists and others identifying with the violent religious right under Trump and serving as a base of the Republican Party; the packing of an activist Supreme Court with its extreme, conservative, militant, Christian justices; the anti-democratic insurrection of 6 January 2022 in Washington, D.C. and its ongoing violent expressions; the rise of violent xenophobic nationalism, white supremacy, oppressive patriarchy and homophobia, antisemitism, Islamophobia; the increasing dangers of nuclear catastrophe, and so much more.

In most of these examples of so much contemporary violence, religion is integrally related to the violence. The nonviolent religious forces for peace and against war are usually passive, silent, powerless, and ineffective when contrasted with the overwhelming religious forces promoting and ideologically justifying violent conflicts and war. It is easy to conclude that when it comes to violence, war, and peace, religion is a negative force and is an essential part of the problem and not the solution.

In noting the etymology of the term "religion", it is easy to recognize why religious culture has so often promoted and justified religion as a negative force that is extremely violent. *Religio* is relational and indicates that two radically different components or terms are integrally connected or related at the foundation and the heart of religion. What are those radically different terms that are brought into integral interconnected relations in religious culture and distinguish religion from nonreligious cultural perspectives and orientations? Although specific language varies widely depending on different religious cultures and their contextualized orientations, religions distinguish and integrally relate and interconnect what is, on the one hand, expressed as God, ultimate reality, heaven, the transcendent, the absolute, the infinite, the eternal, etc., with what, on the other hand, is expressed as the limited and impure human world, the false and illusory, the imminent, the relative, the finite, the temporal, etc. In suggesting how such an approach and religious orientation has so often led to religious cultures promoting violence and war, I will now provide several of many possible explanations.

Religious cultures in relating to what is experienced and expressed as God or Ultimate Reality understandably assume and believe that their religion, faith, scriptures, divine sources of revelation, rituals, and leaders reveal and connect them with goodness, truth, and reality. That is why they identify as religious and embrace their religious culture as essential in their lives. The many components of their religious culture provide them with the trusted pipeline to sacred values, salvation, and absolute reality. What about those others: nonbelievers, infidels, members of other religions and faiths, atheists, secularists, etc.? They do not have our trusted pipeline to our God, salvation, goodness, and reality. In fact, they usually reject what we believe and maintain as the absolute truth and reality. Although it is not necessarily or logically entailed, the overwhelming strong militant move in the history of religions and in religious cultures today has been to the view and corresponding practices that the others are immoral, evil, untruthful, deniers of our revealed absolute reality. Even more, like a cancer, they are a threat that will destroy us if we do not protect our religious culture and if we do not control and destroy the cancerous other.

Such a religious approach and perspective easily moves to embracing the position of the extreme necessity of violence and even war. Since we have the exclusive absolute channel or pipeline to God or absolute reality, the perfect blueprint of religious reality, the only true reality, we know that violence and war are often necessary. God is on our side, not on the side of the nonbelievers. More than that, we are commanded to engage in extreme violence, destruction, and war, even though it involves self-sacrifice, suffering, killing, and being killed. It is our religious duty, and there can be no higher duty.

This may allow us to understand why religious cultures are often the strongest, most violent, and most destructive, war-promoting, negative forces today. Countless examples can be found in the dominant narrative expressions of religious cultures throughout the world. I will only illustrate this by referring briefly to the some of the religious culture of the powerful, militant, Christian Right in the U.S. today. We possess the exclusive absolute

truth and reality, and we are on a Christian mission from God in our present-day multi-billion-dollar crusade waging war on evil. In this violent divine war, we are the strongest supporters of unlimited weaponization, including U.S. nuclear superiority. We are the strongest supporters of the death penalty and the U.S. in leading the world in executions. We are the strongest supporters of military strikes, invasions, and occupations of other counties, especially those that are dominated by evil non-Christian cultures, or, at least, not our kind of militant Christianity. We support a violent militant Israel as Christians, even though Jews reject the true God, because this is a necessary preliminary stage in our Christian theology.

Without providing numerous additional examples of this violent, militant, extreme, Christian religious culture in the U.S. today, we may note something truly alarming that illustrates how this religious culture expresses religion as such a negative force. It might seem that any religious culture that promotes the values of peace, love, kindness, compassion, the Golden Rule, etc., would be horrified by the numerous examples and threats in the U.S, and throughout the contemporary world of the humanly caused death of hundreds of millions of human beings, genocide, endless war, nuclear holocaust, climate change with the destruction of human and nonhuman life, and much more. We would be wrong. The powerful Christian Right in the U.S.—and one can give similar examples of other religious cultures throughout the world—does not fear and is not horrified by such extreme violence and destruction. Just the opposite: It welcomes them! Overwhelming destructive religious violence is welcome as glorious, blissful, ecstatic, and necessary for realizing the preconditions for the Second Coming, the "End Time", the "Rapture", and the time of ultimate purification and salvation, when all true believers will be saved in the eternal blissful paradise of heaven and the nonbelievers will be confined to eternal damnation in hell.

Once again, since we the true believers have faith and are certain that we, and only we, possess the only pipeline to God, the sacred, and reality, we are prepared to use violence, war, and any other means necessary to defend and spread our religious culture with its one true reality and to limit, control, and violently defeat the nonbelievers with their false and dangerous religious cultures. One can easily recognize why such perspectives regarding religious cultures have promoted religious violence, war, and other multidimensional and structural expressions of religion as a negative force.

If what we have already presented were the full picture, we could now provide a definitive response to our question of whether religion is more of a problem regarding issues of war and peace in religious culture. Religion would seem to be such a negative force that it is obviously more of a problem, if not the major problem. What I propose to show in the next two sections, on the phenomenology of religion and the insights of Mahatma Gandhi, is that the full picture of religious culture, violence, war, and peace is much more complex, nuanced, and contradictory, and there are structural and contextualized openings for understanding ways that religious culture can be a positive force for nonviolence and peace.

5. A Phenomenological Structural Model of Religion

In this section, I shall present, in greatly decontextualized and oversimplified ways, a universal, phenomenological, structural paradigm of religion that is intended to express what is distinctive about religious culture. This model can help us to distinguish religious from nonreligious cultures. This universal paradigm, model, and theory of religion may clarify what is distinctive about religious culture and allow us to understand better religious perspectives on war and peace, including Gandhian, non-Gandhian, and anti-Gandhian religious approaches, interpretations, and practices.

Following the approach of philosophical phenomenology, I attempt as much as possible to adopt the phenomenological *epoché*, in which scholars suspend their own presuppositions and value judgments so that they can empathize with and then describe the perspectives of the others being studied. In that regard, I attempt to formulate the struc-

tural dialectic of the sacred as experienced and expressed by religious cultures, describing their normative claims of the nature of ultimate reality, but without offering any scholarly judgments on my part as to whether such clams are justified.[5]

As we have noted, "religion" is a very vague term with many diverse and contradictory uses and meanings, some very violent, but others promoting love, compassion, tolerance, and nonviolent peace. This vagueness about "religion" is expressed in a frequent distinction made by many people, including most of my philosophy students in recent decades, who want to indicate that there is something more in their lives than dominant material, scientific, limited values and worldviews. They assert that they are "spiritual", not religious. They clearly want to reject the dominant institutionalized religion of their socialized upbrings or of the dominant society, but when asked, it is not clear what they mean by the extremely vague, very varied, and often contradictory uses and meaning of "the spiritual".

The universal phenomenological paradigm that follows is intended to include all of the dominant traditional religious cultures, the dissenting and resisting religious cultures, and those who use terms such as the spiritual to express their alternate cultures. Following the lead of Mircea Eliade and other phenomenologists of religion, Emile Durkheim and other sociologists of religions, key ethnologists and other structural anthropologists, and other scholars, we shall not restrict our terminology to God, Allah, Soul, Brahman, Nirvana, etc., since various religious cultures do not use and even strongly reject such concepts, values, practices, and goals. Our essential model is meant to be universal in including all diverse religious formulations.

That is why, following Eliade and others, we'll use the inclusive language of "the sacred" and "the profane". The sacred and the profane express two human existential orientations, two human modes of being in the world, two structures of consciousness, two metaphysical/theological worldviews about the nature of reality. The dialectic of the sacred reveals the essential process of sacralization through which religious human beings and their religious cultures express their faiths, beliefs, and practices regarding what is transcendent and ultimately real and how we can experience, connect, and relate to that ultimate reality in our profane and limited existence in this world. This complex dynamic process of the dialectic of the sacred and the profane is, of course, from the perspective of religious culture. Nonreligious cultures reject the ultimate reality of the transcendent sacred and the reality of its process of sacralization.[6]

We shall formulate three structures in the dialectic of the sacred and the profane. First, religion and religious culture affirm the most radical qualitative separation, the most radical dichotomization, the most radical oppositional dialectical relation between the sacred and the profane. This is not the usual nonreligious distinction of differentiation and dichotomization as a matter of degree: more or less intelligent, more or less ethical, more or less powerful, etc. From the religious perspective, the dichotomized terms of the sacred and the profane are radically different in kind: absolute or relative, transcendent or imminent, supernatural or natural, infinite or finite, eternal or temporal, omnipotent or limited in power, omniscient or limited in knowledge, etc.

Second, in the universal structure of the dialectic of the sacred, these radically dichotomized categories, concepts, and values that are absolutely different in kind are connected through a uniquely religious paradoxical relation.[7] What is paradoxical to "normal" nonreligious experience and thinking is the religious claim that what is absolute, perfect, infinite, unconditioned, eternal, supernatural, etc., reveals itself through limited, finite, temporal, historical, natural phenomena. This paradoxical structural relation can also be expressed in the reverse terms of the dialectical movement: Words, symbols, myths, scriptural passages, human beings, animals, the sun, mountains, rivers, etc., paradoxically reveal and connect us with the radically and qualitatively different transcendent sacred that is beyond the limited, imperfect, natural, temporal, historical, linguistic, contextualized world of human existence. From the nonreligious perspective and human existential mode of being, the religious claim to this paradoxical relation makes no sense, is irrational, is illog-

ical, and illustrates confused and backward thinking. From the religious perspective, this paradoxical relation is structurally essential for the revelation of truth and ultimate reality.

Third, religious culture embraces the dichotomized paradoxical structure of the dialectic of the sacred as always entailing a radical evaluation and choice. The sacred and the profane, the supernatural and the natural, the eternal and the temporal, God/the Divine and the human, etc., are not symmetrical relational terms. They express the most radical, asymmetrical, normative relation in which the sacred, the transcendent, the supernatural, the eternal, etc. is evaluated by religious culture as the absolute ultimate reality. This is not some abstract, cognitive, intellectually detached, unbiased and "objective" evaluation by religious persons. The structural evaluation involves the total religious existential mode of being, lived and expressed on all levels of consciousness, including the conscious and unconscious, the emotional and the imaginative, the individual and social and cosmic relations.

In addition, this sacred mode of being with its evaluation of the sacred and the profane always involves the most radical choice essential to the existential orientation and worldview of religious culture. The sacred as ultimate reality is chosen as the source, basis, and solution for all key issues and questions facing human beings and their cultures. The chosen sacred allows religious culture to understand and experience the solutions to questions regarding the creation of humankind, tribes, clans, the earth, and the cosmos; the religious nature of ethics and how to resolve ethical issues; the nature of violence, nonviolence, war, peace, and how to resolve previously noted difficult issues; social, class, caste, gender, racial, ethnic, and environmental issues; issues of eschatology, salvation, and what happens that transcends mortality and our imperfect human world, and more.

Without enlarging this structural formulation of the dialectic of the sacred and the profane to add other related dimensions and characteristics, we may stop now to reflect on how this relates to the general topic of this essay. One can recognize how the three essential, universal, phenomenological structures can accommodate and easily contribute to the troubling formulations in earlier sections, seen most clearly in the previous section of religion and religious culture as an overwhelmingly negative force of violence, hatred, divisiveness, intolerance, and war.

My religious culture possesses knowledge of the absolute truth and reality of the dichotomized sacred (God, heaven, the soul, morality, salvation) while the profane religious and nonreligious cultures of others do not possess this knowledge. My religious culture understands and experiences the paradoxical relation through which that absolute ultimate is revealed while other cultures lack this paradoxical revelation so that they deny and threaten the revealed ultimate reality. My religious culture evaluates and chooses the exclusive, absolute, sacred reality while other religious and nonreligious cultures lack this essential evaluation and instead choose to live lives of ignorance, immorality, sin, evil, etc. Once again, expressing the phenomenological structures of the dialectic of the sacred and the profane, we can recognize why religious cultures have so often promoted multidimensional violence and war in defending the faith and controlling and destroying the others who deny the sacred and promote cultures based on the profane.

Nevertheless, the phenomenological structural dialectic of the sacred and the profane does not necessarily lead to such disturbing conclusions. First, the dialectic of the radically dichotomized sacred could generate religious culture in which we embrace, formulate, and practice perspectives that emphasize love, kindness, compassion, empathy, tolerance, our interconnectedness with all human and nonhuman life and nature. Religious culture might then promote nonviolence and peace and attempt, as much as is contextually possible, to avoid or at least minimize violence and war.

The second universal phenomenological structure of the dialectic of the sacred and the profane could lead to diverse, pluralistic, inclusivist perspectives that acknowledge that other religious cultures may experience and express the essential paradoxical relation of the sacred and the profane in offering different legitimate approaches to and disclosures of truth and reality. Indeed, as Mahatma Gandhi submits, we may uphold our religious culture while engaging with and learning from other religious cultures.

The third formulation of the dialectic of the sacred with its essential phenomenological structure of evaluation and choice can also provide positive constructive openings and valorizations for religious culture. Human beings, their human relations, and their human religious cultures are always, to a greater or to a less extent, expressions of our existential mode of being in the world as limited, often mistaken, finite, conditioned, imperfect, egotistical, greedy, hateful, cruel, violent, immoral, and sinful beings. Therefore, to claim that any individual, group, or religious culture possess the exclusive perfect knowledge of the absolute evaluation of sacred and profane and the resulting exclusive choice of the transcendent sacred is arrogant, ignorant, illusory, and dangerous. Put differently, we act as if we were God with absolute knowledge of truth and reality. Once again, as Mahatma Gandhi submits, while affirming our faith and religious culture, we should be humbler and more self-critical in refraining from violently imposing our religious evaluation and choice on others.

In summary, our phenomenological structural paradigm of the sacred and the profane essential to religious cultures does not necessarily commit us to the view of the sacred, God, or the transcendent ultimate reality as inherently or essentially violent or as inherently or essentially nonviolent. Similarly, the universal model of the dialectic of the sacred and the profane does not necessarily commit us to the view of profane, limited, spatial, temporal, historical, situated human beings as inherently or essentially violent or as inherently or essentially nonviolent. In the next section, I shall focus on an approach to religious culture that emphasizes nonviolence and peace.

6. Some of Mahatma Gandhi's Insights on Religion, Nonviolence, and Peace

Formulating Mahatma Gandhi's presuppositions, values, concepts, and practices regarding religion and religious culture must include very dynamic, complex, at times contradictory, contextualized variables, relations, and general structures. In thousands of passages, Gandhi affirms his faith, his religious beliefs, and his identification as deeply religious. However, it is often not clear what this means. What is Gandhi's religion, his religious culture, and his necessary characteristics for living a religious life, and how does this inform his commitment to nonviolence and peace?

In many passages, Gandhi identifies his religion as Hinduism, but he then acknowledges that his religion has been deeply shaped by the insights of Jainism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Tolstoy, Ruskin, and others. He boldly claims that his Hinduism even includes all of the nonviolent truths that he believes express the essence of all other religions.[8] In many passages, selectively appropriated by Hindu Vedantists, and especially recently by various nondualistic Advaitins, Gandhi indicates his personal preference for the religious view of the unity and oneness of the absolute ultimate spiritual reality expressed as Atman-Brahman. In many more passages, Gandhi expresses his religious faith in a personal theistic God (Rama, Krishna, or other expressions), as the focus of his prayers, as sustaining him in times of darkness and despair. and as revealing to him the "inner voice" of truth, morality, spirituality, and reality.

In key passages, Gandhi submits that his approach to understanding religion is not limited by religious language, concepts, rituals, scriptures, and other religious phenomena. Striking, in that regard, are Gandhi's passages in which he reverses his earlier, more traditional view of "God is Truth", in which truth is one of many divine attributes. Gandhi embraces what he now takes to be the more adequate, inclusivist, spiritual view of "Truth is God".[9] In such a perspectival understanding, truth may be God in many religious interpretations, and truth may be interpreted differently in religious perspectives of ultimate reality without reference to or with the rejection of "God". Gandhi also wants to include and respect very diverse, atheistic, agnostic, moral, and spiritual views that focus on truth, but that do not have any religious identification.

In his approach to and identification with Hinduism and with religion, Gandhi embraces the view that ancient, traditional, and other religious cultures express the deepest insights, values, and teachings regarding truth, nonviolence, peace, ethics, selfless service,

harmonious living, sustainability, and reality. Nevertheless, Gandhi's approach is qualified, nuanced, and complex. He does not romanticize, idealize, and extol Hinduism and religion in the dogmatic, subjective, uncritical manner of many Hindu and other religious believers. Just the opposite: He is extremely critical of much of traditional Hinduism as expressing violent and untruthful teachings and practices upholding hierarchical class and caste exploitation, patriarchal oppression of women, oppression of *dalits* ("untouchables", "outcastes"), oppression of lepers and other shunned and persecuted peoples, supporting ethnic and religious divisions and conflicts, lack of hygiene, and more. Similarly, he appreciates but is critical of other religious cultures, as expressed, strikingly, in his claim that dominant institutionalized Christianity and most Christians do not understand or practice the essential Christian truth, and they have no right to impose their violent untruthful Christianity on Hindus and other non-Christians.

The key to understanding Gandhi's philosophical approach to religious culture, violence, nonviolence, war, and peace is found in his organic and holistic methodology, interpretive framework, ethical and philosophical and spiritual perspective emphasizing the essential unity and interconnectedness of truth and reality. In such an organic holistic interpretation, we could start with any of the key concepts and principles and then show how they are integrally, relationally, and structurally interconnected with all other essential concepts and principles.

Thus, in formulating key Gandhian insights in this section, we could start with Gandhi's view of true religious culture and then analyze how it is interconnected and unified in complex dynamic ways with *satya* (truth, what is real), *ahimsa* (nonviolence, love), *satyagraha* (firmness on truth), *swaraj* (self-rule, freedom), *sarvodaya* (well-being, uplifting of all), *swadeshi* (self-sufficiency using one's own local and national goods), *aparigraha* (nonpossessiveness), "the constructive program" ("constructive work"), and more. As integrally interconnected, religious culture is caused and conditioned by the other essential values, concepts, and principles, and it in turn causes and conditions them in an ongoing, open-ended, contextually significant process of truth and untruth, nonviolence and violence, peace and war, etc.

Gandhi most often affirms that his two major, foundational, constituting, essential concepts, principles, and ideals are *satya* (truth) and *ahimsa* (nonviolence). That is why we cannot understand his views on religious culture, nonviolence, and peace without understanding his underlying methodological, ethical, and ontological interpretive framework of *satya* and *ahimsa* and their dynamic structural interconnectedness.

Presented here in a very brief and inadequate way, one can grasp Gandhi's focus on the Sanskrit meaning of *sat* (what really exists, is real, is unchangeable and eternal, etc.). For Gandhi, *satya* expresses what is true, real, being; not some abstract detached metaphysical essence, but rather the truth-force (religious-force, soul-force, moral-force, the strongest force) that expresses how what unifies us with reality is more essential than what divides and separates us. This most power truth-force brings us together in harmonious, unifying, interconnected, truthful relations.

Similarly, we may briefly and inadequately note Gandhi's focus on *ahimsa*, the concept, relational value, and structural principle for which Gandhi is best known and is most influential. Gandhi's epistemological, moral, social, economic, political, religious, and ontological perspective is informed by the Sanskrit *a-himsa* (no-harm, no-injury, usually translated into English as nonviolence). Unlike many philosophical and religious views, *ahimsa* is not some abstract, eternal, metaphysical essence. Instead, for Gandhi, *ahimsa* is a dynamic nonviolent force (love-force, moral-force, truth-force, the strongest force). *Ahimsa* as this most powerful nonviolent force organically and holistically brings us together in harmonious, unifying, interconnected, moral, loving, compassionate, selfless, purified, meaningfully developed and truthful relations.

Ahimsa and *satya* are integrally related. Most often, Gandhi submits that nonviolence is the means, and truth is the end. Although it is not always clear to us in the short term, we cannot use violent means to realize the ends of truth and reality. Nevertheless, in other

passages, Gandhi reverses this relation. Truth is also the means, and nonviolence is the end. We cannot use untruthful means to realize the ends of nonviolence, love, and peace. In still other striking passages, Gandhi insightfully maintains that *ahimsa* and *satya* are like two sides of the same coin. They express our two limited human approaches, two limited perspectives, two limited names and classifications of the one, true, pure, spiritual, ultimate reality.[10]

How does this relate to religious culture, nonviolence, and peace? On the first and most evident level of Gandhi's insightful formulations, we repeatedly find his causal, conditioned, means-ends interpretations. Using immoral, violent, untruthful means—overtly, physically, and on the more complex multidimensional and structural levels of linguistic, psychological, economic, political, religious, cultural, and other experiences and expressions—will cause and condition immoral, violent, untruthful ends. We then become entrapped in endless vicious means-ends cycles of hatred, greed, exploitation, oppression, alienation, suffering, violence, war, and conflict. Gandhi's philosophical, ethical, religious, contextually engaged project is to raise awareness of and mobilize action-oriented resistance to the violent and untruthful means-ends causes and conditions. Thus, Gandhi's positive constructive means-ends vision is to break and transform the vicious cycles and replace them with new means-ends causal conditions and new cycles of hope, love, compassion, caring, kindness, ego-transcending selfless service, freedom from possessiveness and the need to dominate, real equality, decentralized democratic empowerment, nonviolence, peace, and developed meaningful and sustainable living.

What is usually not recognized is Gandhi's more radical ontological (metaphysical, theological) move in which he boldly claims that religious cultures that promote violence and war disregard, reject, violate, and contradict the nature of absolute, spiritual, ultimate reality. All such dominant, violent, war-waging, religious cultures always embrace a primary, primordial, foundational, essential, dichotomizing, self-other, us-other ontological classification: The other (religiously, individually, socially, culturally, politically, sexually, racially, nationally, etc.) is essentially and ontologically other. The ontologically dichotomized other is then usually regarded by the religious culture as inferior, impure, backward, uncivilized, irrational, immoral, violent, threatening, and evil. This violates Gandhi's ontological view of truth, nonviolence, and religious culture that maintains the essential unity and interconnectedness of all human beings and of ultimate reality.

By way of radical ontological contrast, involving Gandhi's radical ontological paradigm shift. Gandhi maintains that true religious culture that promotes nonviolence and peace not only leads to better means-ends causal results. Such true religious culture is ontologically grounded. It is consistent with and enables us to experience and develop our realization of ultimate reality. Gandhi's ontological perspective upholds the view that what unites me (my religion, culture, social and economic and political group, gender, race, nation, etc.) with the other is more essential than what divides us. This is an essential unity with tolerance and respect for perspectival contextualized differences. In short, only when our true religious culture is ontologically grounded in promoting the structural unity and interconnectedness of nonviolence and peace are we able to experience, relate, and act in ways that reflect the deepest insights into the nature of the ultimate truth and reality and to most develop our moral, religious, and spiritual capacity at the highest level of self-realization.

What this means, as different from some dominant modern nonreligious narratives that promote and justify tolerance, pluralism, diversity, and trying to avoid violence, conflict, and war, is that Gandhi here provides a specifically religious perspective and justification. Based on his radical ontological paradigm with its ontological perspectival shift, Gandhi maintains that religious believers with their religious cultures must oppose violence and war and support nonviolence and peace as expressing the religious views of truth and reality.

As central to this insightful Gandhian approach to violence, nonviolence, war, and peace, I shall refer only very briefly to Gandhi's complex, dynamic, relational, dialec-

tical understanding of the key absolute-relative distinction. In many writings, Gandhi maintains his experience of, faith in, and belief regarding Absolute Truth and Reality including the absolute perfect ideal Religion (Ethics, Nonviolence, Civilization, Culture, Economics, Politics, *Swaraj*, *Satyagraha*, etc.). Focusing only on these bold passages, many interpreters have regarded Gandhi as an inflexible uncompromising absolutist, who is extolled and at times deified by admirers and devotees as offering us the perfect blueprint of and approach to truth and ultimate reality and who is critiqued and rejected by critics as offering us absolutes that are irrelevant and are obstacles to finding solutions in the contemporary world.

What such admirers and critics often ignore is Gandhi's many writings in which he acknowledges that even he at most has momentary imperfect experiential "glimpses" of Truth, Nonviolence, Ethics, Religion, etc. Additionally, in the overwhelming majority of his writings on the absolute and the relative, Gandhi focuses on our human existential situatedness, our human mode of being in the world, as relative, contextualized, imperfect, spatial, temporal, historical, social, linguistic, psychological, economic, political, cultural, religious beings and how to bring the absolute into dynamic, open-ended relations with our world of relative truth, nonviolence, morality, and religious culture. Thus, for Gandhi, the absolute religious ideals need not be negative forces that are escapist, illusory, untruthful, and ideologically oppressive, violent, and reactionary. Instead, they can serve as experientially based and imaginatively constructed ideals that give us hope, resistance, and a radical paradigm shift with the vision that a far better religious culture of greater nonviolence and peace is possible. In short, Gandhi's focus in the absolute-relative relational and structural dynamic is on how we can move from one relative truth to greater relative truth, from one relative religious culture to greater religious culture, closer to the absolute ideals, minimizing violence and war and maximizing nonviolence and peace as much as is humanly possible.

We shall conclude this formulation of some of Mahatma Gandhi's insights on religion, nonviolence, and peace by noting Gandhi's remarkable hermeneutical moves that make his approach and interpretations far more engaging, challenging, relevant, and insightful. One can easily grant that Gandhi has hundreds of writings that if taken at face value or literally seem embarrassingly naïve, blatantly irrational, completely unscientific, easily refuted by empirical and historical research, and incapable of any factual or objective process of intersubjective verification. Probably best known are Gandhi's many unqualified claims in *Hind Swaraj* that are often cited by anti-Gandhian critics and, in my experiences, are often ignored by critically thinking Gandhi admirers who instead focus on his other writings.[11]

The best illustration of Gandhi's remarkable hermeneutical moves can be seen in his approach to and interpretation of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, his favorite scripture and his daily guide to truthful living, morality, nonviolence, and ultimate reality.[12] Remarkably, Gandhi, upholding his philosophy of *ahimsa*, claims that the Gita is a Gospel of Nonviolence! How is that possible? After all, the textual setting for the Gita is the battlefield, and the two sides are about to engage in violent warfare in which many will die. Lord Krishna as charioteer instructs Arjuna the warrior leader to overcome his doubts about killing and to fulfill his caste duties with renunciation of attachment to results. Arjuna is instructed to act on his self-knowledge that he is a warrior, skilled in killing, that it is his duty to fight, and that the mind–body self-human that may perish is not the real spiritual Soul/Self.

For two thousand years and continuing during Gandhi's lifetime, it rarely if ever occurs to the famous philosophical and religious Hindu interpreters of the Gita or the many millions of Hindu devotees who embrace the Gita as their authoritative scripture that the Gita is a gospel of nonviolence. Gandhi's bizarre interpretation would seem to be a hermeneutical disaster. At the very least, Gandhi's nonviolent interpretation seems to be more of an expression of his personal idiosyncrasies, his moral and theoretical and practical values, his priorities, and not consistent with what the Gita expresses.

In justifying his interpretation of the Gita, as key to his interpretation of religious culture, nonviolence, and peace, Gandhi offers two hermeneutical moves.[13] First, as is often

recognized, Gandhi tells us that we cannot take the Gita literally, at face value, as factually describing and endorsing the battlefield, war, killing, etc. That would lead to disastrous results. Instead, Gandhi instructs us to read and interpret the Gita, with its profound moral and spiritual values and teachings, symbolically, allegorically, and in other nonliteral ways. For example, with no ego attachment to results, our life may be viewed as a battlefield in which it is our duty to fight, destroy, and kill the hatred, greed, possessiveness, immorality, violence, and untruth within all of us and within all religious cultures.

Second, what is almost never recognized by critics and even by admirers is Gandhi's radical hermeneutical move that informs his approach to the Gita and to all other major scriptures and texts. Gandhi repeatedly grants that the Gita's inspired authors, spiritual leaders, political leaders, commentators, and devotees did not regard their scripture as a gospel of nonviolence. As contextually situated, they expressed many profound experiential insights through language, relational values, teachings, and practices that were often literally, overtly, relationally, multidimensionally, and structurally violent. Nevertheless, the Bhagavad-Gita and all other scriptures may be read, interpreted, and appropriated by us, we who are also limited situated human beings, in complex, dynamic, open-ended ways. This was true for the creators and promoters of the Gita over the centuries and is true for us today. In short, we today are capable of reading, rereading, interpreting, reinterpreting, appropriating, and reappropriating the Gita as a gospel of nonviolence for us and for the contemporary world. Gandhi maintains that we can and must do that because that is the most contextually significant, urgently needed, and morally, culturally, socially, spiritually, economically, politically, and environmentally developed interpretation of the Gita for us today. That interpretation of the Gita as a gospel of nonviolence allows us to activate our human potential for realizing true religious culture, free from violence and war, and embracing nonviolence and peace.

7. Concluding Reflections

In this essay on issues regarding religion, war, and peace, we have presented analysis of how religious culture has been an overwhelmingly negative force expressing and promoting violence, hatred, divisiveness, intolerance, war, oppression, domination, and injustice for thousands of years and continuing today. Our formulation of the universal structural paradigm of the sacred and the profane allows us to understand how religious culture can accommodate and give rise to religion as such a negative force inconsistent with furthering nonviolence and peace.

We have also presented analysis of how religious culture need not be such a negative force, and how various religious values, teachings, and practices can resist and attempt to transform religious and nonreligious violence and war. Our formulation of the universal structural paradigm of the sacred and the profane allows us to understand how religious culture can accommodate and give rise to religion as a more positive force expressing and promoting nonviolence, love, compassion, unity and interconnectedness, tolerance and mutual respect, peace, equality, justice, and sustainability. Our extended consideration of some of Mahatma Gandhi's insights suggests ways that religious culture can be a positive force.

It is extremely important to reflect on how and why dominant religious cultures and their dominant religious narratives are such a negative force in our contemporary world regarding issues of war and peace. It is also extremely important to reflect on how the less dominant religious cultures and their narratives can resist and change this so that they become stronger positive forces today regarding issues of war and peace.

In attempting to understand these very complex questions and formulating our most adequate answers, we need to contextualize our formulations and responses. Contextualized religious culture in the contemporary world and in the future is not absolutely dichotomized as essentially or necessarily violent or nonviolent, warlike or peaceful, hateful and cruel or loving and compassionate, divisive and intolerant or unifying and mutually

respectful, and so forth. If that is the case, why is religious culture today such an overwhelmingly negative force?

To understand this, we need to contextualize our approaches and interpretations of religious and nonreligious narratives, paradigms, phenomena, values, relations, structures, and practices as they are interconnected with dominant and secondary economic, social, political, cultural, psychological, linguistic, educational, and environmental variables, forces, relations, and structures in our lives and in the contemporary world. In understanding religious culture as such a negative force, we must include the following and more.

We live in a corporate, capitalist, and globalized multidimensional and systemically structured world in which ego-driven greed and attachments are promoted and maximizing profits and the expansion and domination of capital is more powerful than meeting the needs of disadvantaged and marginalized people and the well-being of all; in which the alienation, dehumanization, and anger of the dominated classes, castes, and others is exploited by diversionary demagogues and by the economic, political, and religious institutionalized powerful; in which the short-term imperatives and objectives of the dominant military-industrial complex—expanded as the dominant interconnected military-industrial-consumerist-fossil fuel-nuclear-private war contracting-media-educational, etc. complex—increasingly shape and dominate all areas of life; in which the dominant modern criteria are object-centric, thing-centric, objectified and fetishized and dehumanized, amoral and immoral, violent, oppressive, exploitive, inequitable, and unsustainable with their quantifying assessments of gross domestic product, individual and national and global development, wealth, success, and happiness. Only when we address these and related dominant contextualized forces in our contemporary world can we understand why dominant religious culture is expressed as such a negative force.

It is also important to reflect on how the abovementioned relations between these dominant and secondary contextualized forces and dominant and secondary religious cultures are dynamic, open-ended, complex, contradictory, and dialectically structured and related. Under different contextualized situations, the dominant-secondary relations can be transformed and even reversed. Not only are dominant and subordinate religious cultures shaped by the dominant economic, political, social, and other forces, but religious cultures can become the dominant forces, negatively and positively, causing, conditioning, and justifying other forces in our lives and in the world. For example, many jihadists and other religious warriors and saints and martyrs are willing to die because of their religious culture. Many white supremacists, xenophobic nationalists, patriarchal misogynists, hierarchical caste and ethnic proponents, and even some power elite capitalists and militarists claim that their perspectives are based on their religious faiths, narratives, and cultures.

This open-ended, dynamic, dialectical relation also holds true between the dominant and the less powerful religious cultures in our contemporary world. In much of this essay, we have emphasized dominant religious culture as a negative force promoting and justifying so much violence, conflict, war, divisiveness, and intolerance. Nevertheless, under different contextualized situations, the dominant-secondary relations between religious cultures can be reversed. Contextualized positive religious culture can become the strongest religious force in promoting and justifying a religious paradigm and narrative of nonviolent resistance and transformation, inner and outer peace, love, compassion, kindness, ethical living, multidimensional tolerance and mutual respect, selfless service, social justice, equality, the uplift and well-being of all, and organically interconnected sustainable living enabling human and planetary development and flourishing.

The challenge today for religious and nonreligious cultures, including those that embrace some of Gandhi's insights and other religious and nonreligious insights regarding violence and war, is to envision a radically and qualitatively different paradigm shift, with contextually significant perspectives, values, theoretical constructions, and action-oriented engaged transformative practices that are meaningful, offer hope, and inspire us with alternative nonviolent and peace ways of living. Central to the spirit of this essay has been my conviction that we have the necessary experiences, insights, values, knowledge,

and human and other resources to engage cooperatively in desperately needed, more value-informed, meaningful, more developed levels of existence in the world, including religious cultures promoting nonviolent and peace.

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Notes

1 My major source for the largely undocumented claims about Gandhi's views on violence, nonviolence, war, peace, and religion in this essay is *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (Gandhi 1958–1991). In addition to many volumes in *The Collected* Works, I have used several excellent anthologies of Gandhi's writings, including *The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi* (Iyer 1986–1987) and *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi* (Prabhu and Rao 1967). Documentation of Gandhi's writings is provided in *Gandhi after 9/11: Creative Nonviolence and Sustainability* (Allen 2019) and in other publications. With regard to later sections in this essay, see Chapter 6 "Gandhi's Philosophy: Truth and Nonviolence", (Allen 2011, pp. 105–30) and Chapter 7 "Modern Civilization, Religion and a New Paradigm", (Allen 2011, pp. 131–54), in *Mahatma Gandhi* (2011).

2 For example, we may cite the famous proclamation by the Biblical Prophet Isaiah: "They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore" (Isaiah 2:4).

3 Of Martin Luther King, Jr's many writings on this, the best source is his *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (King 1968), especially King's chapter "Pilgrimage to Nonviolence".

4 "Religion and Violence in the Contemporary World: Is religion more of the problem or the solution?" in Gligor and Sabbarwal (2011, pp. 14–41).

5 The following phenomenological structural model of the sacred and the profane is most informed by my understanding of Mircea Eliade's contributions to the history and the phenomenology of religion. I interacted with and got to know Eliade very well starting in 1966 and especially in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s and early 1980s. The controversial Eliade was often characterized as the world's leading interpreter of religious experience, symbolism, and myth. In terms of the following formulations, I describe, interpret, document, and evaluate Eliade scholarly contributions in *Structure and Creativity in Religions: Hermeneutics in Mircea Eliade's Phenomenology and New Directions* (Allen 1978) and in *Myth and Religion in Mircea Eliade* (Allen [1998] 2002).

6 Mircea Eliade's phenomenological model of the sacred and the profane is expressed throughout his scholarly books and other writings, his journals and autobiographical volumes, and his literary publications. I most rely on his formulations in Eliade (1954, 1961, [1949] 1963).

7 It may be helpful to clarify a common misunderstanding regarding "the profane" as expressed throughout the dialectic of the sacred and the profane. From the religious perspective, the profane has a negative meaning and is evaluated negatively since it expresses a human mode of being that ignores or rejects the sacred. Nevertheless, such terms as the Devil and Satan, while evaluated negatively, are sacred and not profane. One finds such terms throughout diverse religious cultures as expressing Supernatural Evil, transcending and qualitatively different form our normal, human, spatial, temporal, historical, limited, profane evil.

8 For example, the influential Hindu philosopher Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan invited Gandhi to contribute an essay for the edited book *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*. Radhakrishnan sent Gandhi three questions: What is your religion? How are you led to it? What is its bearing on your social life? In his one-page "essay", Gandhi sent three brief responses: His religion is Hinduism that includes the best of all religions; he is led to his religion through Truth and Nonviolence and in which Truth is God and other expressions of the truth in all of us; his religion bears on his daily social life, dedication to social service, losing oneself in service to all life, recognizing that all is one. See (Radhakrishnan and Muirhead [1936] 1952, revised edition). Gandhi's letter of 23 January 1935 to Radhakrishnan is published in (Gandhi 1958–1991, vol. 60, pp. 106–7).

9 For example, see Gandhi's 8 December 1931 formulations on this in (Gandhi 1958–1991, vol. 48, p. 404). For a compilation of Gandhi's many writings on this topic, see (Gandhi 1955). In *An Autobiography or the Story of My Experiments with Truth* (Gandhi 1940, p. 505), Gandhi writes: "My uniform experience has convinced me that there is no other God than Truth". For Gandhi's strongest formulation on the integral relationship of nonviolence and truth, as more than "twins" expressing two sides of the same coin, but as inseparable and embedded in each other, as two expressions of the one reality, see (Gandhi 1947) and then published in (Gandhi 1958–1991, vol. 88, p. 283).

10 See the previous note for citations from Gandhi's writings on this significant moral, spiritual, philosophical, epistemological, social, economic, political, cultural, ontological claim.

11 See (Gandhi 1997, edited by Parel). Of the numerous examples in *Hind Swaraj* in which Gandhi's assertions, if taken literally, factually, historically, and at face value, seem bizarre and irrational, we may simply note the following. "Modern Civilization" ("Western Civilization") is equated with Satan and the God of War, whereas "Ancient Civilization" ("Indian Civilization") is equated with the Kingdom of God and the God of Love. Traditional Indian peasants enjoy *swaraj* (freedom, independence), use

soul-force, not brute force, are courageous and virtuous, have never been subdued by the sword, and know that nonviolent *satyagraha* is the only Indian way to true *swaraj*. See (Gandhi 1997, pp. 5–8, 66–71). In several of my publications, I attempt to analyze how many of Gandhi's formulations can be contextualized and interpreted to express deeper, complex, nonliteral, symbolic, mythic, political, economic, religious, and cultural meanings. In later writings, Gandhi sometimes revises his formulations in more nuanced and more adequate ways. Nevertheless, in our rereading, reinterpretation, and reappropriation of Gandhi, we must reject some of his views as not contributing to the most developed perspectives on religious culture, nonviolence, and peace for the contemporary world.

[12] Gandhi's translations and commentaries on the *Bhagavad-Gita* can be found in various pamphlets and in Gandhi (1958–1991, especially vol. 32, "Discourses on the Gita", pp. 94–376; and vol. 41, "*Anasaktiyoga*", published in English with the title *The Gita according to Gandhi*, pp. 90–133).

[13] I formulate Gandhi's interpretations of the Bhagavad-Gita and these two remarkable hermeneutical moves in considerable detail and with extensive documentation in "How Can Gandhi Interpret His Favorite Bhagavad-Gita as a Gospel of Nonviolence?" in Allen (2019, pp. 60–85).

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Article

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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Article

A Catholic Pope and a Rawlsian Statesman: War and Peace through the Lens of Non-Public and Public Reason

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Abstract: A Catholic pope and a Rawlsian statesman respectively represent religious and political leaders who confront the reality of war and face the challenge of responding to it. A political decision during conflict based exclusively on religious or secular justifications will be unconvincing in a contemporary plural public space. John Rawls's solution to this dilemma was to offer justifications based on public reason grounded on political values and not on religious or secular values that support non-public reason. However, restraining religious arguments can ignite passionate religious objections when the decisions of government contradict the demands of their religious values. Hence, this paper argues against an exclusive position and highlights the importance of a nuanced approach that engages religious and political perspectives. The arguments are presented by engaging both Catholic and Rawlsian responses to war by focusing on just war theory and the role of a statesman.

Keywords: John Rawls; Catholic Church; public reason; just war theory; statesman; political liberalism; war; peace; non-public reason; pacifism

1. Introduction

The twenty-first century is witness to many instances of conflict, each of which awakens the world to the fragility and unpredictability of international relations. According to John Rawls, "the crucial fact" concerning democratic societies is that there is "no cause" for them to wage war against each other and, hence, "peace reigns among them" (Rawls 1999c, p. 8). On the other hand, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* underlines the obligation of citizens and governments "to work for the avoidance of war" (Pope John Paul II 1994, #2308). However, the omnipresent reality of war in the contemporary context leads us to question the optimism of "perpetual peace" and the "end of history". Furthermore, the situation demands engaging with diverse perspectives in confronting the reality of war. In this article, I engage Rawls's and the Catholic Church's perspectives on war.

In contemporary times, the pope is confined to spiritual affairs, whereas the temporal political realm is where decisions are made in times of conflict. Hence, it is insightful to take into account the views of an influential political philosopher who can respond to the pluralism of religious and secular doctrines in contemporary public space. I see Rawls as an ideal candidate because he responds to the reality of the plural public space in his *Political Liberalism* (Rawls 1996) and confronts the reality of war in *The Law of Peoples* (Rawls 1999c). Furthermore, in the latter text, he engages the Catholic just war approach.

A Catholic pope[1] and a Rawlsian statesman[2] embody Catholic non-public reason and Rawls's public reason, respectively. For Rawls, non-public or domestic reason consists of non-shareable reasons such as those of universities, families, and churches. The reasons of the Catholic Church belong to non-public reason because they have their basis in Catholic thought, which other religious and secular citizens may not accept. Conversely, public reason consists of reasons that are not grounded in any religious or secular doctrines and are shareable when deliberating matters pertaining to the public political forum (Rawls 1996, pp. 212–22). By focusing on Catholic non-public reason and Rawls's

public or political liberal approach, I will compare and evaluate their response to war by concentrating on just war theory and the role of a statesman.

I begin by briefly sketching the history of the Catholic Church's response to conflict. I then outline Rawls's approach to the problem of war, focusing on the role of a statesman and the use of public reason. Subsequently, I compare the Rawlsian and Catholic responses to war exploring overlaps and divergence. Finally, I evaluate the roles of a statesman and a pope towards responding to the question of war, indicating the importance of going beyond binaries and stressing the need for active engagement in the quest to attain peace.

2. The Catholic Church's Response to Conflict

The just war theory predominates the Catholic tradition in responding to conflict situations. However, the spirit of non-violence and the movements oriented towards peace also existed parallelly. Notwithstanding the complexities, Roland Bainton points to three significant attitudes of Christianity towards conflict: pacifism, just war, and the Crusades (Bainton 2008, p. 14). These attitudes arise from attempts to maintain equilibrium by balancing the ideal of Jesus' call to ensure peace and practice love, and the reality of providing order among imperfect humanity (Justenhoven and Barbieri 2012, p. 1). Even though it is impossible to accurately state the periods in which these attitudes dominated, a glance through history reveals the general trends.

Until the fourth century, the Early Church and Church Fathers, through their practice and preaching, underlined the importance of non-violence. The overarching motive that guided them was the expectation of a "kingdom of peace", which would be established with the second coming of Jesus Christ (Justenhoven 2021, p. 43). The Church Fathers, especially, echoed this spirit of non-violence. However, the historical evidence indicating the presence of Christian soldiers leads us to question the extent of pacificism in practice. Modern scholarship critiques the uncritical acceptance of a predominant pacifist tradition until the fourth century (Shean 2010; Iosif 2013). For instance, John F. Shean observes that "the statements of individual ecclesiastical writers are not reliable indicators of the attitudes of mainstream Christians" (Shean 2010, p. 11). The contested view of the prominence of pacifism in the Early Church was followed by the Christian adaptation of just war theory, furthering the complex relationship between war and peace.

The transition of the Church from the private sphere to the public sphere required sophisticated responses to the question of war. The Church's transition to the public sphere began with the legal recognition of Christianity in 313 CE and culminated in official acceptance of Christianity as the state religion in 380 CE. Together with these recognitions came the responsibility of securing the life, property, and borders of the empire. Consequently, waging war was inevitable. This is the broad context within which Augustine adapted the just war theory in Roman thought.

The Christian adaptation of just war theory from the fourth century was not intended to glorify war but was oriented toward peace. Augustine and Aquinas adapted and developed Cicero's rudimentary idea of just war. They both maintained Cicero's understanding of just war as oriented towards peace. However, Augustine and Aquinas presented a contrasting basis for just war. While Augustine treated "war as an expression of 'loving' punishment of the offending party", Aquinas considered war "as justified defense of the common good" (Cahill 2015, p. 3). Augustine and Aquinas outline three criteria for a war to be just, namely: just cause, legitimate authority, and right intention.[3]

The Crusades are another defining moment in the Christian response to conflict. Even though the term "crusade" was coined in the fifteenth century, one can trace the development of the idea of crusades beginning in the eleventh century and culminating in the thirteenth century (Cahill 2019a, p. 214). According to Beatrice Heuser, the Crusades combined the fighting spirit of Germanic tribes and Augustine's idea of just war (Heuser 2010, p. 47). The Crusades modified and conceived Augustine's idea of just war from a totally different outlook. This changed view summoned violence residing in the peripheries to the centre stage of Christianity and was treated as a core of the Christian calling (Cahill 2019a, p. 220).

Crusades were advocated by popes and were undertaken with various goals and religious motives, such as expelling the Turks from the Holy Land and reconquering the territories once ruled by Christian rulers. Cahill states, "the Crusades are unparalleled as the nadir of Christian advocacy of violence and bloodshed" (Cahill 2019a, p. 213). Following the Reformation in the sixteenth century, more violent wars followed, such as the Eighty Years' War (1568–1648) between the Protestant Netherlands and Catholic Spain. The treaties signed under the umbrella term "Peace of Westphalia" were one of the important steps towards settling boundaries and securing peace in Europe.

The history of the Catholic Church cannot be reduced to the violence associated with just war theory and crusades. There were also movements and individuals within the Church upholding the commitment to peace. "The Peace of God" and "the Truce of God" were two medieval peace movements oriented towards protecting certain groups of people from violence, such as women and peasants, and setting aside certain violence-free days, such as advent and lent (Musto 1986, pp. 71–75). Other notable individuals and movements include Peter Damien, Francis of Assisi, Dorothy Day's Catholic Worker Movement, and Pax Christi International. Cahill observes that "pacifism has been a minority witness in Christian tradition and theology" (Cahill 2015, p. 3) and "pacifist authors remain a clear minority" (Cahill 2019b, p. 171). However, the statement of The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (1993) entitled, "The Harvest of Justice is Sown in Peace", unequivocally observes that the non-violent and just war approach traditions in the Catholic Church are oriented towards "a common goal: to diminish violence in this world".

The teachings of the modern popes increasingly underline the importance of peace. Gregory M. Reichberg states that in "the pronouncements of the contemporary popes, discourse on peace has largely eclipsed the related discourse on the just war" (Reichberg 2012, p. 1082). The encyclicals such as *Quadragesimo Anno*, *Mater et Magistra*, *Pacem in Terris*, *Populorum Progressio,* and *Fratelli Tutti* are cases in point. Cahill observes another notable change, where the emphasis is on "international cooperation for peace to a far greater degree than the right to go to war" (Cahill 2019a, p. 313). It is in this same spirit that the Second Vatican Council document, *Gaudium et Spes,* calls for "firm honest agreements about world peace" so that humanity can save themselves from "the dread peace of death" resulting from conflicts (Flannery 1988, #82). Together with many other arguments, *Fratelli Tutti* warns of the "broad interpretations" diluting the legitimate options for military actions mentioned in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.[4] This makes it impossible to call a war a just war and therefore states, "never again war!" (Pope Francis 2020, #258) Christian Nikolaus Braun argues that the popes continue to operate within the just war framework, but we perceive a change because they "forcefully stress the tools of nonviolence *within* the just war framework" (Braun 2018, p. 64). However, the role of the pope or the Church is limited in the present state of affairs.

3. Rawls's Statesman and Public Reason

Rawls's most articulated response to the question of war is presented in the *Law of Peoples*.[5] By "Law of Peoples" Rawls means a political conception of justice applicable at the international level (Rawls 1999c, p. 3). He states, "the Law of Peoples is developed within political liberalism and is an extension of a liberal conception of justice for a domestic regime to a Society of Peoples" (Rawls 1999c, p. 1).[6] Given "the highly nonideal conditions of our world", Rawls's movement from the domestic to the international realm necessitates a response to the issue of war (Rawls 1999c, p. 9).

A statesman is an ideal decision-maker in Rawls's *The Law of Peoples*. A statesman is not an official government position but an ideal that reflects a virtuous and truthful character. Political authorities such as presidents and prime ministers can be called statesmen when they make the right discernment, display ideal leadership skills, and act with strength, wisdom, and courage during critical moments such as war. During a war, the statesmen act selflessly, without the motive of revenge, and with the ultimate aim of securing peace. He sums up the ideal of a statesman in comparison to a politician. While a politician is

concerned only about the next election, the statesman looks forward to the consequence of his or her action on the next generation. Examples of statesmen include George Washington and Abraham Lincoln (Rawls 1999c, pp. 97–98). Notably, Rawls treats the statesman as a "central figure" concerning matters related to war (Rawls 1999c, p. 105).

However, deliberations on the question of war and the decision-making arguments of statesmen have to be expressed by public reason. This means that statesmen must rely on political values and cannot base their arguments on religious or secular reasons. A brief sketch of the basics of Rawls's political liberal approach will clarify his insistence on the necessity of using public reason.

Given the reality of a plural public space in contemporary times, the basis of justification in political matters requires careful attention. Neither religious doctrines, such as those of the Catholic Church, nor secular doctrines, such as those of liberalism, could be the grounds for justification. Rawls identifies this problem in *Political Liberalism* and calls it the "fact of reasonable pluralism". This reasonable pluralism is not an upshot of a pluralism of narrow points of view. Instead, it is "the inevitable outcome of free human reason" (Rawls 1996, p. 37). This was one of the major reasons for Rawls's "political turn" (Weithman 2010, pp. 3–4) from his arguments in *A Theory of Justice*. In this book, Rawls expected that his political conception of justice, justice as fairness, would be affirmed by everyone in the society for the same reasons. However, Rawls concluded that the presence of a plurality of reasonable religious and secular comprehensive doctrines would "contradict" his expectations in *A Theory of Justice* (Rawls 1999b, p. 179).

Rawls casts his theory in the political framework of *Political Liberalism* where public reason plays an important role. Public justification of coercive laws in a society is done using the idea of public reason instead of "nonpublic reasons" (Rawls 1996, pp. 220–22) such as religious or secular reasons. The idea of public reason is connected to "the criterion of reciprocity". According to this criterion, the use of political power can be justified only if we offer public reasons that "may reasonably be accepted by other citizens" (Rawls 1996, xlvi). The use of public reason is limited to the "public political forum" when deliberating on "constitutional essential and matters of basic justice" (Rawls 1996, pp. 227–30). Public reason is a "political value" (Rawls 2011, pp. 91–92) that all citizens can accept as reasonable.

A political conception of justice gives the content of public reason. A political conception of justice spells out and prioritises "certain basic rights, liberties and opportunities" and ensures that citizens have the means to use them. It also consists of guidelines of inquiry indicating "the principles of reasoning and rules of evidence" that help citizens to choose suitable laws and policies (Rawls 1996, pp. 223–24). Rawls does not restrict himself to "justice as fairness"[7] as "*the*" political conception of justice. Instead, he opens up the possibility of diverse formulations of a political conception of justice. He states, "the view I have called 'justice as fairness' is one example of a liberal political conception" (Rawls 1996, p. 226). A political conception of justice can act as a "module" that "fits into and [is] supported by" reasons from secular and religious comprehensive doctrines (Rawls 1996, pp. 144–45). This "overlapping consensus" is possible because a political conception of justice does not have controversial content based on philosophic or religious doctrines but is "expressed in terms of certain fundamental ideas[8] seen as implicit in the public political culture of a democratic society" (Rawls 1996, p. 13). Rawls does not expect unanimity after the deliberations using public reason. There could be equally reasonable solutions offered during deliberations. The advantage is that the final outcome would be legitimate (Rawls 1999b, p. 169). However, there are many criticisms against Rawls's public reason approach. One of them is from the perspective of religion,[9] which we will explore in the next section focusing on statesmen and Rawls's response to this conflict in *Law of Peoples*.

4. Comparing Rawls's and Catholic Responses to War

Rawls compares Christian just war theory with the Law of Peoples and outlines the intersections and disjunctions between both approaches. Both the Christian theory and the

Law of Peoples dovetail on attaining universal peace (Rawls 1999c, p. 103). However, they are not exclusively pacifist. As we have seen, the Catholic Church's initiatives on peace operate within the framework of just war theory. According to Rawls, the total rejection of war as "an unworldly view [is] bound to remain a sectarian doctrine" (Rawls 1999a, p. 335). Rawls and the Church agree on waging war in self-defence when human rights are at stake. Rawls states that war "is justified only in self-defense, or in grave case of intervention to protect human rights" (Rawls 1999c, p. 79). Human rights, for Rawls, consist of the right to life, liberty, property, and equality (Rawls 1999c, p. 65). However, Rawls outrightly rejects declaring war to further the selfish rational interests of a state.

Rawls's statesman makes the decisions on declaring war and on conduct during the war. The outcome of these decision-making processes could differ from the point of view of the Catholic Church, especially regarding the basis and conduct of the war. There are two major points of divergence between Rawls' statesman and the Christian doctrine of just war. First, the doctrine of just war is based on natural law. From a Catholic perspective, natural law is the foundation of fundamental rights and duties. It is above all moral rules and civil laws because, through it, human beings created in God's image participate in God's wisdom and goodness (Pope John Paul II 1994, #1978–79). However, Rawls's views on just war are based on a political conception. He states, "the Law of Peoples falls within the domain of the political as a political conception" (Rawls 1999c, p. 104).

The second point of divergence is on the question of a supreme emergency exception. Even though Rawls and the Christian doctrine of just war theory are against the direct attack against civilians, the point of contention has to do with instances of supreme emergency exception. This exception allows direct attacks on civilians in particular special cases. For instance, Rawls justifies Britain's bombing of German cities during World War II because it was the only way to fight and weaken the violent Nazis. However, the US fire-bombing of Japanese cities in the spring of 1945, and the use of atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki are unjustified. This was a failure of statesmanship to understand that the situation did not demand such strong action but required exploring the possibility of negotiations (Rawls 1999c, pp. 98–101). The Catholic Church's doctrine of double-effect rejects supreme emergency exceptions because the death of civilians can only be justified if it results from unintended or indirect consequences during a military operation. Rawls observes that this doctrine rests on the divine command never to kill the innocent, so a statesman cannot accept it as a ground for basing decisions (Rawls 1999c, 104.5). In short, a statesman can only accept public reasons.

5. Evaluating the Roles of a Statesman and a Pope

A statesman's political decision based on public reason is politically legitimate and can be justified to a plural populace. However, the extent to which religious arguments can contribute to the decision-making process is limited. This limited access to religious arguments, such as the Church's understanding of the just war theory, evokes reactions from critics such as Eberle. He refers to the "Principle of Religious Insufficiency" to indicate the "claim that religious reasons cannot decisively justify state coercion in a liberal polity" (Eberle 2015, p. 32). Taking just war theory as an example, he argues that even though there is a presumption against war in the just war tradition, this can be overcome if the particular situation satisfies certain conditions and certain restrictions are honoured. Similarly, to overcome the presumption against state coercion, certain restrictions apply to all (and not particular) instances and reasons. One prominent restriction among these is the insufficiency of religious reasons to justify coercion (Eberle 2015, p. 32). Hence, Rawls insists that the statesman has to separate his or her personal moral doctrines and other religious and secular comprehensive doctrines in society and uphold the ideal of public reason by focusing exclusively on the political world (Rawls 1999c, p. 105). When a statesman works within the ideal of public reason, he or she must explain his or her decision based on a political conception of justice that is reasonable to all citizens (Rawls 1999b, p. 135).

Rawls understands this limitation of working within the limits of public reason and redraws the boundaries to a certain extent. From a very demanding requirement of an exclusive view, he moves to an inclusive view, and then to a wide view. The exclusive view does not allow the introduction of arguments from any comprehensive doctrine such as religion. Conversely, the inclusive view allows arguments from comprehensive doctrines provided it strengthens the ideal of public reason (Rawls 1996, pp. 247–52). The wide view of public political culture allows the introduction of religious arguments in the public political forum if it fulfills the "proviso". Fulfilling the proviso involves providing "proper political reasons" in "due course" (Rawls 1999b, p. 152). However, the ambiguity surrounding the word "due course" and the omnipresent requirement for providing public reason imposes a burden of restraint for introducing religious reasons. The outcome of this restraint is that citizens and government officials are deprived of religious resources when making decisions.

A statesman employs the same restraint when deciding on war, such as declaring a supreme emergency exception. However, justification based on public reason alone and the legitimacy of the decision-making process need not guarantee a just outcome. As discussed in the previous section, Rawls understands this limitation when he observes that bombing German cities in Germany was justified. In contrast, the US fire-bombing of Japanese cities was unjustified. Hence, restraining a religious argument and, thereby, the rich traditional resources and insisting on public reason may not always guarantee a just outcome.

When faced with the reality of war, the statesman's sincerity and the pope's influence are potential causes for concern. Even though Rawls portrays the ideal picture of a selfless statesman, an elected representative may not step up to this role. One can always expect a Bismarck in the head of affairs who keeps the Washingtons and Lincolns waiting. On the other hand, the influence of the pope is becoming increasingly limited to the religious realm. The restraint imposed by public reason on non-public religious arguments, and the decreased role of the Church in the political realm, contribute to this decreasing influence. Consequently, the efforts of the pope for peace and the concerns against the supreme emergency exception could make only a limited impact.

Confronting the concerns of a dystopian future caused by a potential World War III requires engaging a Rawlsian statesman and a Catholic Pope. This involves going beyond the restricting binaries of a political liberal framework and a Catholic religious framework. A religious framework with its rich traditional wisdom, rational doctrines, and spiritual awakening could be a rich resource for the citizens of a liberal democracy to make informed decisions. However, the Church must recognise the need for a political framework that considers contemporary society's diverse worldviews. At the same time, a political liberal framework must recognise the limitation of working with only political values and give a fair hearing to those subscribing to religious values.

A dialogue between these two positions can facilitate their mutual engagement and effectively articulate a middle path. This dialogue presupposes openness and receptivity from religious leaders and statesmen, where both parties try to understand each other's perspectives and concerns. Religious leaders could make an attempt to understand the responsibilities of statecraft in times of war, while statesmen could take steps to understand the demands of religious values. This engagement between statesmen and religious leaders can be further enhanced by using what Rawls calls "a non-public political culture" (Rawls 1999b, 134n13) consisting of print and digital media, which mediate between the people and the government. A responsible media organisation can enlighten its audience about the subjects under discussion and promote productive conversation and healthy debate on these subjects. This can help to raise awareness and understanding of the issues at hand and encourage citizens to act responsibly.

Even though discussions in the media can raise awareness among religious citizens, the demands of religious values may keep them from taking decisions. Here, interpretations of religious leaders and translations of statesmen hold the key. Religious leaders could take the lead in interpreting religious doctrines by being true to the religious teaching and

being aware of the signs of the times. Similarly, statesmen could convey their decision on responding to conflict by taking into account the sensitivities of religions. Furthermore, apart from the carefully scripted words upholding the spirit of public reason, the statesmen could also translate the grounds of a decision into religious terms for better receptivity among religious believers.

A dialogue between statesmen and religious leaders could also explore the possibilities of resources within religions to deal with psychological effects before, during, and after war. Arguments and directives based on public reason can do little to provide emotional support to civilians, soldiers, and bureaucrats in times of violence, uncertainty, economic distress, and other traumas associated with conflict. Religious resources and volunteers open up one of the many possibilities that can instil hope and provide emotional support during times of crisis. In sum, the decision to wage a just war and the orientation to peace depends on the active engagement of the public reason of an ideal Rawlsian statesman and the non-public reason of religious and secular leaders such as a Catholic pope.

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1 I use the term "Catholic pope" to refer to the head of the Roman Catholic Church. The adjective "Catholic" is added to distinguish the Roman Catholic pope from the Coptic Orthodox pope who heads the Coptic Orthodox Church.

2 I use the male-gendered term "statesmen", as used by Rawls, but this term refers to more inclusive ideal decision makers.

3 For a comparison of Augustine's and Aquinas' approach see (Cahill 2015, pp. 4–12).

4 "The strict conditions for *legitimate defense by military force* require rigorous consideration. The gravity of such a decision makes it subject to rigorous conditions of moral legitimacy." Pope John Paul II (1994, #2309).

5 For an initial response of Rawls, see (Rawls 1999a, pp. 331–35).

6 Society of Peoples refers to all those peoples whose interactions are governed by the Law of Peoples. Rawls (1999c, p. 1).

7 Rawls's preferred political conception of justice is "justice as fairness". It consists of two principles which were first stated in *A Theory of Justice*, revised in *Political Liberalism*, and the final formulation is stated in *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*. These principles are: "(a) Each person has the same indefeasible claim to a fully adequate scheme of equal basic liberties, which scheme is compatible with the same scheme of liberties for all; and (b) Social and economic inequalities are to satisfy two conditions: first, they are to be attached to offices and positions open to all under the conditions of fair equality of opportunity; and second, they are to be to the greatest benefit of the least-advantaged members of the society (difference principle)". Rawls (2011, pp. 42–43).

8 The three fundamental ideas are: "[The idea of] society as a fair system of cooperation over time, from one generation to the next, [. . .] the idea of citizens [. . .] as free and equal persons [. . .] [and] the idea of a well-ordered society as a society regulated by a political conception of justice". Rawls (1996, pp. 14–22).

9 For criticisms against Rawls's public reason approach from the perspective of religion, see (Vallier 2014; Wolterstorff 1997).

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Article

God, Religion, and War: Language, Concept, and the Problem of Definition from Genesis to *Jihad* to Levinas

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Abstract: Using a discussion of the etymology of *re-lig-io* as a starting point, this essay begins by considering the problem *of* religion—of understanding God, and of language as an instrument for achieving the ends of religion and that understanding—and the problem *for* religion of revelation and interpretation. It follows to the consequences of this double complication for understanding "war" in the biblical and early Christian traditions. The essay leads, then, to a tri-valent discussion of "*jihad*", and from this *jihad* centerpiece toward further versions of these complications as they apply to mysticism, medieval Jewish thought and thence toward and into modernity, from Spinoza to Levinas.

Keywords: *religio*; revelation; interpretation; Qumran; Crusades; *jihad*; mysticism; Gersonides; Spinoza; Levinas

1. The Problematic of Religion and the Israelite-Judaean Substratum

One might begin by defining terms, particularly because this essay has as its intention to observe how the first two key terms in the overall title of this volume and their conceptual cognates have been variously used in particular contexts. Part of the range of understanding "war" and "peace"—especially in "religious culture"—reflects the problematic of religion and its understanding in the first place.

The word "religion" is a direct offspring of the Latin term, "*religio*"—which is comprised of three elements. The first, "re-", is a prefix that means "back" or "again." The second, "-lig-", is a root meaning "bind/ing". The third, the suffix "-io", simply indicates that the word to which it is attached is, grammatically speaking, a feminine singular noun. The obvious question is: to what does religion bind us back/again? The answer, equally obvious, is: to the source that humans, across time and space, have believed has made us. This leads to a second question: why do we feel the need to be bound back/again to that source? The answer is that humans have also believed, across time and space, that, having created us, that source has the power to destroy us—to help or harm us, to further or hinder us, to bless or curse us. With our sense of an array of related positive/negative possibilities—and our desire to access the positive—humans have, across our history and geography, shaped diverse means, using diverse instruments, of connecting ourselves to our contending understandings of that source. In short, we have contrived religion as a means of survival, be it in the here and now or in whatever we have come to believe, (which may differ from one *religio* to another), is the thereafter.

All of this is inherently problematic. That source is by definition beyond our own human realm, which means that how we understand its configuration (one God or many; lacking any sense-accessible form or assuming human shape—for example) and the most effective way to be connected back/again to it derives from diverse, particular belief systems and are beyond our ability to ascertain using the intellectual and other instruments that we typically use to understand our own reality. It also means that that source connects to us by revealing itself at certain times and places to certain individuals—we might call them prophets, priests, poets, artists—who serve as conduits through which a sense is

communicated regarding what that source is, how and why it formed us, and what is necessary in order to continue to flourish in the world that it has shaped.

This process, *revelation*, is found at the beginning of every religious tradition and is part of the problematic process of understanding God. God—or whatever other term we might use to refer to that source (but all terms are inherently limited by virtue of being human-derived and thus reflecting the human experience and understanding of reality)—*reveals* itself. Or so every religious tradition believes. Revelation presents a dual complication. First, when the prophetic conduit is still among us, does s/he—and thus do and can we—understand what the revelations *mean*, given that that wholly "other" source does not speak our language, so to speak. More importantly, perhaps, in the long run: once that/those sacerdotal individual—or individuals—is/are gone from among us, understanding the revelation is exponentially more difficult: we are consigned to the ongoing act of interpretation. While that in and of itself is not necessarily a problem (perhaps it is intended by divinity to be part of the process of our connecting back to it), it becomes a problem when individuals confuse their interpretations with the revelation itself—especially if such individuals possess the power to impose their particular interpretation on others.

Almost inevitably, then, religion finds itself interwoven with politics and can beget violence as much as gentleness, strife as much as love, war as much as peace. One can certainly see all of this playing out within the Abrahamic traditions. God is understood—*believed*—to be all-powerful, all-good, all-knowing, and ongoingly interested and engaged in human affairs, but can we *know* what these descriptives mean in God's terms, as opposed to our own? Inherent linguistic issues regarding God and God's connection to humans are already apparent in the early chapters of Genesis. How and why does the all-powerful, all-knowing God *allow* Adam and Eve to defy a direct order with regard to consuming a certain piece of fruit? Or—a few chapters later, in Gen 6—when God purposes to destroy all of humanity except for Noah and his family, because except for Noah, humanity was evil: *what exactly did they all do*? What *is* "evil"? Nowhere is that term explicitly defined.

The truth of this problematic has particularly significant applicability in the matter of war, peace, and their concomitants across Abrahamic history. We might, for instance, observe it when we arrive at the era of the early Israelite kingship, when, in II Samuel 15, God instructs King Saul, by way of the priest/prophet, Samuel, to make war against the Amalekites and notes that, with God's support, he will be victorious—and that he should kill every last man, woman, child, and animal. The reasoning for such a draconian divine order (" . . . for what they did to Israel when they waylaid them as they came up from Egypt"—v 2) requires and receives considerable rabbinic interpretative discussion. Moreover, when Saul fails to fully fulfill that order—allowing the Amalekite king to survive, along with cattle and sheep to be sacrificed to the Lord—Samuel rails furiously, that "to obey [the Lord] is better than sacrifice" (v 22). This is the final straw, in fact, that leads to Saul's eventual loss of his throne (to the house of David) and his life (to the Philistines).

The Israelites eventuate, nearly a millennium after the time of Saul, as Judaeans who, late in the Second Temple Period, endure the fragmentation of their mainstream community—and at least one group of Judaeans withdraws from the mainstream to dwell in isolation in the desert, near the Dead Sea, at a site later called Qumran. Among the handful of scrolls (aside from those recording nearly all of the books of the eventual Hebrew Bible) produced by the Qumran community is one popularly called the "Battle Scroll". It describes a final *war*—between those who are allied with God and led by "the Good Teacher" and those evil forces, led by the "Wicked Priest", who oppose God's will. The eventual outcome that is predicted is the wholesale destruction of all of those who are not part of the Qumran community—pagans and Judaeans alike—and the establishment of a new, perfect reality. The Qumran community itself disappeared—either scattered or destroyed—during the time of the first Judaean Revolt against Roman power in 65–70 CE that culminated in the destruction of the Judaean Temple in Jerusalem.[1]

One notes two relevant developmental issues within the few following generations. The first is that the Judaeans evolve into two increasingly separate communities of Jews and

Christians. This schism in turn revolves around a handful of primary issues: differences of interpretation regarding the revelation-inspired course of history up to that point in time. Firstly, the two sibling traditions differently interpret what *constitutes* the revelation: for Jews the time of revelation ended around 444 BCE; for Christians it not only continued for more than half a millennium thereafter, but surged upward as it were, so that the culmination of that era was embodied in the ultimate conduit between God and ourselves: Jesus of Nazareth.[2] And therefore the Bible canonized by Judaism around 140 CE was limited to what, when the Christian Bible was canonized around 393–7 CE, was merely the "Old Testament". Furthermore, Jesus, as a unique intermediary between humanity and divinity came gradually—"officially" by 325 CE—to be understood by mainstream Christians to be both entirely divine and entirely human.[3]

Both sides of this spiritual equation considered themselves to be the *verus Israel*—"true Israel," that properly continues and fulfills Hebrew biblical prophetic predictions. This applied in particular to the long-awaited anointed one (*mashiah/khristos*). For evolving Christianity, Jews were stuck in denial that Jesus was the fulfillment; for evolving Judaism, Christians were stuck in their embrace of Jesus, whereas the messiah had not yet arrived.[4] Of further relevance to our discussion, the final book of the "New Testament"—*Revelation* aka *The Apocalypse of St. John*—resonates from the Battle Scroll written at Qumran during the late Judaean period: the end of time as we know it will be marked by a cataclysmic struggle in the culminating war between God's forces for good and those, led by the Satan, (in lieu of the "Battle Scroll"'s Wicked Priest), for evil. In the end, the latter will be destroyed by being submerged in a lake of fire.

2. From Judaean Schism to War and Peace in Evolving Christianity

The second issue of particular relevance for this discussion is that the time leading up to these developments is marked by what the pagan Roman Empire refers to as the *Pax Romana*: Roman Peace. What is important is that this term refers to a condition marked simply by the relative absence of war. Thus, the long history of external and internal violence that was so significant to the ongoing expansion of the Roman Republic and its offspring, the Empire, reached a point when, for long stretches of time, no such violence was necessary: the borders were established and secure and the far-flung populations within them were not overly restless—or at least so it seemed to the Romans in Rome and elsewhere far from the borders and unaware of or at least unaffected by those groups that remained restless.

As we shall note shortly, "absence of war"—a negative—is not the only way to understand "peace", and the difference between that negative and a more positive sense of peace will reflect religious developments within and beyond the Roman imperial period. The schism within the Israelite-Judaean tradition that yielded Judaism and Christianity will be a significant part of thinking of peace beyond its "absence of war" mode—and part of the ongoing matrix of interpreting how the Creator-God intends humans and creation to evolve.

Judaism moves forward through the interpretive agency of an extended rabbinic tradition; Christianity through the patristic-scholastic tradition the early part of which is dominated by St Augustine (354–428 CE). By the time Augustine is the Bishop of Hippo, the pagan Roman world that encompassed most of the Mediterranean and European worlds, as well as much of the Middle East, has begun a significant reshaping toward becoming Christian.[5] Within a few generations of Augustine's death, the last of the Western Roman emperors, Romulus Augustulus, has been dethroned (in 476 CE) and the ancient Roman Empire has made significant strides toward becoming Medieval Europe.

Moreover, that same secular military sense of aggressive self—the roots of which, as with so many key aspects of Christianity, may already be found in St Augustine's late fourth-early fifth century legitimization of "just wars"[6]—had shown itself capable of being directed against and not only on behalf of or in alliance with the Church. The political hegemony of Christianity was troubled by a series of external and internal issues, with the consequence

that even the phrase "on behalf of or in alliance with" may not be seen as referencing a simple, uniform condition. The same Council of Nicaea that emphatically declared the fully divine/human nature of Jesus yielded Arian's minority view that denied the *homoiousia* of Father and Son—a view termed as heresy by the majority. Heresy would continue in variant forms for many centuries. Thus, for instance, a Monophysite view that denied the reality of Jesus' human nature also emerged.[7] The Jews, increasingly marginalized, remained a spiritual competitor scattered as an archipelago of islands across expanding Christian seas. Various forms of paganism remained active into the fifth and sixth centuries. The relationship between Church and State—arguing over whether kings and emperors or bishops and popes should be the ultimate authority for governing society—reached crisis proportions in the eighth century. By that time, a new claimant to an absolutely correct understanding of God, God's prophetic conduitry, and how humans can properly bind themselves back to God—Islam—had appeared on the stage of history.

By the early eighth century, in fact, Islam extended its spiritual arms from the Pyrenees to the Himalayas. What followed for the next few centuries was, among other things, a varied range of Christian–Muslim conflicts most intensely defined by a series of nine Crusades.[8] That term itself underscores a distinct interphase between war and religion, since it refers to the ambition to carry the cross (Latin: *crux*) into the Middle East and specifically toward Jerusalem, to return to Christian control what had been lost by the Byzantine Christians to the Seljuk Turkic Muslims a generation earlier.[9] For the purposes of this discussion, four particular Crusade-related issues are notable. The first is that in the capture of Jerusalem in the First Crusade, in 1099, the Crusaders reveled in spilling the blood of both Muslims and Jews—Godfrey of Bouillon's account of that triumph ebulliently references the flowing of Muslim and Jewish blood through the streets, "up to [the crusaders'] knees and bridle reins".[10] One might connect this kind of comment to the layered issue in the next paragraph to ask the question: what constitutes a just war in the Augustinian sense—with respect both to the act of "fighting the infidels" and to the nature of *how* one fights.

For the second Crusade-related issue pertains to the precise requirement for what Pope Urban II had promised to his hoped-for army—remission of sins, and with it, a more direct path to Paradise—in a public sermon (at the Council of Clermont) before the First Crusade was undertaken. Was it necessary to *die* liberating Jerusalem? To fight with a *pure spiritual* focus? When the Crusaders were defeated for the most part in the Second Crusade, one of that event's strongest advocates, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, concluded and bemoaned the fact that too many Crusaders must have been focused on plunder and not on spiritual matters—and therefore were defeated. Bernard was also distressed at the massacres of Jews in the Rhineland that took place along the way, particularly during this Crusade, largely inspired by the preaching of a Cistercian monk, Rudolph. For—this is the third issue—an ever-broadening sense of *othering* that the Crusades encapsulated meant not only that the Jews were placed in the same infidel category with the Muslims for the purposes of Crusader violence.[11] Later, in the Fourth Crusade, the Western Christian armies chose to go no farther than Constantinople, sacking the capital of Byzantium on the grounds that Orthodox Christians were as worthy of being attacked as an "Other" as were Muslims and Jews.[12]

The fourth issue pertains to the broadest of questions being asked in the context of this bloody era. From the time of the First Crusade forward, not only were there those who wondered whether, in order to gain the promised remission of sins, one had to die fighting, or whether it was sufficient to have fought for Jerusalem and lived to tell the tale. More relevant to our own discussion was the question asked by the French King Louis IX (Saint Louis)—or perhaps Jean de Joinville—in the context of the Seventh Crusade that Louis led with some reluctance: *is this really what God wants us to be doing*?[13] The reasoning behind the question was straightforward: since Louis understood Christianity to be undoubtedly God's preferred mode of human–divine engagement—God's preferred *re-lig-io*—then Christians should always be defeating the infidel Other! Yet, Christians

won sometimes, and Muslims won sometimes. Maybe this is *not* what God wants us to be doing—or put otherwise (although Louis did not specifically think in these terms): if one thinks along the lines of Augustinian just war theory, perhaps these are not all just wars in God's eyes. Ironically enough, having returned home after a war effort that resulted in no clear triumph for either side, Louis was later induced in part by his voracious brother, Charles of Anjou, to undertake another—the Eighth—Crusade, in spite of his doubts, and picked up the dysentery from which he died, in Tunisia, nearly 1500 miles from the Holy Land that was his martial and spiritual goal.

What, on the other hand, might one say of the Muslim view of all of this? Where Islam is concerned there is a very logical place to direct the question—another matter of terminology. The term is the Arabic word, *jihad*, meaning "struggle"—and popularly, in the West but also in some parts of the contemporary Muslim world, understood to mean "Holy War." *Jihad*, however, operates on three levels. The primary level focuses on one's self, struggling to make one as effective a *muslim*—one who submits to God's will—as possible.[14] The secondary level applies to the larger sphere of the "*Umma*" (the [Muslim] people) and only the tertiary level even pertains to the realm beyond the *dar al 'Islam*, ["the Realm of Submission [to God's Will]"), much less necessarily embracing violence and war as a method for *jihad*.

Within this threefold matrix there is an inherent double issue with double consequences. As always in the history of religion—to repeat—one is necessarily caught between the faith-bound certainty of revelation and the complexity of interpretation, and each of the Abrahamic traditions offers to its constituents the certainty that the text of the Torah (and Hebrew Bible) or the Gospels (and Old and New Testaments) or the Qur'an represents God's definitive word through one or more intermediating prophets or messengers. Once these texts are committed to a canonical written form, we are caught in the complication of interpretation.

3. Islam and the Shaping of *Jihad*

Where *jihad* is concerned, the double consequence is obvious. We might reasonably assume that primary *jihad* is not only purely spiritual *jihad*, but is *effected* through spiritual means (although the spiritual might be reinforced by physical means: fasts or other denials of the body's needs or performing a particular number of *rakats* in prayer). When, however, one turns to secondary and tertiary *jihad*, an obvious interpretational issue will be: what are the most appropriate instruments of the struggle? Concisely put: *the word or the sword*?

The very fact of interpretation within Islam has led, across history, to the early Sunni–Shi'i schism, and beyond that split, to *Ash'arite* and *Mu'tazilite* understandings of fundamental religious issues (such as God's attributes, the Qur'an as created or uncreated, the reality of human free will, the validity of the use of reason within the understanding of revelation, et al.), to say nothing of diverse schools (*madhab*s) of jurisprudence, from Hanbali, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanafi; to Ja'fari, Zaydi, and Ismaili (to say nothing of minor schools)—and within Sufi (mystical) Islam, to scores of different *tariqa*s.[15] Across geography and history within and beyond the borders of the *dar al'Islam*, *jihad* has meant discussion and debate and it has also meant warfare. Therefore, it is no small matter to say that *jihad* is this and not that: our human penchant for interpretation, complicated by the limits of words when confronted with describing and conveying an understanding of and commandments from the Ineffable has meant that *jihad* has had varied practical applications over the centuries.[16]

This complexity is further complicated by how we interpret the need for *jihad*: not only what it means to be a better *muslim*—i.e., (to repeat), someone who *submits* [to God's will]—but what the consequences are if one fails to fulfill that desideratum. Consider: for Christianity (to be concise), the consumption in Eden by Adam and Eve of the fruit forbidden to them by God ends up interpreted as an Original Sin profound in its repercussions. The notion that all of humanity is the heir to that Sin merely by being born as a consequence of sexual congress, combined with a well-evolved concept of Hell in all of its horrors, yields

the unhappy fate for all of humankind to end up forever in that Hell unless it embraces the human/divine Jesus as its savior.[17]

Jews interpret the act of Adam and Eve as disastrous on a moral and practical plane (they are thrown out of the Garden of Eden, after all; he will have to work hard and she will bear children in pain, etc.), but without the generation-by-generation consequences explicated by Christianity. Nor is there even a real word for "Hell" in Hebrew, much less the sort of visions of it endemic to Christian thought.[18] While Islam offers a concept of Hell and also a distinct concept of Final Judgment that can lead someone to that unhappy place, the road to damnation is not based on the sin of Adam and Eve. On the contrary, the Qur'an is rather explicit that one person's sins cannot yield consequences for someone else: "No soul will be questioned for what another soul has done" (Q. 17:15). Therefore, the very nature of sin and evil, particularly as understood through the act of Adam and Eve, (and/or referenced through Noah), is necessarily subject to an interpretive process when we are trying to determine how most fully to submit to God's will—and each tradition, speaking broadly, goes in its own direction.

What we *believe* is inevitably interwoven with what and how we *understand* and how and what we *understand* is interwoven with what we *believe*. The great scholastic, St Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109), recognizes this even when he is undertaking the first fully articulated argument for God's existence—the Ontological Argument, contained in his ca 1085 work, *Proslogium*—when at the end of the first chapter he notes that "I do not seek to understand that I may believe, I believe in order to understand. For this also I believe: that unless I believed, I would not understand". And indeed, his "proof" is predicated on an already-accepted belief not only in God's existence but in an understanding of God as perfect—as a Being than which there can be none more perfect—and that to exist is more perfect than not to exist (St Anselm 1966).

I make this last point to underscore the historical tendency of humans to confuse our belief in a given set of revelations with the interpretations to which the revelations have been subject. If we add *love* to the issue of revelation/interpretation/belief/certitude complexity—and the issue of "knowing" what constitutes God's Will and "knowing" how serious the abrogation of that Will might be, together with particulars of the potentially negative consequences of that abrogation—then *jihad* with regard to others becomes potentially further complicated.

For loving myself and loving God and therefore struggling with myself so that I am a better *muslim* is simple enough as a concept. Loving others, both because God suggests that we love one another and simply because one loves certain others—most obviously, family and friends—is also simple to understand but potentially complicating when that secondary love is placed in the context of secondary *jihad*. If I love you and therefore want the best for you, I naturally want to struggle to help you become a more effective *muslim*, which at least will make you a happier being in this life and perhaps the next and at most keep you from Hell—if the tradition in which I believe understands that there is such a thing.

Thereby, of course, hangs the double conundrum: if my tradition teaches that there is Hell and that those found morally wanting end up in that place, I believe that loved ones who fall into this last category are in obvious danger. Aside from the question of whether Hell exists (as it does *not* in every tradition), I am bound by the problem of whether or not I am accurate in my assessment as to what it is that my loved ones (and I) need to be doing to please God and what not to do in order not to displease God: a constant *jihad* to understand this and to know how to improve myself and others must never let me rest with the certainty that I *have* it. I must *continue* to struggle. (Think Plato: my life and that of those I love, together with important moral and ethical principles and concepts, may never simply transpire, unexamined, but must progress under constant cross-examination.)

My loved ones may, if, say, I am a Muslim, fall within the *'Umma* but it is also conceivable that some of them are beyond the *'Umma*, in the *dar al'Harb*. Ought I to struggle with them all to compel them to see the Truth of God as I see it, or as the leaders whom I

follow and respect see it? If I have found the right path—the *shari'a* that leads me in the wilderness of existence to the water of eternal life—ought I not enjoin others to join me on that path, and ought I, if I can, use whatever means are at my disposal to ensure that they do so?[19] Do those means include violence: is *jihad*, then, definable as Holy War?

How capable am I of recognizing the possibility that *my path could be mistaken*—that I and those who agree with me could be wrong about what we believe, based on our misinterpretation of the revelation's message; that what I believe, even if it *is* perfectly correct for me, might not be so for others? Given the infinite variety of humans, trees, leaves, and snowflakes created by the one God, is it not at *least* as likely that there are diverse correct paths that can bind (*-lig-*) us back (*re-*) to God than that there is only one? How capable am I of understanding the degree to which my *ego*—my self-focus—may impinge on my understanding of God and the path to God?

Interestingly, this difficulty is assuaged in a particular way by the Abrahamic mystical traditions. The mystic, by definition, believes that there is a hidden innermost depth to God that s/he can access, even as God's depths are inaccessible—and even as, in the Muslim and Jewish traditions God is understood to be absolutely without form and thus without the spatial aspect that the notion of "innermost depth" implies. But mysticism embraces the paradoxes that define any attempts to grasp, engage, understand, "know" God. The mystic seeks the unseekable, the *mysterion* ("closedness, hiddenness", in Greek) but also believes that the God who is sought is, at the same time, seeking the mystic—seeking to unify, to *bind back* the mystic's soul (a tiny "piece" of Godness in all of us) to the source of every soul.[20]

One way to understand this—without forgetting that words are always limited and limiting instruments of engaging, exploring, and explaining God—is to say that the mystic seeks to be completely filled with God. In order to be filled with God one must be empty of self—*empty of ego and of self-focus*. And ego is precisely the element that might cause an individual to engage in *jihad* with others over matters of faith. Sufism refers to the emptiness process as *fana'*—a dissipation of one's self into Godness. To be relieved of ego, of self, can lead in at least two directions. One is the direction of danger: if I cannot regain my ego once I have been emptied of it, once I have escaped it (achieving *ek-stasis*, a condition of being outside myself), then I will go mad—or I will die or apostasize.

If my ability to return to this reality—and to communicate the experience well enough to benefit the community around me—is compromised, then I will have fundamentally failed. For my goal must be not to gain enlightenment but to gain it in order to improve the world of others around me—otherwise my goal is too *self-focused* (so I will by definition be doomed to fail in the first place). If my goal is to improve the world around me but I so completely lose myself in Godness that I cannot regain myself, my goal will not have been achieved. The danger of losing myself is layered with possibilities.

The second direction, however, is that, in emptying myself of ego I may come to a clearer sense of how diverse the paths—the *tariqa*s—to God's *innerness* actually are.[21] Given the endless diversity of humanity and of all of the Creator's creation, it seems inherently odd that God would expect in only this one area of human enterprise, religion, a single path back, and the mystic has a unique potential to recognize this oddness and to push back against it, articulating a broad *shar'ia*.

This perspective expressed itself historically in the words of a number of Sufis.[22] To name two outstanding examples—both of them individuals well versed in conventional legalistic *shar'ia* and both of them engaged in life-long spiritual *jihad*, ever seeking the path to effective *islam*—"submission"—vis-à-vis God. Ibn al-'Arabi (1165–1240), popularly known as *Muhyi id-Din* ("Reviver of the Faith"), who drew together myriad prior threads within Muslim thought in writing extensively about Islam, also noted that in the Qur'an we are told that "wherever one turns, there is the Face of God" (Q II.115). His understanding of that verse, in part, led him to write, in his *Bezels of Wisdom* (*Fusus al-Hikam*):

> . . . My heart can take on any form:
> A meadow for gazelles,

A cloister for monks,
For the idols, sacred ground,
Ka'ba for the circling pilgrim,
The tablets of the Torah,
The pages of the Qur'an.
My creed is love;
Wherever its caravan turns along the way,
That is my belief,
My faith.

His view is explicitly that aspirants of diverse spiritual traditions can become one with God. The heart to which he refers is both his own heart, assuming an omnimorphous condition—and the heart of God, speaking through him. For his heart is emptied of self and filled with God, but he has managed to regain a self that can communicate his enlightened condition. The God he experiences is a God of love seeking reunion with all those who seek Him—not only those who follow a particular *shar'ia* or *tariqa* or form of faith.

A generation later, Jalaluddin Rumi (1207–1273), who began his career as a prominent master of jurisprudence, took a sharp turn in his life's *tariqa*, prompted by an unnerving question asked by Shams of Tabriz, who appeared in Rumi's classroom and blurted out: "who is the greater Muslim, the Prophet Muhammad or (the Sufi) Beyazid Bustani, who said 'how great is my glory!'"? The notion that the latter had been filled with God in a particular manner—so that he was in the moment of that outcry a channel through which God Itself spoke (as opposed to Bustani speaking as some egotistic politician might)—could suggest a condition of God-filledness even greater than that experienced by the Seal of the Prophets. But that is not possible, since no human spiritual being can achieve greater intimacy with God than Muhammad!

Suddenly moved to consider that *shar'ia* might not be the be all and end all of binding one's self back to God, Rumi moved further away from teaching and thinking about jurisprudence and deeper and deeper into a dynamic Sufi *tariqa* renowned both for its mind-bending spinning *sema* and for the poetry that poured out of Rumi himself.[23] One of the more famous passages ascribed to him is (in part):

Not Christian or Jew or Muslim, nor Hindu,
Buddhist, Sufi or Zen. Not any religion
Or cultural system. I am not from the East
Or the West, nor out of the ocean or up
From the ground . . .
And he writes:
. . . I go into the Muslim mosque
and the Jewish synagogue
and the Christian church
and I see one altar.

There are those who argue that since these overtly universalistic passages are not from the canonical *Mesnevi* or from the *Divani Tabrizi Shams* (the two multi-volumed main bodies of Rumi's written work), then they may not be his. Perhaps, but within the *Mesnevi* itself there are also passages such as

Every holy person seems to have a different doctrine
And practice, but there's really only one work (I: 3087–3088).

And, in a lengthy passage (in Mesnevi II, 1750ff), Moses is represented as being instructed by God that

> . . . *Ways of worshipping are not to be ranked as better*
> *or worse than one another.*
> *Hindus do Hindu things.*
> *The Dravidian Muslims in India do what they do.*
> *It's all praise, and it's all right.*
> . . . the love-religion has no code or doctrine.
> Only God.

The words in italics are presented as God's, the non-italicized words are the poet's comment on God's words. There are more passages like these in Rumi's poetry. He, like Ibn al-'Arabi, was a very devout Muslim—but he saw no contradiction between that and embracing the full spiritual legitimacy of others whose form of faith was different from his own—including non-Abrahamic faiths.

The point is that both of these mystics, among many others, in simultaneously bursting beyond the bounds of the self and finding the piece of Godness within themselves—so that *ek-stasis* and *en-stasis* are one and the same—understood (in an era fraught with violence and strife—with endless wars—from the Mongol invasions and the *Reconquista* to the Crusades) that the spiritual *jihad* undertaken by the mystic seeking oneness with God opens him/her to true dialogical possibilities with those of different *tariqa*s, different *shar'ia*s, different Muslim theological and jurisprudential perspectives, as well as with those whose approach to divinity falls outside Islam.

If *jihad* by no means necessarily implies war, except in the spiritual sense—of warring with one's own soul and on behalf of the souls of others to make one's self and them better Muslims—what of the primary word for peace: *salaam*?[24] There are two related ways to understand the root Arabic meaning of that word. One is that it shares the root of the word *muslim*, so it implies peace that is a function of embracing God and submitting to God's will. A second aspect of the root connects it to the idea of completeness. In both possible aspects the term is a positive that contrasts significantly with the Latin word, *pax*, that is a negative—a mere absence of war, as we have noted above.[25]

This is certainly clear in Hebrew, a sibling language to Arabic—these languages are as close, as Semitic tongues, as are, say, Spanish and Portuguese as sibling offspring of Latin—in which the word for peace, *shalom*, is barely an adjustment of the word *shalem*, meaning "complete". Therefore, the religious traditions that make such central and purposeful use of these languages for both their revealed texts and centuries of interpretational discussions offer an inherent three-dimensionality to their concepts of peace—at least in the ideal.

4. Medieval and Post-Medieval Jewish Thought and God's Wars

This leads to the obvious question: where might we find somewhat equivalent discussions regarding peace and war within medieval Judaism? This question must yield an answer informed by radically different political circumstances compared with Christianity and Islam. Both of the latter came to assume politically dominant positions in the world at large, the first by the end of the fourth century and the second by the mid-eighth century. By contrast, by the time what we may recognize as "Judaism" emerged out of the Israelite-Judaean tradition—certainly by the year 140, with the canonization of the Hebrew Bible—Jews had ceased to govern an independent polity, and over the next 18 centuries instead occupied the position of a minority wherever they dwelt, shaped as a far-flung archipelago within vast Christian, Muslim, and often other (e.g., Hindu) seas.

Until the mid-twentieth century and the coming into existence of the State of Israel, Jews would rarely have been in a position to consider physical violence—much less war—as a viable option for pursuing their political or spiritual ends. This becomes particularly obvious in considering the important fourteenth-century work by the Provençal polymath, Levi Ben Gershon, otherwise known as Gersonides (1288–1334), whose *The Wars of the Lord*—written at length between 1317 and 1329—might seem, based on simply looking at its title, to suggest something other than what I have just asserted for medieval Judaism. However, Gersonides' text has nothing to do with war, as it turns out, but is rather an

extensive polemic intended to show that Aristotle's view of the universe as eternal—over and against the Torah, the perspective of which Gersonides is defending—is wrong, even as mediated by Maimonides. *The Wars of the Lord* discusses creation, the nature of the soul as immortal (because it is, after all, a "piece" of God within us), dreams, prophecy, divine knowledge, and providence—and so on.

Gersonides' long narrative neither comments on physical war, per se, nor therefore either approves or disapproves this or that form of it, and is thus completely different in its discussion from Augustine's discussion or the discussion of *jihad* in its secondary and tertiary meanings; if anything, it comes closest in feel to the discussion of *jihad* in its primary, inwardly directed meaning. Why such a title, then? It is derived from a verse in the Torah (Num 21:14–15): "Therefore it is said in the Book of Wars of the Lord, what He did in the Sea of Reeds, and in the brooks of Arnon . . . "—in the context of the Israelites' first military contacts with Canaanites, their God-aided success against the latter, their loss of faith, nonetheless, and the peculiar punishment for that failure of faith, of poisonous "fiery" serpents, followed by atonement and cure by way of a "serpent of brass." The referenced book does not exist—or at least, no longer exists—but the medieval midrash known as the *Book of Yasher*[26] asserts that such a scroll was a group effort, written by Moses, Joshua, and the Children of Israel; and the Spanish rabbinic commentator and poet, Moses Ibn Ezra (1060–1138), took it to be a narrative that covered struggles to assert God's primacy that extended from the time of Abraham to the time of Moses. Ibn Ezra and others connected the book to another Torah passage, Ex 17:14, where God commands Moses to inscribe an Israelite military victory (over the Amalekites at Rephidim), "on a scroll as something to be remembered and [to] make sure that Joshua hears it . . . ".[27]

So why does Gersonides choose this biblical phrase as the title for his work? He sees his polemic, expounding and defending the truth of the revealed Torah against all-comers—and for him, contemporary Christianity's perspective is as problematic as that of the pagan Aristotle (whose style of argumentation had been picked up and used by the scholastics, most obviously in St Anselm's formulation of his Ontological Argument). Therefore, his words are the spiritual sword in the hands of a victorious God whose wars to establish universal recognition of Its singular supremacy began in the time of Abraham and continued through the time of Moses and Joshua to the time of Samuel and Saul to the long era of the rabbinic/patristic–scholastic schism to Gersonides' own time. The word *milhamot*—"wars"—used for his text is a summary statement of spiritual *jihad*, even as the word and the phrase that comprise the title in which it is embedded evoke the sort of physical wars associated with Canaanites and Amalekites hostile to Israel and the Israelite God and not the philosophico-theological struggles of medieval Judaism against paganism and—from Gersonides' and his intended Jewish audience's perspective—Aristotelian paganism's Christian heir.[28]

Jewish obliqueness and allegory where "war" is concerned might point our own narrative forward another step by following history a further war-and-peace-within-the-context-of-religion step forward. For the issue of the papacy's supremacy within and/or beyond Christian Europe that helped lead to the Crusades also led, much later, to a series of wars, fought under the umbrella of religion, which emerged in the aftermath of spiritual revolt—the Protestant Reformation—first against certain papal policies and ultimately against papal ecclesiastical authority overall. What began as a series of spiritual protests against those policies (in particular, the selling of indulgences) in the form of 95 theses articulated by Martin Luther and nailed to the church door in Wittenberg, Germany, in 1517, initially led to a simple response: the excommunication of Luther by the Medici Pope Leo X. The unanticipated support, however, of his fellow bishops beyond the Alps, led to a protracted struggle that by mid-century became an Age of Catholic–Protestant Religious *Wars* that continued on and off for more than 150 years. The most intense period within that long stretch was the so-called Thirty Years' War, lasting from 1618 to 1648.

This was the war-and-violence-ridden world into which Amsterdam-born philosopher, Baruch/Benedict Spinoza (1632–1677)—a Sephardic Jew whose family had emigrated from

Portugal—grew up. Spinoza's role in our own discussion is this: that he saw vicious wars being repeatedly fought on religious grounds as derived from a sense of possessiveness regarding God coupled with the egotistical clinging to particularized interpretations of that source and how to access it. He proposed to change this ego-bound equation for *re-lig-io* by reconsidering the accepted revealed text exploring and explaining that source and its access, and by altering the terminology *referencing* the source.

Therefore, Spinoza begins by introducing a modernist approach to analyzing and understanding the Bible. The *Theologico-Political Treatise* is the first work that exhaustively and in detail considers the text of the Bible in a manner that may be considered both rational and very little affected by particularist prejudices. Indeed, consistent with his non-particularist viewpoint, although Spinoza's primary focus is the Hebrew Bible, he makes no distinction between it and the New Testament as "Bible." Trained as a Jewish biblical scholar, he espoused a viewpoint that is nonetheless both Christian and Jewish—or rather, neither of these, per se.[29] He follows this innovative discussion with a second innovation, in which he equates God with Nature: "Nature herself is the power of God under another name, and our ignorance of God is co-extensive with our ignorance of Nature (25)."[30] It is Spinoza's unequivocal non-sectarian viewpoint that God is not drawn more to one group than to another—although his introduction of new terminology for "God" has been too often misconstrued as atheistic, first by his own contemporaries and then by subsequent commentators.

The *Theologico-Political Treatise* was published in 1670—anonymously, and in Latin, rather than in the vernacular—and raised a storm of controversy. Surely what distressed some of its readers, at least, was not what it said regarding Scripture or God—it does not really question the validity of either—but the fact that it does undercut the supercessionist sensibilities of Christians and the superior sensibilities of Jews vis- à -vis each other (and vis- à -vis all others). Blinded by the offense taken at Spinoza's universalism, his critics railed against him as a heretic or worse.[31]

He equates God and Nature—in a literal sense, for he refers to *Deus sive Natura* ("God or Nature") specifically in *Ethics*, Part I, Proposition IV, *Proof*; and in Part IV, *Preface*, where he also equates both with "eternal and infinite Being." The typical treatment of "God" as a kind of personal name—encouraging a sense, within diverse religious traditions, of God as a particularized possession—is replaced by a term and concept that people rarely claim in that same way, for they recognize that nature belongs to everyone. Therefore, God as "*Natura*" is other than God as that term is traditionally used by Christians and Jews and we might suppose that such a God is an entity that created the world but, having done so, retains no particular interest in its progress through time.

But everything that Spinoza says about God, whether he writes *Deus* or *Natura*, militates against that understanding. For in suggesting that *Natura* exists both as *naturans* ("naturing") and *naturata* ("natured"), he underscores the idea that the Creator is found throughout Creation: God and the world are both separate and profoundly linked. God is embedded within us, within the natural world—within *everything*. Of course, one could still suppose that the Mind of God becomes disconnected from Creation once that Mind has finished creating: a father can deposit part of himself (sperm) into what eventuates as his offspring and, having done so, disappear without ever having a relationship with that offspring.

Those who saw or see Spinoza as disconnecting a personified God from Creation because of his choice of terms no doubt imagine(d) his intention as something of this sort. Those who do this would be missing both another aspect of understanding the *Deus sive Natura* equation and Spinoza's own discussion of God that peppers the *Ethics*. This way is by means of the rabbinic notion of God's Name as ineffable. Spinoza recognizes this in alluding to the conversation between Moses and God in Exodus 3:14—in which the latter responds to Moses' query as to who God is with the words "I am/will be that am/will be"—in writing of Moses' understanding of God as "a Being Who has always existed, does exist, and will always exist, and for this cause he calls Him by the name *J-H-V-H*" (*Treatise*,

chapter II, p. 36). If God's very name is ineffable, and cannot be used in the ordinary way of offering some intelligible sense of God's essence—because God's essence is being itself, which humans cannot understand—then how much less can we truly understand what the being that we wish to name really *is*?

The point of this brief discussion of Spinoza is twofold. It carries us back to the beginning of this narrative, and the problematic of understanding the source—even its name—to which our various traditions wish to bind us back. It also underscores that, where Spinoza is concerned, the issue of *war and peace within religious culture* offers two significances. One is the context in which he is wrestling with the questions of God that he addresses—a war-soaked context shaped by Western religious culture, in which he is both an insider (he is part of the world and its large philosophico-theological concerns) and an outsider: exiled by his Sephardic Jewish community he never became part of the Christian community, either. The other is his attempt to facilitate an end to this religious war-based way of the world by introducing a new vocabulary to articulate the way in which humans are bound to the source of all of humanity and all of nature.[32]

5. War, Peace, and Religious Culture in the Modern Era

We can twist the screw of this discussion a further turn by moving deeper into the age of modernity toward our own time, and turning, in a world ever more torn by wars, to the French Jewish philosopher, Emmanuel Levinas (1905–1995)—specifically, his essay, "God and Philosophy." His discussion also furthers our return to the starting point of our discussion in addressing (among other things) the problematic of religion as that problematic is shaped by language and by the tension between revelation and interpretation—and thus, implicitly, the problem of God and understanding whether and when God wants us to wage war or peace.

The problem that Levinas raises is twofold. First, he makes reasoning a circular proposition: "Rationality has to be understood as the incessant emergence of thought from the energy of 'being's move' or its manifestation, and reason has to be understood out of this rationality."(2)[33] Second, in turning to the issue of God—by way of the claim of theology to independence from philosophy—he asserts that philosophy should be able to include the discussion of God within its discourse (by which he means "God" as the Bible represents God) "*if this God does have a meaning*."(3)[34] My added emphasis is intended to underscore—again—the God problem for Levinas: can we even speak of God as having *meaning*, whatever that term signifies for *us*? Is God, as a *signified,* another aspect of "thought"—in other words, something that is within *my* head that I express when I say "God" and when I discuss God, or *is* it some transcendent Other?

We cannot really list the attributes of God, even though every religious tradition tries to do so, because God is wholly other than what and where we are (as we have previously noted); God has no *meaning* in the common parlance sense of that word, outside of the meaning that we impose on the word "God." We cannot talk about God—although we not only *do* so but make *war* based on what we assert about God—because the transcendent God is beyond any kind of language that we possess, derived as language is from our immanent realm. It is not, then, ultimately, God's *Name* concerning which we cannot state definitively that it does or does not effectively convey "Godness", but God Itself that is beyond any discussion of God.

The problem is that in its absolute transcendence, God cannot fit into our *ontology*. Everything we say of God, every attribute we ascribe to God, attempting to reify God, tries to bring God into our realm—but that defies what we have defined God to *be—Wholly Other*[35]—and every effort we make to bring God into our realm, to give God *meaning* for us so that we can enter God into our philosophical discourse about what *is* (ontology), must fail. Even as we speak of "pure Being" (by way of Ex 3:14 or otherwise), the notion conveyed by those terms ("pure" and "being") is derived from the limits of our reality and our understanding: what we understand "pure" to mean and what we understand "being" to mean.

And whatever we do to discuss it leaves us trapped in the limits of language. Nothing we say about God can escape the limits of our world, but God is by definition *beyond* our world. God remains meaningless as far as we understand meaning. God remains outside the limits of philosophy, and thus theology, in Levinas' excursus, is liberated from philosophy to the extent that its focus transcends those limits. "If the intellectual understanding of the biblical God, theology, does not reach to the level of philosophical thought, this is not because it thinks of God as *a being* without first explicating the 'being of this being,' but because in thematizing God it brings God into the course of being." (3).

If this is so, then any assertion regarding what God wants—including making war—cannot be embraced uncritically. To the extent that "religious culture" connects to theology, that culture has the power to extend us toward everything around and beyond us, yielding a rewarding internal *jihad* toward understanding what is beyond understanding and an external relationship with those around us that is peaceful in a full and complete and not merely devoid-of-war sense. The fact that too often over time and space the opposite has been true underscores the reality of human limitation—that we misunderstand God and then misconstrue the imperatives of that misunderstanding.

Religious culture has a long history of shaping both war and peace. As humans we are, according to all three Abrahamic traditions, endowed by God—the source to which our diverse forms of *re-lig-io* seek to bind us back—with free will and therefore with the ability to choose our actions (not, incidentally, because our revelationary texts explicitly say this, but because we have *interpreted* the God-breathed soul within us to encompass free will). This means that we can choose—and have chosen, over time and space—how to understand God and God's relationship with and intentions for us, including the imperative to make war in God's name.

The complex history of peace and war is the historical fruit suspended from the tree of choice—and that fruit still hangs before us into our own era. In plucking and consuming it we realize the heavenly and hellish possibilities of the present world, regardless of what the Abrahamic traditions variously assert may or may not await us in the next. As a species we continue, still today, to make war and peace, inspired or not by religion. The ultimate war is the *jihad* with ourselves and with our understanding: of the world; of the source to which we want our world and ourselves to be bound back; of the question of whether there is a prescribed manner of accomplishing this—and if so, whether we can ever really *know* or properly articulate it beyond our unprovable beliefs.

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Notes

1 There is a plethora of works, particularly in the past two decades, on Qumran and the so-called Dead Sea Scrolls. For easy accessibility to the general reader, however, I recommend two early paperback classics: *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (Allegro 1965); and *The Dead Sea Scriptures in English Translation* (Gaster 1957).

2 Jewish tradition maintains that, after the priestly Scribe, Ezra, redacted the Torah—for which the traditional date is 444 BCE—God ceased to reveal Itself through prophets. Obviously, Christianity does not embrace this idea.

3 This transpired at the extensive Council of Bishops at Nicaea that year, when the full divinity of Jesus, championed by Athanasius, prevailed over the argument by Arius that the Father is superior to and thus separate from the Son (and Holy Spirit). Athanasius contended that the three aspects of the Trinity were of the same substance: *homoiousia*.

4 One of the further distinctions, as a consequence, is that, whereas traditional Christians were (are) awaiting the return of a specific figure, traditional Jews were (are) awaiting an entirely ambiguous figure—and therefore any number of "false messiahs" littered the landscape over time, the most famous of these being Shabbetai Tzvi (1626–1676).

5 Thus, the Emperor Constantine legalizes Christianity with his Edict of Milan, in 313, and the Emperor Theodosius makes Christianity the official religion of the Empire not long after his accession to the throne in 379.

6 Augustine noted in his *City of God* and argued more specifically in his treatise, *Contra Faustum Manichaeum* (St Augustine n.d., book 22, sections 69–76) that, while individuals should not resort immediately to violence, God has given the sword to

governments for good reasons—based on Romans 13:4. Thus he asserted that Christians, as part of a government, ought not to be ashamed of protecting peace and punishing wickedness when pushed to do so by a government. He further argued that this was a personal, philosophical stance, centered on thought, not action: "What is here required is not a bodily action, but an inward disposition. The sacred seat of virtue is the heart." He further observed that to remain peaceful in the face of a grave wrong that could only be prevented or stopped by violence would be a sin. The obvious question that this just war theory yielded was/is how and when war-making may be construed as legitimately as opposed to falsely based on these principles. The issue is—again—interpretation.

7 The Armenian Church stands out for having embraced a Monophysite view.

8 Nine, more or less; the number is debatable because sometimes it is difficult to say whether one Crusade continued with a brief break or ended and a different Crusade began shortly thereafter. Moreover, there was a slew of crusades at the same time *within* Christendom. Ultimately, the number becomes not only debatable but irrelevant: my point is to suggest that there were many such wars fought in the name of God. Moreover, one can argue that Crusades—or attempted Crusades—against the Muslim world continued after the Crusades were over, as for example that of Pope Pius II against the Ottoman Turks, in 1464, that never got off the ground: virtually nobody showed up at Ancona, where the Pope was waiting.

9 I am referring specifically to the Battle of Manzikert in 1071 and its consequences for the region.

10 See Krey (2012, pp. 256–62), and much more recently, *The First Crusade* (Rubenstein 2014) and more particularly, *Armies of Heaven* (Rubenstein 2011). These words are ascribed to Raymond d'Aguiliers. A second, anonymous witness suggested "up to their ankles." Either way, the level of slaughter was presumably substantial and enjoyed by Geoffrey. The description may have been colored by references to Apocalyptic literature.

11 Crusade-inspired anti-Jewish violence in Europe was already visible during the First Crusade, but the Second brings both a more egregious level (and exilic consequences for many Jewish Rhineland communities) and the kind of distressed response exemplified by St. Bernard.

12 Thus, whereas Arians and Monophysites (and others later on) would be termed *heretics*, the conflict between the Bishop of Rome as Pope and the Patriarchs of the seven Eastern Sees regarding comparative levels of ecclesiastical authority led to a great *schism* in 1054 between the Western Church and multiple Eastern Churches. The Western Crusaders of the Fourth Crusade chose to view their Eastern Christian schismatic counterparts as infidels. Certainly the immense wealth of Byzantium available for plunder had something to do with that interpretation of the situation.

13 The question of who thought this is less relevant than the fact that the thought was being expressed. For more on Louis IX, however, see the magisterial new look at *The Tunis Crusade of 1270* (Lower 2018); and the superb *The Making of Saint Louis* (Gaposchkin 2010).

14 Note the convenience of contemporary English-language orthography that permits a distinction between "Muslim"—one who follows the specific spiritual lead of Muhammad—and "*muslim*": anyone, in particular pre-Muhammad figures such as Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, who submit to God's will.

15 There is considerable discussion as to which, beyond the four Sunni *madhab*s, and the first two of the noted Shi'i *madhab*s, constitute "major" *madhab*s. *The Four Imams and Their School*s (Haddad 2007) offers a dense yet concise discussion of the Sunni schools and there is a plethora of works on each of these and on the various non-Sunni *madhab*s.

16 One of the ways in which Islam underscores the ineffability of God is with reference to the complication of God's Name: that there are 99 "Names" to reference God—and certain types of individuals, such as mystics and, above all, the Prophet Muhammad, know/knew many more than 99 such Names.

17 This does not disobligate Christians from good as opposed to evil deeds as essential religious values: an evil-doer who is baptized does not automatically get into heaven thanks to that sacrament. My point (in the following paragraph) is that neither Islam nor Judaism carry within them the idea of Original Sin and its consequences.

18 Two Hebrew words are eventually pressed into service by Jews for "hell". One is *she'ol*, which originally, however, really only meant "grave"—or at any rate a dark and still place where those who are dead go (Rainwater 1990), among other discussions. The other, *gehenna*, is a corruption of the phrase *gei ben Hinnom*—the "Valley of Hinnom", just south by southwest of Jerusalem, with an at worst horrifying and at best ugly history: this is the "Valley of the Shadow of Death" through which the psalmist walks, "fear[ing] no evil, for Thou art with me."

19 The Arabic root, *shar*, of the word, *shar'ia*, (typically translated as "religious law" or "jurisprudence") refers to the sort of path that leads one to water in the midst of the wilderness—and is therefore essential to survival.

20 There are many discussions of what mysticism is, from that in Henry James and Evelyn Underhill to a plethora of recent volumes. A concise and accessible definition is found in Soltes (2008, pp. 1–10).

21 *Tariq(a)* is another Arabic word meaning path or trajectory; it is specifically used in Sufism to refer to the specific Sufi orders (each of which is its own uniquely and specifically contoured path or trajectory).

22 There are Christian and Jewish mystics, such as St Francis of Assisi and Abraham Abulafia who manifest this sensibility, as well. See Soltes (2008, pp. 1–10, 124–30, 135–39).

[23] *Sema* is a word, together with *dhikr*, typically used to refer to the initiation of the mystical process. Where most Sufi *tariqas* use a word or phrase as a starting point, Rumi came to use the physical act of spinning about. The *tariqa* that evolved included, among other things, whirling round one's own axis while whirling, as a group, around an empty center, with the eyes closed and the head tilted at a 28-degree angle, and with one hand pointing slightly upward, toward heaven and the other downward, toward the earth.

[24] See note #14 regarding "*muslim*" vs. "Muslim."

[25] Salaam must also be contrasted with other Arabic terms that are more limited in fullness of peaceful intention, such as *sulh*.

[26] This book is named for but should not be confused with the biblical so-called *Book of Yasher* ("Upright [Man]"), mentioned in Joshua 10:13 and 2 Sam 1:18 (and possibly, though a potential scribal error obscures it, in 1 Kings 8:53).

[27] The Amalekites, as we have observed toward the outset of this narrative, would be referenced later on in I Sam 15.

[28] Gersonides' intended audience was clearly Jewish, since he wrote in Hebrew. In a manner analogous to the Spanish Judah Halevi's intentions in writing his *Kuzari* (1140), Gersonides—aside from intense personal intellectual philosophico-theological interests—intended for his fellow Jews, a downtrodden, often persecuted minority, not to lose faith in the absolute legitimacy of their relationship with God (their *re-lig-io*, based on their interpretative understanding of God's primary revelation). Thus the model of the Israelites—positive (in war, defeating the Amalekites and the Canaanites, with divine back-up) and negative (losing faith and being afflicted by fiery serpents as a consequence) undergirds the extensive and sophisticated dialogue in which he engages with the thinking of Aristotle and its offspring. See Gersonides (1984–1999).

[29] See Soltes (2019).

[30] Quotes come from Benedict Spinoza, *Theologico-Political Treatise*, and from *Ethics*. The editions are reprints of the Bohn Library Edition containing the R. H. M. Elwes translations of the Latin originals published by George Bell & Sons in 1883 (Elwes 1951 and 1955); the page number cited here refers to the Bohn edition.

[31] The initial hostility of the Sephardic rabbinical leadership in Amsterdam toward him that led to accusations of heresy first emerged much earlier (in 1656)—before he had actually written anything, so the criticisms were based on hearsay—largely because, in an inheritance conflict with his half-sister, Spinoza went outside the community to the secular/Christian authorities. The rabbis were both affronted, ego-wise, and paranoid that airing dirty laundry in public could have a detrimental effect on the community of which he was part. This was an uneven legal war: he hardly fought the charges that led to his excommunication—if at all.

[32] Important discussions of Spinoza with regard to both his Jewishness and his importance for modern thought range from *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* (Strauss [1930] 1982); to *Spinoza, Liberalism, and the Question of Jewish Identity* (Smith 1997); to—especially—*Betraying Spinoza: The Renegade Jew Who Gave Us Modernity* (Goldstein 2006).

[33] Levinas numbers his paragraphs, so the numbers in parentheses refer to his paragraph numbers. See Levinas (1996).

[34] In the underlying issue of theology versus philosophy, one might say that he is transforming the Jewish-Christian-Muslim religious "war" regarding supersession and superiority with insights into a kind of academic "war" between these two disciplines regarding superiority.

[35] Every language has its term for "other", but the weight of it may be most accessible to English-speakers by way of the Latin term, *alienum*.

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Article

The Nonviolence Conundrum: Political Peace and Personal Karma in Jain and Hindu Traditions

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Abstract: Debates on war and peace within Jain and Hindu traditions revolve around the fear of incurring individual bad karma from violence, potentially inhibiting the individual's journey to spiritual liberation. Generally, the religious culture of both Jain and Hindu traditions elevates nonviolence to one of the highest moral principles. Jainism embraces *ahiṃsā* (non-harming) as the central doctrine, and Hindu traditions exalt non-harming as one of the highest disciplines and virtues (*dharma*). However, a personal spiritual commitment to nonviolence creates tension with the humanistic value of striving for an ethic of social justice and peace. Maintaining social harmony sometimes requires confrontation or targeted violence. It is not surprising that while both traditions laud *ahiṃsā* for personal peace, they also deliberate on the challenge of using necessary violence to maintain an orderly society. Despite sanctioning limited violence (*hiṃsā*) in acute situations, various texts and myths express a general suspicion for using war or other aggressive methods to solve social and political problems.

Keywords: *ahiṃsā*; *dharma*; Shrimad Rajchandra; Mahatma Gandhi; Jainism; the *Bhagavad-Gītā*; *Mahābhārata*; Jain *mahāvratas*

To address the tension between the principle of nonviolence and the political and social necessity of violence, this paper will first show how Jain and Hindu texts provide differing positions on the virtue of *ahiṃsā*, notwithstanding their equal concern for violence. It will then analyze select examples that demonstrate a tension between the individual ethic of nonviolence for householders committed to personal liberation and their social responsibility in professions involving law and order. Finally, by engaging with traditional texts and more recent dialogue between Mohandas K. Gandhi and his contemporary Jains, this paper will analyze how the two traditions seek to address the conflicting goals of social well-being and personal spiritual liberation, requiring withdrawal from the situations of conflict. While responsibility for social peace sometimes requires corrective and militaristic actions, the practice of nonviolence demands abstaining from karma that chain the soul to this existence. I propose that Jain and Hindu sacred texts and historical figures, such as Gandhi, seek to resolve the nonviolence conundrum by demarcating modified *ahiṃsā* for the householders (the ideology of *pravṛtti*, societal engagement) and an intensified observance for the renouncers (the inclination of *nivṛtti*, individual withdrawal from worldly engagement). Setting aside the fear of personal karmic repercussions may be a necessity in service of social harmony (nonviolent and just social order), which may require using violent force at times. Ultimately, the Jain and Hindu resources refrain from providing a philosophical and ethical justification for war. While Hindu texts provide space for a necessary war, its repercussions point to the futility of violence. Similar to some just war theorists in western traditions, they remain skeptical of war because it is inextricably connected to violence.[1] Hence, war can be justified in some situations, but it is never "just" because it violates the ethical principle of *ahiṃsā*, perpetuating the karmic cycle of violence and bondage to this existential reality.

1. Ahimsā as the Highest Dharma for Attaining Liberation

1.1. Ahimsā in Jainism: Disrupting the Flow of Karmic Bondage

The Sanskrit word *ahiṃsā,* found in the texts of Jain and Hindu philosophy, connotes a negation of the word *hiṃsā*, "killing" or "injury"; hence it is translated as "not-harming" or "non-injury." One of the most detailed and intricate definitions of *ahiṃsā* comes from Lord Mahāvīra, the 24th Tīrthāṅkara of Jainism:

> All living beings desire happiness, and have revulsion from pain and suffering. They are fond of life, they love to live, long to live, and they feel repulsed at the idea of hurt and injury to or destruction of their life. Hence no living being should be hurt, injured, or killed.
>
> All things existing, all things living, all things whatsoever, should not be slain, or treated with violence, or insulted, or tortured, or driven away.
>
> He who hurts living beings himself, or gets them hurt by others, or approves of hurt caused by others, augments the world's hostility towards himself.
>
> (Jain 1983, pp. 187–88)[2]

This mandate by Lord Mahāvīra has led the Jain religious culture to hold non-harming in high regard. The first essential vow for Jain followers involves a commitment to non-harming: "I renounce all killing of living beings, whether subtle or gross, whether movable or immovable. Nor shall I myself kill living beings nor cause others to do it, nor consent to it" (Jacobi 2020, pp. 28–29).

Christopher Chapple provides a glimpse of the exhaustive Jain view of life forms: "Life dwells in rocks, clods of earth, drops of water, flowing streams, radiant sunbeams, flickering flames, and gusts of wind. There are also viruses and bacteria, fungi and plants, birds, and mammals, including humans" (Chapple 2017, p. 112). While Hindu and Buddhist traditions exalt the virtue of nonviolence, Jain texts provide the most detailed scope of what can be termed nonviolence. Nicholas F. Gier rightly notes that "Jainism offers us the first and unarguably the most extreme conception of nonviolence" (Gier 2004, p. 29). For Jains, nonviolence relates to their metaphysics of the sanctity of each soul. Hence, harming any living being, however small, obstructs the spiritual goal of liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth.

Jain metaphysics encompass the belief that each living being—from humans and animals to micro-organisms—possesses a soul, which becomes mired by the force of the consequences of activities (karmas). The goal of human life is to get rid of all karmas to realize the pure state of the soul—liberation. Padmanabh Jaini succinctly elucidates, "If the soul becomes subject to attachment and aversion, it gets tainted by *hiṃsā* and thus becomes harmful to itself and others . . . The orientation of the Jaina discussion on *ahiṃsā*, therefore, proceeds from the perspective of one's own soul and not so much from the standpoint of the protection of other beings or the welfare of humanity as a whole" (Jaini 2004, p. 48). Jaini rightly expresses the spiritual focus of nonviolence and how it has motivated the Jain monastic creation of scrupulous rules to avoid harming any living beings. However, this orientation also causes dilemmas for the Jain lay community's social ethic of self-preservation when faced with aggression and violence. How Jain texts and the community offer nuanced views of nonviolence for householders will be shown in the second part of this article.

1.2. Ahimsā in Hinduism as the Ethical Principle and the Highest Duty

The *Vedas*, the earliest texts of Hindu tradition, emphasize mutual friendship, amity, and social harmony. According to the *Yajurveda* (XXXVI.18):

> May all beings look at me
>
> With friendly eye.
>
> May I look at all

With friendly eye.

May all look at one another

With friendly eye. (Shastri and Shastri 2008, p. 62)

The Vedic teachings do not elaborate on *ahiṃsā* as Jain traditions do, but they certainly offer a socio-ethical framework for maintaining peace, goodwill, and harmony. Later Hindu texts also celebrate the virtue of *ahiṃsā,* and the Hindu Dharma codes of conduct include nonviolence. The yoga philosophy of Patañjali enshrines *ahiṃsā* as the first of five *yamas* (disciplines) in the five restraints. The other four *yamas* are *satya* (truth), *asteya* (non-stealing), *brahmacarya* (restraint of the senses), and *aparigraha* (non-possessiveness).[3] Intriguingly, the most extensive praise for nonviolence comes from the *Mahābhārata*, the epic encompassing the tale of an extremely violent civil war. In his post-war instruction in the art of ruling, a mighty warrior Bhīṣma instructs King Yudhiṣṭhira about the value of abstention from harm and cruelty:

> Ahimsa [non-violence] is the highest dharma [law, sacred duty]. Ahimsa is the best tapas [religious austerity]. Ahimsa is the greatest gift. Ahimsa is the highest self-control. Ahimsa is the highest sacrifice. Ahimsa is the highest power. Ahimsa is the highest friend. Ahimsa is the highest truth. Ahimsa is the highest teaching. (Mahābhārata XIII: 116: 38–39)[4]

Although the text uses the same Sanskrit term for nonviolence as Jain sources, M.N. Dutta translates *ahiṃsā* as non-cruelty, not non-harming. Perhaps the translation is meant to fit the instruction for King Yudhiṣṭhira. According to the Hindu *dharma* laws (duties) for the warrior class, a king is committed to protecting their kingdom and subjects, which may include using violence against an aggressor. According to the *Mahābhārata,* a *kṣatriya* (a member of the ruling class) "should protect the people. Always trying his best for the destruction of robbers and wicked people, he should always display his prowess in battle . . . There is no greater duty for him than the suppression of robbers" (Mahābhārata XII: 60: 13–16).[5] Hence, kings may deploy necessary violence, but they are advised to refrain from acts of cruelty, even against their opponents.

Nevertheless, the verses preceding the above praise of *ahiṃsā* in the *Mahābhārata* resemble the Jain notion of karmic consequences incurred by acts of violence. Grandsire Bhīṣma says, "He who acts with hostility towards another becomes the victim of similar deeds done by that other. Whatever acts one does in whatever bodies, he has to suffer the consequences thereof in those bodies" (Mahābhārata XII: 116. 36-37). The law of karma dictates that sustainable inner peace and social harmony cannot be obtained through acts of violence. Prominent Indian philosopher S. Radhakrishnan writes, "All acts produce their effects which are recorded in both organism and environment. Good produces good, evil, evil. Love increases our power of love, hatred, our power of hatred" (Howard 2018, p. 85). This belief that each action connects to its consequences has deterred some followers of the Jain, Hindu, and Buddhist traditions from engaging in a householder's lifestyle, motivating them to adopt the path of a disengaged renouncer.

However, both nonviolence and karmic consequences have also been interpreted pragmatically in the Hindu texts, such as the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, and through various Jain narratives. Philosopher Bimal K. Matilal characterizes the literal definition of karma, which can lead to disengagement, as an "older karma doctrine" because it suggests that all actions create bondage: "The law of *karma* dictated that all such [ritual acts involving animal sacrifice and actions of daily life] activities were creating as well as contributing further to the bondage of moral agent." He notes that "the śramaṇas [the renouncer tradition] preached a way to break the vicious cycle by their philosophy of 'non action'" (Matilal and Ganeri 2002, p. 128). While serious seekers of spiritual liberation often adopt a limited involvement and non-confrontational lifestyle, out of fear of the repercussions of actions that may cause violence, various Hindu and Jain texts and authors seek to provide alternative ways to authorize actions, which may include violence, to disrupt violence itself.

2. Debates on Justified Violence and the Question of Karmic Consequences in Jain and Hindu Religious Culture

Both Jain and Hindu traditions, though elevating ahiṃsā to a high personal ethical virtue, grapple with social responsibility. An individual may withdraw from acts of aggression to avoid negative karma. However, maintaining a culture of peace in the social sphere requires individual to act, which may include active confrontation, in response to aggression or violence. Hinduism's varṇāśramadharma-based civic structure (duties according to caste and stage of life) traditionally encompassed social responsibility for maintaining peace in Hinduism. Jainism's *Śramaṇic* (striving for spiritual liberation) ethos focused on the non-confrontational social ethic of care for all beings. Notwithstanding their focus on peace and nonviolence, the accounts of warrior kings and concerned laypeople in Jain literature show their awareness of inevitable conflict. Jain and Hindu traditions offer didactic tools to help straddle the individual ethic of avoiding negative karmas and the civic duty of addressing negative actions that create social disorderliness.

2.1. Jainism's Measured Violence to Maintain Peace

Because *ahiṃsā* is the central principle in Jainism, debate about justified confrontation is virtually absent in Jainaśāsana (Jain religious theory and practice). Traditionally, the Jain monastic community, dedicated to achieving spiritual liberation, resorts to *mahāvratas* (great vows) requiring extreme self-control and vigilance. Monks and nuns pay attention to every act, word, and thought to avoid violence toward any living being—from invisible micro-organisms to mighty beasts. Anthropologist Lawrence A. Babb provides a detailed description of the Jain ascetic lifestyle:

> Ascetics drink only boiled water so as to avoid harming small forms of life that would otherwise be present. Their food must be carefully inspected to be sure that it is free of small creatures. They must avoid walking on ground where there might be growing things, and do not bathe so as not to harm minute forms of water-borne life . . . They may not fan themselves lest harm come to airborne life . . . They may not use any artificial means of conveyance. (Babb 1996, p. 56)

Such careful attention to micro-organisms leaves little room to discuss questions regarding necessary violence against the sentient human beings. Hence, Jain religious literature, unlike Hindu texts, rarely engages with questions related to the ethic of necessary war because Jain spiritual teachers, who are considered experts in matters of Jain doctrines, do not generally endorse any acts involving violence.

However, it is important to note that even though Jainism holds the utmost respect for all life, it is by no means "cloaked in the negation of life" (Tobias 1991, p. 6). Jain laypeople only take *aṇuvratas* (minor or lesser vows requiring modified restrictions in adherence to the five vows), which allow the observant to use necessary violence involved in boiling water, cooking, cleaning, and collecting material for ritual worship. Jain householders also adopt occupations to earn wealth and sustain families, ritual traditions, and, above all, support the monastic community. Jain monks and nuns depend on laypeople's charity to sustain their lives and support their spiritual pursuits. Laypeople incur good karmas because of such sacrifice and service. Nevertheless, in uniformity with the commitment to nonviolence, Jainism prohibits laypeople from taking on trades that may be potentially harmful to living souls. These include agricultural enterprises as well as those involving meat products, armaments, and winemaking. Jains have traditionally selected mercantile professions, such as jewelers, bankers, grocers, and manufacturers, as well as professions in the medical and teaching fields. Chapple, however, notes the instances that show exceptions to this norm: "Jains in the southern part of India are largely agriculturists and in years past many served as generals and warriors" (Chapple 2008, p. 7). Looking more closely, it becomes evident that the Jain tradition is not homogeneous in its practices and holds a variety of views.

It would not be proper to classify Jains as pacifists (strictly avoiding necessary defense). Instead, Jains might be better considered as proponents of nonviolence, which may require standing up to violence. Kim Skoog writes:

> Jainas (mendicants and lay followers alike) realize that it is impossible to live a life totally in accordance with the principle of nonviolence . . . There were a number of famous Jaina generals and soldiers, none of whom was condemned by Jaina leaders or followers. Overall, it can be noted that there does not seem to be clear, well established guidelines on how lay Jaina followers are expected to respond to war and terrorism. Though nonviolence is encouraged, it is not an absolute, there are perceivable exceptions. (Skoog 2004, p. 30)

Skoog notes that this "flexibility" poses dilemmas for individuals when deciding on a course for themselves. Historically, the Jain community of about six million practitioners co-existed with its fellow communities of Hindu Dharma traditions. Hinduism and Jainism share many myths, ethical rules, and social laws. Generally, the Jain community has also been influenced by Hindu laws in matters of civic duties for householders and people in power. Padamnabh Jaini writes: "The Jaina lawgivers of medieval times accorded with customary Hindu law in these matters." He proceeds to provide the example of the tenth-century king, Somadeva, who "stipulated that 'a king should strike down only those enemies of his kingdom who appear on the battlefield bearing arms, but never those people who are downtrodden, weak, or who are friends' " (Jaini 2004, p. 52). Indeed, such a position of Jain lawgivers has been recognized as a deviation, albeit a necessary one, from the law of *ahiṃsā* within the tradition's canon and religious narratives. Even a glorious victory on the battlefield leads to feelings of remorse, acts of self-purification, and expiation for violent karmas.

Jain literature sanctions laypeople to address violent conflict with "*virodhi-hiṁsā*: that is countering violence with violence as a final resort" (Jaini 2004, p. 53). In the story told by Lord Mahāvīra himself, a soldier Varuṇa takes the vow to strike the aggressor only after he is attacked. Following the first strike, the mighty Varuṇa courageously obliterates the enemy. Once violence has been committed, Varuṇa, concerned about the consequences in his own afterlife, immediately sits on the ground to venerate Lord Mahāvīra to achieve his own peaceful death. Varuṇa does not rejoice in his victory but fears the adverse repercussions of his deeds. He seeks to abandon all feelings of hostility toward his enemy. Jaini surmises that Jain texts and traditions "appear to have outlined a path of nonviolence that would allow a lay adherent to conduct his daily life with human dignity while permitting him to cope with the unavoidable reality of the world in which violence is all-pervasive" (Jaini 2004, pp. 58–60). Astute awareness of the pervasiveness of violence also helps Jain practitioners uphold social harmony and deters them from perpetuating violence by waging wars for political power.

While classifying various levels of *hiṃsā*, Sulekh Jain, a prominent member of the Jain community in the United States, lists *rajkeeya himsa* (violence related to the matters of state). This form of violence involves an individual's duty to follow the state's civil laws (Jain 2016, p. 81). A Jain must resist injustices and work to protect the law and order of a society, which may require violence, such as punishing a criminal and stopping imminent violent acts. While the monastic community stays away from such controversies, this view is consistent with the lay members of the Jain community I recently interviewed. A Jain householder, who resides in the United States, recently told me, "Jains are not cowards." Although he follows the Jain vegan diet and avoids eating root vegetables (as they cause more violence to the creatures of the soil), he provided examples of Jains who fulfill their civic responsibility by serving in the military and practicing medicine and law. These professions require great vigilance in avoiding unnecessary violence, and they are motivated by the intention to serve, maintain social order, and protect lives.

2.2. Hinduism's Sanctioning Violence for Disrupting the Cycle of Violence

In the Hindu moral (*dharma*) code, nonviolence is one of five components contributing to the prescribed conduct for all people, irrespective of caste, social status, or gender. According to the *Manusmṛti* (Bühler 1886), this includes, "Abstention from injuring (creatures), veracity, abstention from unlawfully appropriating (the goods of others), purity

[inner and outer], and control of the organs [senses]" (Bühler 1886, X: 63).[6] As noted above, nonviolence is considered the highest *dharma* in various Hindu scriptures because taking the life of sentient beings leads to dire karmic consequences. However, various Hindu texts and traditions do not hesitate to permit violence in order to (1) stop violence and acts of serious aggression; (2) perform the *dharma* of a warrior (*kṣatriya dharma*) for the defense of the nation and its people; and (3) maintain social order through a legal system. The *Manusmṛti*, while upholding nonviolence as an essential duty, declares in plain terms:

> One may slay without hesitation an assassin who approaches (with murderous intent), whether (he be one's) teacher, a child or an aged man, or a Brahmana deeply versed in the Vedas. By killing an assassin the slayer incurs no guilt, whether (he does it) publicly or secretly; in that case fury recoils upon fury. (*Manusmṛti*: VIII: 350–51).[7]

The sanctioning of violence against an assailant when confronting aggression and oppression corresponds with Jain *virodhi hiṃsā*, which is oriented toward disrupting acts of violence. However, Jain religious culture is more reticent about using such violence, while Hindu social stratification makes room for those who take responsibility to defend and punish when duty calls.

The *varṇāśramadharma* system of Hinduism gives authority to those in ruling and military professions to use force for defending and protecting subjects. In the epic, the *Mahābhārata*, Queen Draupadī makes the case for waging war against those cousins who sexually assaulted her in public and deceived her husband. King Yudhiṣṭhira, the embodiment of Dharma himself, considers violence, anger, and revenge destructive forces, ignoring his duty as a warrior and guardian of the law. However, Draupadī incites her husband, King Yudhiṣṭhira, to take up necessary violence. She pleads: "O king, this [is] to be the time when you should display your might to the avaricious sons of Dhritarashtra who always injure others. This is not the time for showing forgiveness toward the Kurus; when the hour for showing might arrives, it behooves you to display it." (*Mahābhārata*: 3.28.34-36).[8] Draupadī encourages King Yudhiṣṭhira to deploy the necessary power to confront the destructive and immoral forces represented by their nefarious cousins, the 100 sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra. Draupadī's insights emerge from Hindu classical *dharma* (legal and civic laws and duties) expositions: "In classical Hindu legal texts, the rule of kings (*rāja-dharma*) and their proper conduct (*rājanīti*) includes their divine right to govern, conquer, and wage war in protection of dharma" (Dunbar 2011, p. 4).[9] Draupadī reminds her husband about his political and familial duty as a king and a warrior. King Yudhiṣṭhira seemed to be taking on the duty of a renouncer (a person of *nivṛitti*) by hesitating to engage in necessary military conflict against his aggressors. This dialogue differentiates the king's individual ethic of nonviolence from his social ethic of upholding law and justice.

Furthermore, the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, which is a part of the *Mahābhārata*, provides a deontological approach and the *dharma* (doing one's duty) ethical framework for engaging with malevolent forces. Lord Kṛṣṇa, a divine incarnation of Viṣṇu, instructs the mighty warrior Arjuna to do his duty as a warrior at the moment when Arjuna becomes paralyzed by seeing his cousins and elders arrayed in opposition on the battlefield. Kṛṣṇa reminds him of his duty as a leader of the army and warns him that if he abandons this duty, he will be considered a coward. Kṛṣṇa recounts the award for performing his political duty of fighting an inevitable *dharma* (righteous) war:

> If you are killed, you win heaven;
>
> If you triumph, you enjoy the earth;
>
> Therefore, Arjuna, stand up
>
> And resolve to fight the battle! (*Bhagavad-Gītā*, 2: 37)

This command and promise by Kṛṣṇa could be seen as an act of glorifying war. However, the *Mahābhārata* (the *Bhagavad-Gītā* is a part of the epic) provides gruesome portrayals of post-war suffering. In this way, even though Hindu and Jain sources sanction

necessary war and, at times, glorify it, they do not fail to show the horrible consequences of violence. They may result in personal karmic repercussions in the afterlife or as collective suffering, loss, and remorse in this life.

3. Post-War Suffering in Jain and Hindu Sources: Creating an Awareness for Personal and Societal Consequences

Various Jain resources, from epics to the *Purāṇas*, orient the followers to choose the path of *ahiṃsā*, despite the narratives' justification of necessary war. In her article comparing Buddhist and Jaina attitudes towards warfare, Juan Wu brings attention to the ways Jain texts deal with the post-war consequences *vis-à-vis* the warrior's future birth. She quotes, *Viyāhapannatti*, a Śvetāmbara text, which contains the dialogue between Gautama Buddha and Lord Mahāvīra: "O Venerable Sir, being devoid of good conduct, [devoid of virtues, unrestrained,] not observing any vow or fast, enraged, wrathful, killed in the battle, with passions unpacified, at the time of death, having finished their lives, where did those men go, where were they reborn?' [Mahāvīra said] 'O Gautama, they were generally reborn in hell or as animals.'" (Wu 2015, p. 102). Even though war was necessary, violence committed by soldiers subjects them to unfavorable rebirths. Wu points out that soldiers who were dedicated to the Jain religious path and values are exonerated from the ill consequences of violence: "In the Viyāhapannatti, while Mahāvīra also points out that many soldiers fighting to the death in the 'Battle of the Chariot with the Mace' underwent unpleasant rebirths due to their impassioned mental status and lack of religious piety, he further clarifies that there was indeed one soldier, the Jaina layman Varuṇa, reborn in heaven" (Wu 2015, p. 101).

As noted earlier, Varuṇa exemplifies the ethos of privileging Jain ideals while engaging in necessary military duties. When his end was near, mortally wounded, he withdrew from the battle and spent his last breaths worshipping the *Jinās* (*Tīrthāṅkaras*) and observing ascetic vows. Through such narratives, Jain traditions demonstrate the right way to participate in laypeople's obligations to confront the forces of violent aggression. As Jaini puts it, the story of Varuṇa shows that the Jainas, from early times, permit laypeople "to cope with the unavoidable reality of the world in which violence is all-pervasive" (Jaini 2004, p. 60). The famous tale of combat between Bhārata, the son of the first *Tīrthāṅkara* Ṛṣabha, and his brother Bāhubali corroborates the Jain vision of the futility of war and violence. When Bāhubali was defeated by Bhārata, instead of despairing, he took Jain monastic vows. Bāhubali meditated and was released from the agony of the cycle of repeated death and rebirth. He continues to hold a prominent place of reverence in Jainism (Jaini 2004, pp. 54–55).

While Jainism focuses on individual karmic suffering and unfavorable rebirth caused by violent acts, Hindu traditions bring attention to the pain of survivors of war as well as their remorse during their lifetime on this earth. Following the war of the *Mahābhārata*, the dialogue between Lord Kṛṣṇa and Queen Gāndhārī (the mother of 100 deceased sons) provides the various dimensions of suffering and grief (*śoka*) by surveying the battlefield. She cries out:

> Many who were handsome and had good color have been pawed by the flesh-eaters and lie there in their necklaces of gold, their eyes bulging like bull's eyes. Others still wearing their armor and carrying their gleaming weapons, seem to the flesh-eaters to be alive. (*Mahābhārata*, XI.16.38)[10]

Furthermore, the *Mahābhārata* shows the post-war suffering from the vantage point of women, a perspective focused on in recent studies on just war and pacifism (e.g., Fiala 2008; Ryan 2020; Chappell 2009). Gāndhārī shows the same battlefield on which Kṛṣṇa asked Arjuna to fight the worthy battle, but now the battlefield resounds with the wails of women, not the shouts of enthusiastic warriors:

> Many shriek and wail upon seeing the bodies, and others beat their heads with their delicate hands. The earth seems to be crammed with fallen heads, hands,

> and every sort of limb mixed with every other and put into heaps. And thrilling with horror upon seeing headless bodies and bodiless heads, the women, unaccustomed to these things, are bewildered. After joining a head to a body, they stare at it blankly, and then they are pained to realize, "This is not his," but do not see another one in that place. (*Mahābhārata*, XI.16.50-53)[11]

These scenes of pain and agony resemble accounts of hell in Jain and Hindu texts. Gāndhārī's vivid description of mutilation and mourning puts a question mark on the justness of any war. James L. Fitzgerald rightly notes, "The human cost of the Bhārata war is fully registered in the epic only through this mantic vision of Gāndhārī's" (Fitzgerald 2004, p. 24). The listener of the tale is left to ponder the hollowness of glorifying the warrior dharma to engage in war.

Not only are the women bereaved by the loss of their husbands, sons, and relatives, but the victorious King Yudhiṣṭhira becomes consumed by grief and guilt for having caused such great destruction. Yudhiṣṭhira, whose army defeated the Kuru army, cries out:

> Damn the *kṣatra* way! Damn the power of mighty chest! Damn the unforgiving stubbornness that brought us to this disaster. To get a piece of the earth we totally abandoned men who were equal to the earth, men who we should have never killed. And now we live with our kinsmen dead and our wealth exhausted (*Mahābhārata*, XII.7.5).[12]

The *Mahābhārata* thus shows the other side of warriors' pride and the consequences of participation in battle. Postwar suffering and anguish pose the question: How can a war be just (righteous) when it results in carnage and the cruel dance of violence and pain? Grief-stricken, Yudhiṣṭhira asks a poignant question in the *Mahābhārata*: "If someone is victorious but grieves like a poor afflicted imbecile, how can he think of that as victory? In fact, his enemies have defeated him." (Das 2010, p. 234). In his book, *The Difficulty of Being Good: On the Subtle Art of Dharma*, Gurcharan Das refers to the inconsolable grief (*Mahābhārata* X.10.13) of the surviving ones after their loved ones have been brutally murdered. He deliberates on the challenge of engaging in necessary violence through the remorse of Yudhiṣṭhira, who was always reluctant to wage war. The victory seems like defeat because of the death and destruction of the loved ones.

Das reaches the same conclusion that Gandhi did, many decades ago, when he read the *Mahābhārata*: "When the Kurukshetra War comes to an end, it becomes clear that the theme of the *Mahābhārata* is not war but peace" (Das 2010, p. 251). Yudhiṣṭhira, as do Varuṇa and Bāhubali of the Jain tradition, sees the spiritual path as the way out of misery. Following his victory, "Yudhiṣṭhira's sense of sorrow, guilt, and shame was so great, his conviction that the war had been wrong was so deep, he could not accept the fruits of these actions" (Fitzgerald 2004, p. 86).[13] He announces: "I am going to leave behind the pleasures of society and go. The road one travels all by oneself is peaceful" (Das 2010, p. 234). Although he is persuaded by the elders and Lord Kṛṣṇa to stay and rule the kingdom, Yudhiṣṭhira remains disenchanted and pessimistic. Ultimately, both Jain and Hindu traditions approach the questions of war and violence through the prism of violence and its consequences.

4. Nonviolence Conundrum and Some Resolutions: Insights from Mahatma Gandhi and Shrimad Rajchandra

The following section offers insights from two twentieth-century thinkers: the Jain philosopher Shrimad Rajchandra (1867–1901) and Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948). Gandhi was influenced both by the personal ethic of nonviolence, as propounded in Jainism, and the social ethic of performing one's duty, as underscored in the *Bhagavad-Gītā*. Gandhi sought Rajchandra's council concerning dilemmas of life. Although he was dedicated to nonviolence in his personal life, Gandhi deliberated on questions of necessary war and violence as he confronted situations that tested the limits of *ahiṃsā*. Apparently, Gandhi was influenced by Shrimad Rajchandra's staunch views on *ahiṃsā*, informed by the Jain

commitment to nonviolence. Nevertheless, he creatively forged his own path that navigated both a layperson's duty of necessary violence and a renouncer's commitment to the Jain and Hindu culture of nonviolence. Gandhi's views on handling venomous snakes and menacing monkeys provide insights into his perspective on addressing violent situations.

While Gandhi was in South Africa, he wrote a series of questions to Rajchandra (he lovingly addressed him as Raychandbhai), including this inquiry: "If a snake comes and bites us, what should we do? Should we remain calm and silent and allow it to bite, or kill it outright to save ourselves?" (Majumdar 2020, p. 113). Rajchandra was a lay Jain householder, but in practice, he followed Jain principles ardently. His response to Gandhi is revealing, "If I reply to this question in the affirmative and say, let the snake bite, it would, of course, become a great problem . . . but those who have realized the truth, that the body is a transient thing, it would not be at all reasonable to kill a creature which is attached to the body" (Majumdar 2020, p. 113). In his response, Rajchandra, as a layperson, acknowledges the "problem" in allowing a snake to bite, but, as a seeker of the Jain path, he privileges the path of absolute nonviolence for the enlightened beings who tread the path to attain liberation. Undoubtedly, his views are consistent with the Jain perspectives on war as outlined above.

While Rajchandra advises Gandhi to sacrifice his transient body to save the snake's life, a close examination of Gandhi's views reveals that he negotiated both paths: the practice of nonviolence in his own life and the social responsibility of maintaining harmony and justice as a social reformer and political leader. He wrote in 1921, "The purest way of seeking justice against the murderers is not to seek it . . . Their punishment cannot recall the dead to life. I would ask those whose hearts are lacerated to forgive them, not out of their weakness—for they are able every way to have them punished—but out of their immeasurable strength" (Howard 2008, p. 139). Gandhi argued for forgiveness and reconciliation, fearing the law of karma. However, he was also aware of the moral dilemmas associated with prohibiting violence in all situations. The *Bhagavad-Gītā* presents the reader with perhaps the direst of all predicaments: the choice between violence and nonviolence against one's own kinsmen in war. Arjuna's cousins had transgressed the limits of humanity, and they demanded war as the only solution for the settlement of the disputed kingdom. Gandhi was cognizant of the limits of absolute nonviolence in social and political contexts. The complexity of sociopolitical issues of defense against terrorism and war caused him to deliberate further on this:

> Suppose a man runs amuck and goes furiously about sword in hand, and killing anyone that comes his way, and no one dares to capture him alive. Any one who dispatches this lunatic will earn the gratitude of the community and be regarded as a benevolent man. From the point of view of ahimsa it is the plain duty of everyone to kill such a man. (Howard 2008, p. 141)

Gandhi was asked by his colleagues about his views about war against the Nazis. On 11 November 1938, Gandhi writes, "My sympathies are all with the Jews. They have been the untouchables of Christianity. The German persecution of the Jews seems to have no parallel in history. If there ever could be a justifiable war in the name of and for humanity, war against Germany to prevent the wanton persecution of a whole race would be completely justified." Gandhi sees a "problem" with the genocide of the Jewish people, which reflects Rajchandra's hesitation for advising laypeople to submit to violence and aggression (as he showed through the example of the venomous snake bite threat). However, he adds his personal stance, "I do not believe in any war" (Gandhi 1999, vol. 29, pp. 239–40). In this vein, Gandhi interpreted the call to war in the *Bhagavad-Gītā* allegorically. He demonstrated his understanding of the limits of nonviolence in certain situations and argued for using any means to disrupt the suffering of innocent people.

Das recapitulates Gandhi's pragmatic philosophy of nonviolence, "Gandhi taught the world that *ahiṃsā* is not pacifism. Nonviolence does not come from weakness but from strength, and only the strong and disciplined hope to practice it nonviolence is active and even dangerous, as the British discovered to their discomfort during India's

freedom struggle" (Das 2010, pp. 249–50). As a public figure, Gandhi used nonviolence strategically to fight injustice and reluctantly permitted war against violent forces. As an individual committed to truth and nonviolence, he rejected the notion of war. Instead, he used nonviolence as a "weapon" and asked those victims of the Nazi atrocities to do the same. However, he realized the limitation of nonviolent methods on the face of such acts of hate and senseless murder.

Gandhi's method of *ahiṃsā* transforms into this ethical virtue in a technique that can be used to confront structures of violence. Gandhi sought to resolve the nonviolence conundrum by interpreting *ahiṃsā* as the "mightiest weapon" to resisting evil. He also recognized situations where a nonviolent fight is not a possibility. Gandhi's words underscore the strength of reconciliation and nonviolence: "By non-violence I do not mean cowardice. I do believe that, where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence, I would advise violence. But I believe that forgiveness adorns a soldier. And so I am not pleading for India to practice non-violence because she is weak, but because she is conscious of her power and strength" (Gandhi 1999, vol. 27, p. 246). Gandhi transformed *ahiṃsā* into a weapon and wielded it against violent forces. The *dharma* of nonviolence, when practiced with attention to justice and compassion, can lead to less violence. It is important to address dangerous situations, even if they require violence, to avoid greater suffering, as history has shown. In times of distress, Gandhi's views are consistent with those rules for the layperson and the ascetic found in Jainaśāsana and the *Mahābhārata*: the duty of defending the innocent, which may require violence, and the observance of *ahiṃsā*, which may require self-sacrifice.

5. Conclusions

Debates on just war within Jain and Hindu traditions emphasize a concern for violence that is often justified during wars—a concern that has been underscored by western pacifist traditions. While engaging with the subject of just war, philosopher Jon Nuttall writes, "If whole-sale death and destruction is permissible in times of war, does this mean that there are no moral limits that can be placed on the actions of those who engage in war or can we still retain some distinction between those actions that are right and those that are wrong?" (Nuttall 1993, p. 161). What Nuttall asks for, Jain and Hindu traditions have sought to do: questioning the efficacy of war as well as holding warriors accountable. Culpability emerges in the form of personal karmic repercussions and the community grief for lives lost in war. For the Jain and Hindu traditions, both forms of culpability became deterrents against the inclination to glorify war.

Predrag Cicovacki, in the preface to a comprehensive two volume treatise on nonviolence, comments on a general sentiment about the war, which can be seen in our current times: "In the frenzy of war, those who are violent are hailed as heroes and saviors. Those who refuse to choose sides, those who do not shoot and murder, those who resort to nonviolence, are regarded as traitors and cowards. There are 'just' wars and the 'right' to self-defense, which pretty conveniently justifies the use of all means" (Cicovacki and Hess 2017, vol. 1, p. xi). The use of violent means hardly ever results in a positive and peaceful outcome. Gandhi expressed doubt to those who justified any means for a certain outcome. Major General Smedley Butler, a veteran of World War I, writes, "The general public shoulders the bill [of war]. And what is this bill? This bill renders a horrible accounting. Newly placed gravestones. Mangled bodies. Shattered minds. Broken hearts and homes. Economic instability. Depression and all its attendant miseries" (Chappell 2009, p. 71). The path of *ahiṃsā*, which requires diligent vigilance to preempt situations that may lead to warfare, is always preferable.

Admittedly, at times, traditional Hindu traditions laud the militaristic ethic as a justified means to maintain law and justice. Ultimately, Hindu texts, as in the case of the *Mahābhārata*, show that violent means result in personal suffering and social misery. In current times, any political defense for aggression by some groups, in light of these ancient texts, attests to their selective and contrived interpretations for a very different context. Hindu and Jain traditions do not deny the absolute inevitability of violence when

performing civic duties, but, simultaneously, they draw ample attention to the adverse personal and social cost of war and violence.[14]

Among Hannah Arendt's "reflections" on the social-political turbulence of the 1960s, she warns that "The practice of violence, like all action, changes the world, but the most probable change is to a more violent world" (Arendt 1970, p. 80). From this understanding, it is possible to assume that a religious culture of nonviolence was the reason for the historic lack of a number of violent scrimmages in India's religious cultures, as compared with other countries. Historian A.L. Basham notes, "There was sporadic cruelty and oppression no doubt, but, in comparison with conditions in other early cultures, it was mild. To us the most striking feature of ancient Indian civilization was its humanity" (Basham 1954, pp. 8–9). Historically, both Jain and Hindu traditions have adopted pragmatic approaches to the social ethic of self-defense, defending one's community and homeland, and maintaining social order.

Ultimately, Jain traditions use martial vocabulary to define their goal of spiritual liberation: a *Jīnā* (conqueror) or *arihanta* (destroyer of enemies) is the highest spiritual state in which all malevolent desires are overcome by an individual. In Hinduism, an individual seeking the ultimate end of *mokṣa* (freedom from the cycle of death and rebirth) observes the restraint of all selfish desires and cultivates amity toward all (regardless of their caste, ethnicity, and relationship). Although there are differences between the Jain and Hindu social ethic of conducting necessary warfare (as Mahāvīra never glorifies war), the ethical principle of *ahiṃsā* and the doctrine of personal karma helped create a framework that allows violence only as a last resort, without losing sight of the spiritual goal of liberation. What we can today garner from Jain and Hindu traditions' rich engagement with the nonviolence conundrum is that the dharma of nonviolence, when practiced with attention to justice and compassion, has the incredible capacity to reduce the everyday violence so prevalent around us. Indeed, attention must be paid to confront the extremist forces in religions that selectively use ancient texts to serve their modern goals of political power through aggression.

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Notes

1 Western thinkers, starting with Augustine, Hellenic expositions on war, and western scholars, such as Michael Walzer, John Rawls, and Ramsey Paul theorize the idea of just war. See: (Walzer 1977; Fiala 2008).

2 Jyoti Prasad Jain cites the *Jain Sūtras* that underscore the centrality of nonviolence in the religious culture of Jainism.

3 *ahiṃsāsatyāsteyabrahmacaryāparigrahā yāmaḥ (II Sutra 30).* Hindu yoga system's five disciplines (*yamas*) are similar to Jain Dharma's five *aṇuvratas* or limited vows for laypeople, namely nonviolence (*ahiṃsā*), truth (*satya*), non-stealing (*achaurtya or asteya)*, control of the senses (*brahmacarya*), and non-attachment non-possession (*aparigraha*).

4 In the translation of *Mahābhārata* by M.N. Dutt, the word *ahimsā* is translated as "abstention from cruelty" (Dutt 1994, vol. 9, p. 479).

5 The translation is from The *Mahābhārata* (Vol. 7) by M.N. Dutt. In this section, Grandsire Bhīṣma describes the duties of all four castes.

6 *The Laws of Manu* (Ch. X) states: https://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/manu/manu10.htm Accessed 29 October 2022.

7 *The Laws of Manu* (Ch. VIII) lists the duties for a king. https://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/manu/manu08.htm Accessed 29 October 2022.

8 The translation is from The *Mahābhārata* (Vol. 2) by M.N. Dutt. In this section, Draupadī expresses her concern regarding Yudhiṣṭhira's lack of anger in the face of atrocities inflicted by their cousins. She incites him to use necessary force abandoning "forgiveness" toward their aggressors.

9 Dunbar adds: "Both the *Manusmṛti* and the *Arthaśāstra*, therefore affirm that war is unavoidable in life but the former insists on regulating war through principles of human conduct, which are known as the rules/conduct of war (yuddha-nīti)" (Dunbar 2011, p. 4).

10 This passage and the following passages are from James L. Fitzgerald's translation of the *Mahābhārata* (Fitzgerald 2004, vol. 7, p. 56).

[11] The *Mahābhārata*, trans. and ed. James L. Fitzgerald, p. 9.

[12] The *Mahābhārata*, trans. and ed. James L. Fitzgerald, p. 180. Śānti parvan, Chapter 7, Verses 5–7: "*dhig astu kṣātram ācāraṃ dhig astu balam aurasam dhig astv amarṣaṃ yenemām āpadaṃ gamitā vayam sādhu kṣamā damaḥ śaucam avairodhyam amatsaraḥ ahiṃsā satyavacanaṃ nityāni vanacāriṇām*." The *Mahābhārata* devotes many pages that recount the suffering from the post-war perspective of the surviving ones. These passages show not the dispassionate militaristic side of war, but the traumatic and painful affective aftermath of violence.

[13] James Fitzgerald comments on Yudhiṣṭhira's postwar grief that "he even announced his intention to end his life by sitting and fasting (*prāya*)" (Fitzgerald 2004, p. 86). Yudhiṣṭhira cries out (XII: 1. 15): "I have conquered this whole Earth relying on the strength of Kṛṣṇa's arms, the favor of the brahmins, and the strength of Bhīma and Arjuna. But ever since finishing this tremendous extermination of my kinsmen that was ultimately caused by my greed, a terrible pain [*mahād duḥkham*] aches in my heart without stopping" (Fitzgerald 2004, p. 169).

[14] Dunbar cites various Hindu religious texts and scholarly sources that support Hindu warriors' ethos of protectional dharma. Dunbar writes, "If killing was committed for the sake of dharma, then it was seen as a noble act. Furthermore, brave Hindu warriors who died in battle were promised the reward of heaven (*Vīrasvargam*) . . . " (Dunbar 2011, p. 9).

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Article

What Changed in Medina: The Place of Peace and War in the Life of Prophet Muhammad

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Abstract: The Prophet of Islam, Muhammad, is depicted through extremely polar interpretations. Some perceive his life as a source for peace-making societies, whereas others portray him as a "warmonger" or "Prophet of the sword", and use his examples to justify violence and terrorist attacks. The major incidents referred to in the latter context are the wars and conflicts that occurred after his migration to Medina. These conflicts are also prominent in *sīrah* narratives of his Medinan life from classical and modern periods. One can argue that there is a significant difference in the way Prophet Muhammad acted in Medina compared to the Meccan period. This is mostly attributed to the power balance, as the Muslims had little power in Mecca, which resulted in them enduring adversities, including verbal insults and physical torture while remaining peaceful and non-violent. In Medina, however, the Muslims obtained relatively more power and behaved differently. The main criticism of the Prophet at this juncture is that he took advantage of this power and became violent; this is the reason all the battles fall in his Medinan life. This article examines the root causes of his behaviour and shift in attitude. It clarifies the Prophet's goal and agenda at this stage of his life. The article highlights his attitude towards peace and war by holistically analysing the battles and skirmishes that unfolded during the Medinan period. It examines the time spent on war and peace throughout his prophetic mission. In doing so, it enumerates statistical data, such as the number of battlefield casualties and those from expeditions. To attain accurate information in this regard, classical *sīrah* works and modern research on the battles are referred to as the main resources.

Keywords: Prophet Muhammad; *sīrah*; Meccan period; Medinan period; peace; war; jihad; jihadists; *qital*; *harb*; *sariyya*; *ghazwa*; sword

1. Introduction

Islam and the name of the Prophet, Muhammad, are frequently associated with some of the most appalling acts of violence and terrorism that humanity has ever faced. This is because so-called "jihadists" and other radical groups consistently invoke Prophetic traditions, as well as Qur'anic verses, to justify their acts. One serious accusation reads as follows:

> One example that jihadists were able to use to justify their beliefs was the example of Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, who was a warlord and did many of the things Islamic State were doing. What is ISIS doing that Muhammad didn't do or wouldn't have approved of? That is actually—unfortunately, not the easiest question to answer . . . (Chang 2015)

While addressing these accusations and questions is not this article's primary concern, it provides historical context for the battles and expeditions that occurred in Prophet Muhammad's life, in order to better grasp his stance towards peace and war. To achieve this, it underlines the importance of a holistic approach towards the *sīrah*[1] (Islamic discipline that deals independently with the biography of Prophet Muhammad) and his goals. In addition, attention is drawn to the context and evolving nature of the battles and skirmishes

that took place in his life. The reasons for the perception of Islam as a "religion of war" and its Prophet as "the Prophet of the sword" will also be questioned, together with the accuracy of these general perceptions.

2. Methodology and Limitations of the Paper

In the field of history, it is paramount to focus on primary resources to collect information and have valid understanding of past events. In this respect, early and classical period *sīrah* sources are crucial to obtain a true and reliable picture of the events that unfolded in Prophet Muhammad's life. Since perceptions attributed to the Prophet are due to controversial claims made by different groups, such as radicals or extremists, to justify their acts based on Islamic tradition (and from there, Islamophobes), classical *sīrah* works need to be closely examined as a touchstone for the accuracy and authenticity of such claims. *Sīrah* sources are crucial, given that most attention is paid to verses of the Qur'an and Prophetic tradition (aka hadith collections), neglecting their further implications and the analysis of their application in the Prophet's life. For these reasons, early and classical period *sīrah* and hadith sources will be the major references for this paper. The focal point for this research is locating and understanding the actual picture of war and, consequently, peace in the Prophet's life, based on the available recorded data in the Islamic and, in particular, the *sīrah* tradition.

3. A Brief Overview of the Prophet's Life: Meccan and Medinan Periods

Starting from the first revelation, Prophet Muhammad's prophetic mission continued for 23 years. After receiving his first revelation in 610 CE, the first 13 years of his mission were spent in Mecca and the last ten years unfolded in Medina. Early and classical period *sīrah* sources agree that the Prophet and his companions experienced severe hardship and adversity in Mecca, ranging from verbal and physical harassment, to ever-increasing levels of enmity, which resulted in persecutions and torture. The level of adversity reached a point where Prophet Muhammad was humiliated by the Meccan polytheists and faced physical torture (Bukhari 2008, I/3). The harsh treatment and cruelty reached a peak when all Muslims were subjected to a boycott for approximately three years (including women, elderly people, children and even non-Muslim allies) (Ibn Hisham 2006, II/95; Tabari n.d., I/550). During the Meccan period, some early converts to Islam were killed solely because of their belief and religious orientation (Ibn al-Athīr 1970, VII/152; Ibn Sa'd 2001, III/176–88).

How Prophet Muhammad and the early Muslims responded to this gradually increasing harassment and torture is of paramount importance. When this period is scrutinised, it can be seen that reactionary moves were categorically prohibited by the Prophet (Ibn Hisham 2006, I/171). This is evident in the main themes revealed during the Meccan period: apart from theological concepts, such as the essentials of faith and matters pertaining to ethics, Qur'anic verses from this period commanded and directed all believers to be patient and persevere.[2] The fact that accounts of previous prophets (*qasas al-anbiya*) and their struggles are the subject matter of a significant portion of Meccan-revealed chapters is also testament to this (Esack 2007, p. 124; Saeed 2008, p. 67).

During the Meccan period, neither revolutionary acts nor any kind of war or violent reactionary movement existed that could serve as a reference for radicals. Prophet Muhammad was manifestly on the side of peace and determined to remove or neutralise all elements that could lead to violence. To avoid any sort of reactionary movement and conflict, he crafted strategies such as the principle of avoidance as the main philosophy. Similarly, he established an educational institution known as Dar al-Arqam to keep his followers, particularly the youth, away from conflict zones. Sending handfuls of followers during this time to Abyssinia (the first two migrations) can also be seen as a peaceful means to reduce the ever-increasing tension in Meccan society.[3]

War and conflicts are associated with the Medinan period of the Prophet's life, despite the city being peaceful and harmonious in contrast to Mecca, especially for the first few years. Understanding the context and general condition of Medina prior to when battles

took place is crucial. Prophet Muhammad undertook significant steps soon after his migration and settlement in Medina. He first implemented social reforms, like establishing brotherhood among the Muslims and constructing a mosque that had religious, educational, judicial, social, as well as political importance, in order to strengthen and unite the Muslim community. He also established economic regulations for marketplaces. More importantly, he signed the constitution of Medina, known as the Medina Charter, with all communities (Muslims, polytheists and Jews); this brought harmony and peaceful coexistence to the city (Bulaç 1998, pp. 169–70). The constitution guaranteed religious freedom and protected all inhabitants of Medina, regardless of their religious background. All segments agreed on the Prophet's leadership and details about the administration, ruling and relations among neighbouring tribes, including the defence of the city in the event of warfare (Anjum 2022). Nevertheless, conflicts arose within the city that ultimately led to the intervention of military forces, due to external threats faced by the community or betrayals of the charter's provisions.

4. Permission for War: What Changed in Medina?

During the Medinan period, the Muslims had battles with outsiders. The Meccan polytheists were the most prominent. This raises the question: why? Although the Muslims faced harassment and torture during the Meccan period, they did not react or retaliate, and preferred to remain silent. In Medina, however, they acted and resorted to combat against the same people who harassed them in Mecca. What changed? Was this because they gained enough power in Medina?

These questions are frequently posed in non-Muslim scholarship on the Prophet's life. The medieval polemical image of the Prophet is replete with charges towards him as he is portrayed as a warmonger, ready to kill and plunder communities supposedly for refusing to follow him (Daniel 1993, p. 92). Despite the change in tone, as well as methodology used to present Prophet Muhammad in later Western works, this tainted image permeates Orientalist studies, which highlights the shift in response that is generally attributed to the changing power balance once the Prophet became established in Medina. Montgomery Watt, as a Western academic, points to this perception. While noting that scholars like Thomas Carlyle, Frants Buhl, Richard Bell and Tor Andrae attempt to rescue the distorted image handed down by medieval polemics, he lists Weil, Aloys Sprenger, David S. Margoliouth, William Muir and Theodor Noldeke as typical scholars who maintain the vestiges of "war-propaganda views" in their works (Watt and Bell 1970, pp. 17–18, cited in Buaben 1996, p. 189). Among these scholars, William Muir's presentation of the Prophet in Medina, as opposed to Mecca, is worth noting. He portrays the Prophet in Mecca as a believer who was protected by God, an honest man fighting against pagans. Conversely, he flips the depiction of the Prophet in Medina and paints him as a more conniving and violent person (Buaben 1996, pp. 35–42). Muir's dual depiction of the Prophet, as one of the most objective and "genuine" attempts to understand his life, represents a dominant perception and raises the same questions.

The answer to these questions fundamentally lies in the first initiatives and reforms the Prophet undertook soon after his arrival to Medina. The fledgling city-state was at the beginning of a new era and its peaceful atmosphere (at least for the first two years) was not a result of coincidence. It is well known historically that the people in Yathrib[4] had been suffering from ongoing internal conflicts for almost 120 years, the last of which is famously known as the Buath wars in *sīrah* literature (Būtī 1999, p. 119; Ghazzali 1999, pp. 165–66; Samhudi 2001, X). To seek a solution to this ongoing conflict, a delegate came to Mecca where they first met with the Prophet. This resulted in the migration of the Prophet and his fellow believers to Medina. Due to his subsequent reforms, the city of Yathrib turned into the civilised and peaceful city of Medina (literally meaning the place of civilisation or light-filled city). Now, Medina was a "state and/or city-state" that had its governor appointed with the consensus of all segments of society (Yildirim 2009; Albayrak 2010).

While these changes took place in Medina, the Meccans, on the other hand, were conspiring to return the Muslim migrants to Mecca and were planning to wage war if necessary (Mahmudov 2017, pp. 61–62). They started a propaganda war against the emigrants to turn others in Medina against them. According to *sīrah* sources, to achieve this objective, they even contacted some leaders in Medina; this included Abdullah ibn Ubayy ibn Salul, the leader of Khazraj tribe, who aspired to become the city leader prior to the Prophet's arrival (Ibn Hisham 2006, I/345–46; Bukhari 2008, tafsir 15 hadith no. 4566, marda 15 hadith no. 5663, adab 115 hadith no. 6207, isti'zan 20 hadith no. 6254; Muslim 2004, jihad 40/116 hadith no. 1798). In this context and under these circumstances, it is evident that the strategy required to deal with these threats had to be entirely different from that in Mecca. The Prophet in Medina was not only responsible for his messengership (in Muir's words, a believer who is protected by God), but he was also the leader of a newly established city-state. He had to consider the needs of all communities who signed the Medina Charter and placed their trust in him. For this reason, he started to take precautions to ensure the safety and security of the city and its citizens. This started by forming units in the vicinity of the city, the neighbouring tribes of Medina, and later expanding to the entire region.[5] The Prophet also formed an intelligence network across Arabia (Gülen 2007, vol. 2/217–18; 231–33; Haylamaz 2013, vol. 2/422). All these strategic decisions and actions can be viewed from the perspective of politics and statecraft.

According to the Islamic intellectual tradition and theology, Prophet Muhammad came with a universal message. It is a creedal belief that his mission continues until Judgement Day. In this respect, through the message he brought and life he lived, he set rules, strategies and methodologies that people can follow and build on. In the Meccan period, on the one hand, he had to convey his message to people who had been suffering, but on the other hand, he had to develop and implement a means to continue their cause. It was a phase that was more about educating people, strengthening their certainty in faith, and tolerating hostility and oppression with patience and fortitude. Simply put, teaching ways to serve and survive on an individual level was the main methodology adopted at this stage. Conversely, in the Medinan period, the prophetic life and strategies developed and/or introduced the Islamic approach, and set rules and principles geared towards governing and social organisation, legal issues and international relations. This stage in the Prophet's life also naturally set and arranged the rules pertaining to warfare or the rules of engagement, in modern terms. It is critical to note that neither the Prophet nor any other believer was waging war at this stage; "the state" was pursuing war as a secondary issue under defined circumstances that will be discussed later.

5. Qur'anic Terminology Regarding War

When the words related to warfare mentioned in the Qur'an are analysed with their nuances, the differences between them can be seen. Regarding war, three terms need investigation, as they are widely used but commonly misinterpreted: *jihad*, *qital* and *harb*. Although other words in Arabic and Qur'anic terminology describe conflicts, i.e., *jidal* and *isyan*, these three terms and the Qur'anic verses in which they appear are the most important. Investigation into their meanings and nuances will lay a foundation for a better understanding of their scope, as well as the practical application of these verses in the *sīrah* of the Prophet.

The term *jihad* exists in verses revealed in Mecca and Medina. Derived from the root j-h-d, *jihad* means using one's ability and exhausting all available means to fulfil an objective, or strive against all forms of difficulties and hardship (Ibn Manzur n.d., XI/133–34; Zabidi 1965, VII/534–38; Kamali 2002, p. 617). However, in Islamic terminology, it is used to refer to striving or struggling in the path of God or for the sake of God to remove barriers between the human being and their Creator, to please God, as well as to protect the religion in its pristine form as it was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (Kamali 2002; Afsaruddin 2013, pp. 2–3). This is apparent in the Qur'an, as this term is used in conjunction with the phrase *fi sabil Allah (to strive/struggle in the path of God)*.[6] It is not

the equivalent of war in this respect. It can be said that the Qur'anic usage of the term *jihad*, with accompanying expressions such as *fi sabil Allah* or *yujahiduna fi sabil Allah bi amwalihim wa anfusihim* (they strive with their wealth/belongings and their selves Qur'an 8:72), expresses that this struggle can be exercised individually or collectively, as well as via different means depending on the circumstances. Thus, it is a broad term that includes all types of struggle, including war (if necessary), to reach God's pleasure and approval.

Its usage in Meccan verses, when read alongside the actions of the Prophet as found in the *sīrah* literature, clearly indicates it has broader connotations than physical war. Although in a broader sense *jihad* is an umbrella title for all kinds of struggle, including verbal, physical and armed, during the Meccan period it was not used for physical confrontation, as is evident from the sources. One of the Meccan Qur'anic verses remarkably uses the term *jihad* as follows: "So obey not the disbelievers but strive against them herewith with a great endeavour." (Qur'an 25:52) Greater *jihad* (*jihadan kabira*) is commanded in this verse, yet the Prophet did not wage any physical war during this period. Therefore, when the Qur'anic usage of the term *jihad* is considered from a holistic perspective, semantically and interpretively, it has broader meanings than mere physical fighting and combat (Afsaruddin 2013, p. 2; Kamali 2002, pp. 617–18). In addition, as pointed by Bulac, if *jihad* only meant armed struggle, combat or "holy war", then other terms such as *qital* and *harb*, which are used for these actions, would not be used in the Qur'an because there would be no need for them (Bulaç 2004, p. 51).

In hadith collections (prophetic tradition), the term *jihad* reflects various meanings: it has spiritual, ethical, as well as physical struggle connotations, similar to the Qur'anic usage. In addition, it is interesting to observe its common usage in the Islamic mystical tradition since the early classical period. Especially after the 4th and 5th centuries of hijra (approximately 10th–11th centuries CE), there is emphasis on its metaphysical or spiritual aspects, far from its violent connotations (Afsaruddin 2007, pp. 496–98). Being aware of the term's usage in the first three centuries of hijra, particularly its common usage in the sphere of hadith tradition, is important to counter and refute polemical arguments found in the modern era. This is a pertinent point to underline, as the term *jihad* has been used in this broader sense since the emergence of the Islamic religious tradition; it is clearly not something introduced or claimed recently by Muslim scholars to avoid Western criticism.

When it comes to physical warfare and fighting, the Qur'an uses *qital* or *harb*, which appear in the verses revealed during the Medinan period only. Some subtle differences exist between the meanings of these two terms. *Qital* is fighting or armed combat against the enemy and can be understood as a sub-section of *jihad*, as it is designated in specific verses of the Qur'an, generally at an individual level or for certain situations (i.e. Qur'an 2:190–93 and Qur'an 2:217). On the other hand, *harb* is the general term used for war in Arabic. *Harb* appears only four times in the Qur'an in the following verses: 5:64, 8:57, 47:4 and 2:279. The phrase "in the path of God" is never conjoined to *harb* in the Qur'an. For this reason, it can be said that *harb* has no bearing on the concept of *jihad* (Afsaruddin 2007, p. 495).

Most exegetes of the Qur'an agree that 22:39 is the first verse revealed concerning fighting during the first year of hijrah in Medina (Qurṭubī 1967, vol. 12 p. 68):[7] "The believers against whom war is waged are given permission to fight in response, for they have been wronged. Surely, God has full power to help them to victory." This is the first step in this regard, and it was revealed to "permit" Muslims to fight in self-defence against those who waged war and "wronged" them. It is not an order to instigate war *carte blanche*, but an important sign of a way out for the Muslims who were distressed after patiently suffering the horrendous treatment and violence inflicted on them by the Meccan polytheists over an extended period. In a nutshell, it gave the Muslims permission to resort to self-defence, if needed, to decisively respond to the Meccans harming them. Along with two other verses (22:40–41), this verse introduces the reasons the permission was granted and its wisdom, as well as the result expected from the believers in the case of victory. It

also contains warnings of what had happened to previous communities (Unal 2006, pp. 694–95).

In subsequent Qur'anic verses revealed in Medina, as a second step, the span of this permission is widened to the extent that Muslims should become a power that intimidates and deters their enemies, using different strategies such as financial means and physical combat on the path of or for the sake of God (i.e., Qur'an 8:60, 5:35, 9:41 and 22:78).

6. Objectives of the Permission for War

Apart from understanding the context for permission, it is also crucial to touch on other aspects, i.e., the reasons, objectives and engagement rules, to have a thorough understanding of the context and place of war in the life of the Prophet. Here, this article begins to answer the "why?" and "what changed?" questions: although the Prophet and his companions were exiled to Medina, the Meccans were not satisfied, as they were still developing plans to extinguish Islam and the Muslims. This was due to taking this as a matter of honour among the Arabs. The Meccans did not shy away from conflict, using all the means available to them to pressure the Muslims and Medina to the extent of demanding the extradition of the migrant Muslims to Mecca. In this regard, they communicated with different groups and leaders within Medina and used tremendous effort to overturn their support of the Muslims.[8]

This was a serious threat for the Muslims and was concerning for the entire populace of Medina, as a peaceful environment had been established due to the constitution. Any threat towards the Muslims and their leader (Muhammad) was a threat to the newly established city-state. In this context, the first verses permitting self-defence were revealed. It is obvious that the strategy undertaken in such circumstances would be different to that found in Mecca; the city of Medina was not the same as Mecca, and the people who lived there and their circumstances were also substantially different. The Prophet performed his duty (i.e., spreading the religious message) as he did in Mecca, as well as now being in charge of the pluralistic city-state in Medina and responsible for the safety and security of all people. The Medinans gave him this authority to establish a secure and peaceful environment for its Muslim and non-Muslim inhabitants. Within this substantially different context, the nature of the circumstances changed and the "danger" posed by the Meccans transformed; thus, permission for self-defence was granted to the Muslims. At this stage, there was a need for a general heightened awareness and a more central collective response, as the danger was approaching Medina. Therefore, under such circumstances, defending the city became a necessity and the most important task to be carried out by all residents—Muslim and non-Muslim.

Based on Qur'anic verses, Prophetic traditions and the context of this permission from the *sīrah*, Muslim scholars enumerated several reasons for self-defence and fighting. These are closely in line with the purpose and higher objectives of the Islamic faith and jurisprudence (*maqasid al-sharia*). Permission was granted first and foremost in respect to self-defence, which seeks to protect one's religion, life, intellect, lineage and wealth (known as *darurat al-khamsa*—the five necessities), as well as to stop oppression/injustice and ensure freedom of religion and thought (Ghazzali 1322, I/174; Shatibi 2010, I/1–7, 23–95). However, these are enjoined as secondary issues, as peace is essential and war should not be demanded, according to Islamic law.[9] The Qur'an and Prophetic practice discuss these conditions in the context of a state of war that already exists, when Muslims are forced to engage. Strict rules and limitations were commanded when carrying out military operations by these texts. For instance, when the Prophet was sending an army on an expedition, he used to repeat several statements to the commanders, according to hadith and *sīrah* sources:

> Do not betray any agreements you have entered into. Do not plunder. Do not commit injustices or use torture. Do not touch the children, the womenfolk, the elderly, or other non-combatants of the enemy. Do not destroy orchards or tilled lands. Do not kill livestock. Treat with respect the religious persons who live in

> hermitages or convents and spare their edifices. (Muslim 2004, kitab al-jihad 2; Ibn al-Athīr 1970, vol. 3, p. 227; Unal 2006, p. 1219)

However, no single example in the *sīrah* of the Prophet states that these rules are set for conflicts and battles among Muslims. Ironically, many contemporary atrocities are conducted in Muslim regions against or among Muslims, with hadith and *sīrah* texts used to justify these acts.

7. Application in the *Sīrah* of the Prophet

After permission was granted, the Prophet did not seek war, initiate any conflict or take vengeance on the Meccans. Rather, he sent patrols to neighbouring regions beside Medina. He also attended some of these expeditions. In *sīrah* sources, these forces are clearly differentiated from those fighting pitched battles and other types of warfare: *Sariyyas* are the campaigns where the Prophet appointed his companions to lead but did not attend, whereas *ghazwas* are the campaigns that the Prophet attended and led (Sertkaya 2016, p. 7). *Sariyyas* are a type of expedition or reconnaissance force sent abroad before a battle, although the *sariyyas* continued after these battles started. Thus, it is appropriate to question and investigate the reasons for assembling such troops in the early Medinan period before battles, and the results they attained.

7.1. Sariyyas and Their Objectives

As mentioned above, one of the Prophet's strategies was to assemble and send patrol units to neighbouring tribes (from around Medina all the way close to Mecca), after permission to fight in self-defence was granted. Until the first battle, the Battle of Badr, around 17 of these kinds of forces had been dispatched to different regions in Arabia. These forces comprised approximately 5–300 people. Except for one incident,[10] no blood was shed during these patrols. The reasons and practical outcomes of these patrols reveal the expeditions' motives and the core reason for the permission, particularly once the timing (after Prophet Muhammad consolidated power in Medina) and the number of such resources are considered.

The first reason was to establish, sustain and ensure the safety and security of the newly established city of Medina. However, this was not the only aim. *Sīrah* works show that the Prophet had a broader vision: he aimed to gradually spread the peaceful atmosphere established within Medina throughout the Arabian Peninsula and beyond, starting with neighbouring regions (Haylamaz 2013, vol. 2, pp. 426–27). This is evident when the chronology and sequence of events are closely examined.

Throughout the Arabian Peninsula, plunder and looting were prevalent prior to Islam. The mentality of "might is right" rather than "right is might" was widespread at that time. Whoever had power was oppressing the weak; cruelty and tyranny ruled the peninsula in the pre-Islamic era (al-Zayid 2018, I/55–56, pp. 72–77; Armstrong 2006, pp. 57–63; Schimmel 1992, pp. 7–8) In contrast, the Prophet decided to form different sized patrols that did not disturb anyone, take others' belongings nor tarnish their honour, despite the contrary being the prevalent norm for decades. As argued by Gülen, having these kinds of forces passing by without creating any violence and conflict was previously unprecedented in the Arabian Peninsula and, therefore, revolutionary. None of these patrols resulted in bloodshed (Gülen 2007, II/224–25, pp. 234, 240). This strategy worked and ultimately led to the spread of the Prophet's message (i.e., Islam).

Another objective of these forces was to manifest the existence of another "intimidating power" in the region, so that the oppressed could seek refuge with them in Medina. This eventually broke the Meccans' sovereignty. It also granted power to those who were righteous, rather than the oppressors. In a way, a powerful message was sent throughout the region: that the Meccans claimed authority because they had power, not the other way around; meanwhile, these newly assembled units caused a decline in Meccan authority in the region. Consequently, the employment of such forces laid the foundation for the rule of

law and displayed the supremacy of the righteous as it paved the way for the emergence of a peaceful and sustainable society.

Additionally, these units aimed to remove the barriers set before the freedom of religion and to spread the message of Islam. With these intimidating forces sent abroad, Prophet Muhammad was able to send religious teachers to neighbouring tribes in safety and appoint secure places to carry out his message. Some scholars, like Gülen, interpret this tactic as containing a message for future generations as well as for the people at that time, instilling the notion that such pressure, oppression and hardship cannot be a reason to give up fulfilling such an important task (Gülen 2007, II/224).

Prophet Muhammad wanted to create a peaceful environment in all of Arabia. To that end, the varying sized armed patrols aimed to establish order and security around Medina, collecting intelligence about new developments from his enemies, pushing back the Meccan forces that had come close to Medina, proclaiming that the Muslims were now established and powerful enough to intimidate their enemy, speaking with the tribes around Medina to find common ground for agreement, responding rapidly to any situation that occurred and carrying out the mission of spreading his religious message outside Medina. Now that permission to fight had been granted, they had to be prepared for such an eventuality, and such preparations were in effect training for the possibility of full-scale war (Haylamaz 2013, II/5).

For this reason, the Prophet continuously sent these patrol units abroad to show force throughout that time to mitigate and minimise serious encounters. When the Muslims encountered their Meccan opponents in the first battle in the second year of hijra, it can be argued their enemies were already psychologically defeated. This is interpreted as another military strategy used by the Prophet, resulting in fewer casualties and a quick surrender (Gülen 2007, II/233–40). This is also one of the reasons why most of the battles lasted only a short period. Consequently, these patrols and their show of force widened the peaceful environment established in Medina to the neighbouring tribes. The Muslims' presence was felt across the Arabian Peninsula, and they became a refuge for the oppressed and weak; then, they took the sovereignty of the Arabian Peninsula into their own hands (Haylamaz 2013, II/5; Gülen 2007, II/232–33).

7.2. Brief Overview and Statistical Analysis of the Battles in the Sīrah

Looking at all the moves related to battles in the *sīrah*, a careful examination of the classical sources provides intriguing statistics, particularly in relation to the time spent and number of casualties. This analysis reveals the full picture and grants an opportunity to evaluate warfare as it appears in *sīrah* works. The entire *sīrah* of the Prophet details 73 expeditions,[11] with the Prophet attending 13 of them. Haylamaz posits, in its absolute sense, that only 7 of them should be regarded as *ghazwa* (pitched battle),[12] according to the term's technical definition. The rest were either not war related or were moves to suppress internal revolt against the Medinan city-state.

It is important to note at the outset that none of these battles lasted a second day. In other words, all the physical battles the Prophet attended were completed within a single day of fighting. It is even more remarkable to observe that all these seven battles (*ghazawat*) constitute no more than approximately 15 h of pitched fighting, based on meticulous studies of early *sīrah* sources.[13]

The *Risalah* (prophethood) of Prophet Muhammad began in 610 CE on the 27th night of the month of Ramadan, and was completed in 632 CE on the 12th day of Rabi' al-Awwal, according to the majority of *sīrah* scholars. This means his prophetic mission covered 7960 days. Within this period, physical confrontation occurred in only three battles that the Prophet attended (*ghazwa*). These were the battles of Badr, Uhud and Hunayn. No physical confrontation occurred at the Second Badr and Tabuk, whereas Khandaq ultimately resembles a duel with individual combat from opposing sides, rather than two armies fighting. Similarly, Taif is considered a siege, despite having some casualties, and was more a continuation of the battle of Hunayn. Given the nature of these duels, it does not make

sense to categorise them as a confrontation of two armies, given that pitched battle never occurred (Haylamaz 2016, p. 52; Hamidullah 2001, p. 88).

Haylamaz vehemently argues that conflicts with the Jewish tribes (namely the sieges of Banu Qaynuqa, Banu Nadir, Banu Qurayza[14] and Khaybar) cannot be classified as battles in the technical sense. These can only be considered as rebellious upheavals against a legitimate state (Haylamaz 2016, p. 53). He posits that the position taken by the Prophet is not much different than that taken by any official state today. These tribes opposed the legitimate government that emerged after they had given their complete support and agreement. The strategy the Prophet adopted meant he was able to suppress these upheavals and prevent them evolving into a permanent problem for the new state. In fact, before his arrival in Medina, these kinds of internal conflicts were an integral part of the city for over 120 years. They also did not face any problems of this kind within Medina afterwards. Each of these respective incidents with the Jews in Medina did not occur at once. Rather, they emerged and developed individually, escalating over time. They did not transform into two major religions fighting (Muslims vs Jews), nor as the mass destruction or ethnic cleansing of any religious or minority group (the Jews, in this case). This is apparent in the treatment of those who stayed loyal to the Constitution of Medina. Even other Jewish tribes did not intervene when their fellow Jews sought their assistance. They preferred to stay neutral as they considered this "their own problem" (Haylamaz 2016, pp. 53–57; Heyet 2014, pp. 98–108) It was expected that the state immediately respond to these threats, which endangered the peaceful life and harmony of the rest of its population.

Compared to his approximate 8000 days of prophethood, presenting the Prophet's life based on a battle-centric approach, as if his life and success revolved around these battles, is unfair and is an obvious error, if not an outright distortion. Joel Hayward's synopsis of his upcoming book on the wars of the Prophet tackles this issue. He analyses the Prophet's use of warfare from various angles (i.e., economically, politically and socially) as a transformational process. In his short introduction, he purports that "even though he [i.e., the Prophet] was continuously at war for a decade and initiated around eighty armed missions, twenty-seven of which he led himself" (Hayward 2022). This presentation of facts requires extra sensitivity and needs to be carefully articulated given the limited scope of warfare in the Prophet's life.

In relation to the total amount of time spent in battle, Haylamaz posits that only 79 days elapsed from the moment the need for battle emerged; this is together with the time spent preparing, trying to convince their opponents to solve the conflict diplomatically, taking their positions on the battlefields, fighting, waiting on the battlefield afterwards, distributing war booty, and resolving issues such as captives, etc. Again, this calculation is based on conflicts where physical battle occurred. In a calculation inclusive of those expeditions where fighting did not take place, such as the Second Badr or Tabuk, the total time spent was approximately 144 days (Haylamaz 2016, p. 61).[15]

As for number of casualties, despite the large number of battles and the massive size of the opponent's army in some cases, they were also small. In total, the number of casualties in the battles in which fighting occurred included 108 Muslims, compared to 111 non-Muslims, according to Haylamaz's findings (Haylamaz 2016, pp. 61–62).[16] If all sieges, *sariyyas*, the conquest of Mecca and similar incidents are included, this number increases to 217 Muslim casualties, compared to 287 non-Muslims. According to Hamidullah's calculations, the total number of casualties from both sides did not exceed 400 people (Hamidullah 2001, p. 13). If we broaden the spectrum to include the lives lost due to assassinations,[17] irrespective of battles, and those executed due to their crimes based on legal verdict,[18] the number increases to a maximum 296 Muslims and 701 non-Muslims. Haylamaz concludes that the maximum number of lives lost from both sides, as found in the entire *sīrah*, is 997 people in this scenario (Haylamaz 2016, pp. 66–67). Given the number of incidents and conflicts that took place, and considering the large Meccan confederate force, the total number of casualties on both sides is incredibly low. The importance of this meticulous study and the identification of these casualties can only be seen when compared

to other battles in history, regardless of them taking place in recent years or centuries ago. The number is always far more than those casualties during the Prophet's life, in many cases by thousands. Given the historical facts and the data available, as suggested by Hamidullah, the life of the Prophet can be claimed to be the least deadly period among the lives of similar important figures (Hamidullah 2001, pp. 12–14).

7.3. The Prophet's Stance Amid the War and Conflict

Prophet Muhammad did not instigate any of the battles or expeditions, when examined closely. Rather, he was always the one seeking alternative ways to prevent any kind of conflict via diplomacy. If these battles are studied from the perspective of their reasons, countless pieces of evidence clearly show that he exhausted all means of diplomacy before fighting took place.[19] It is also crucial to highlight that scholars such as Abdurrahman Azzam argue that all the battles in his life were defensive (Abd al-Rahman 1979),[20] despite some noting disagreement on this point (Shah 2013).[21] Those propounding the idea that all the battles were defensive could deduce abundant evidence from classical *sīrah* works to prove their argument. Here, this article touches on the major battles: Badr (the first battle) was the Quraysh's extermination plan for the Muslims, which they planned and invested in for a long time, including the ammunition caravan sent to Syria by them for supplies. Uhud was an attack by the Meccans to take revenge for their disappointing defeat at Badr a year prior. Khandaq was their last resort, an unprecedented army formed via a confederation of many tribes to destroy the Muslims and Medina. All three of these major attacks were unsuccessful, with minimal casualties on both sides.

The conquest of Mecca was a result of the Meccans breaching the Treaty of Hudaybiya,[22] signed approximately 23 months previously. They unjustly and cruelly killed 23 people from the Khuzaa tribe who were allies of the Muslims. The Battle of Hunayn was more of a continuation of the conquest of Mecca. It was mainly due to the unease of the Hawazin tribe, who orchestrated a plan to attack before the Muslims marched towards them, assuming they would be the next target. They incorporated every living being in the army—women, children, camels, cattle, sheep, etc.—as a clear indication that they would fight to the death.[23] Finally, the conflicts with the Jews occurred mainly because they wanted to regain the power they lost over the city after the state was formed with their full initial support. One of the most distinct pieces of evidence that peace was the preferred method of the Prophet and that justice was essential, is the outcome of the conflicts with the Jews over a period of four years. Conflict with them was resolved until the death of the Prophet. For nearly three and a half years, peace and harmony were re-established in Medina, new agreements were signed with the Jews and they did not experience any conflict thereafter (Haylamaz 2016, pp. 55–57).

One may ask, if this is the case, why is *sīrah* introduced mainly through the lense of war expeditions when the Prophet was not personally involved in many battles? What was his general approach to these conflicts? How was he a "successful commander" if he had little to do with war?

First and foremost, the *sīrah* genre was established in Arabic literature and history from the pre-Islamic era onwards in the popular culture of the *ayyām al-ʿArab* [days of the Arabs] tradition.[24] The dominant feature of this tradition was to narrate the epic and heroic acts of their forefathers. War and violence constituted the major themes of this culture. This naturally shaped the subsequent generations' depiction and documentation of the *sīrah*. They merely adapted the tradition to cover the Prophet's life and his successors (Caliphs) in a similar format (Jones 2012, pp. 344–45).[25] Most of the early *sīrah* works are even titled as *maghāzī*, reflecting this adoption and perception.[26] This mindset and mode of adoption had a ripple effect upon shaping future *sīrah* works.

War is a reality that cannot be neglected in the history of human beings. In one sense, as argued by some scholars, the history of humanity is a history of wars.[27] This reality can be viewed as extending to the life of the first human being and prophet, according

to Muslims, with Adam and his two sons Cain and Abel.[28] Islam is understood as a complete religion that addresses all aspects of human life; Prophet Muhammad represents an exemplary role model for all Muslims' affairs, according to the Islamic tradition. In this respect, he did not fall short or neglect to prepare his army, considering the slight chance of a battle. On the one hand, he sought the means to avoid any kind of conflict; on the other hand, he prepared his companions for the worst scenario that could occur, as a last resort. In his philosophy, power can only be an intimidating force to deter people from fighting or causing injustice. This is in line with Qur'anic teachings (Qur'an 5:27–32) Thus, he trained his companions accordingly and took all necessary measures in the same way as capable military commanders (Gülen 2007, II/204–14).

At this juncture, an important nuance differentiates the Prophet from other military commanders. This is because he was a different personality who never harmed people, who delayed his aim for the sake of saving lives and avoiding bloodshed, and someone who dealt compassionately with even those who intended to take his life (Gülen 2007, II/214–17; Haylamaz 2013, II/86–89).[29] According to Gülen, despite enduring countless hardships and facing various assassination attempts, and as someone who was protecting himself and his community, it is also important to realise that his sword was not soiled with a single drop of enemy blood (Gülen 2004). Haylamaz, as a prolific scholar of *sīrah*, seconds this statement via his meticulous study of the source materials.[30] This important point skipped the attention of many *sīrah* writers.

Despite so many expeditions and consecutive battles, the Prophet never killed anyone. In an environment where males were active in various forms of conflict by default, he did not shed the blood of anybody or harm anyone except for one incident, according to *sīrah* sources. Although the Prophet was attacked by an enemy and about to be killed, he only targeted a part of his assailant's body (his shoulders) that would not have caused death, in order to diffuse the situation.[31] The Prophet protected himself in self-defence, and demonstrated that he was the Prophet of peace, mercy and compassion at such a critical moment.

Self-defence is one of the five main essentials required from believers and the Prophet (Ghazzali 1322; Muslim 2004, iman 62 hadith no.226; Tirmidhi n.d.; Dawud 2005, sunnah 32 hadith no. 4771–72) In addition, according to Islamic tradition, if a person loses their life for the sake of protecting their belongings or defending themself, they are considered a martyr. Putting yourself in danger is religiously prohibited (*haram*) in Islamic law, which equates to suicide, but defending oneself is an obligatory (*fard*) act. Thus, if the Prophet could have killed him in this case, without any opposition, it would have been easily justified considering the circumstances. Nevertheless, he did not do so; he only acted to stop the aggression and did not go beyond that.

One may argue that Islamic history after the time of the Prophet includes many battles with large numbers of casualties, in addition to consecutive long periods of wars starting from the period of the Rashidun Caliphs. One simple response to this is that the Islamic tradition, the Qur'an and the authenticated *sunnah* (the Prophet's life, statements, acts and tacit approvals) are the only absolute binding sources of Islamic legislation. The rest are interpretations of these two essential sources and are matters pertaining to *ijtihad* (independent legal reasoning or judgement). Ultimately, the conduct and opinions of subsequent generations have no binding authority over Muslims. Deriving rules based on their actions, or justifying some of the actions of extremists based on their conduct, would not be a precise, appropriate, nor sound methodology, considering this essential criterion.

8. Conclusions

A manifesto published in the French daily Le Parisien in 2018, which was signed by around 300 prominent intellectuals and politicians, including a former president, made a shocking demand and created controversy among Muslims around the globe. Arguing that the Qur'an incites violence, it insisted that "the verses of the Quran calling for murder and punishment of Jews, Christians, and nonbelievers be struck to obsolescence by

religious authorities," so that "no believer can refer to a sacred text to commit a crime." (Le Parisien 2018) It requested this proposal, while removing Islamic scriptural texts from their historical context. Under what circumstances were these verses revealed, who were the people that could wage war, and, most critically, how did the Prophet and the first believers (the prime practitioners of these commands) understand and apply those passages? In most cases, these and similar questions are overlooked; people tend to cherry pick passages from the scripture and deduce broad blanket rules.

With the emergence of extremist groups, Islam as a religion and Prophet Muhammad as the main figure in Islamic tradition, are commonly associated with violence and war. The term *jihad* is widely employed by these groups in the sense of exhorting effort to engage in violence to achieve "sacred goals". Originally, in Islamic sacred texts and during early Islamic history, *jihad* was used in a broad spectrum, encompassing spiritual efforts to physical confrontation. It has implications ranging from the religious and spiritual to the social, political and ethical realms of human life. However, in the last few decades, the meanings of this term have substantially shrunk and suffered semantic restrictions, to the extent of being tantamount to violence and war. This was primarily because of the emergence of extremist groups such as Al-Qaida, ISIS, the Taliban and al-Shabab, and their misuse of the term as a tool to justify their horrendous acts as well as impose their political and ideological standpoints. It is also widely used in Western studies as a synonym for the term "Holy War". Ultimately, *jihad* has turned into a serious cause of paradigmatic concern related to violence in the Muslim and, particularly, Western worlds. Consequently, Prophet Muhammad's life and Islam are perceived as the root cause of this problem in most cases. Thus, many of the criticisms, such as the French manifesto and Sam Harris' comment mentioned earlier, are aimed at passages of the Qur'an and/or the *sīrah* of the Prophet.

Another aspect is the depiction of the Prophet's life through battles and wars. This is mostly not questioned and accepted as a default historical fact. Although his Meccan life is presented as a peaceful period, his Medinan era is portrayed as possessing consecutive battles. Commonly, his shift in attitude is attributed to a power balance. This article sheds further light on the Prophet's Medinan life, and questions what changed in Medina and the reasons for giving Muslims permission to fight at this stage. It examined the objectives of war, the historical context and the application of the permission for war, based on factual figures related to battles and expeditions in the *sīrah*. It has shown that war (pitched battles) comprised a minimal number in his life—only 79 days of his approximately 8000-day prophetic career. In Allen's articulation, based on Ghandi's insights, the rest of his life was a source of positive force for non-violence, peace, love, compassion, justice, tolerance, acceptance and mutual respect (Allen 2022). What he achieved, apart from in this time, is crucial, as it relates to many people and different circumstances. His life from this angle needs to be studied in detail as it relates to contemporary times more so than those exceptional complex circumstances. These different situations can better define the Qur'anic application and meaning of the term *jihad*, as well as the Prophetic stance towards peace and violence. This defined his interactions with his family members, friends and broader society—Muslim and non-Muslim alike. How he acted with people as a leader of the Muslim community, father, husband, friend and so on, should be of primary concern to the approximately 1.9 billion Muslims in the world—roughly 24% of the global population.

Contradictory slogans, such as "Islam is a religion of peace" and "Islam is a religion of violence", are far from revealing the true position, as they come from a reductionist approach and are not scholarly. The matter is complex, nuanced and at times contradictory. It requires deeper analysis and understanding of the time and historical context of the Islamic sacred texts and *sīrah* of the Prophet. After all, peace and war are matters of politics relating to international and interstate affairs. What would determine the case is the state's and authorities' relations, depending on the circumstances and context, according to Islamic sources. As an ideal political state, peace is prioritised, but this does not mean that there is no room for war. Dictating circumstances, Islamic teachings present defined rules of engagement in a restricted sense as a second or last resort. Islamic sacred texts and

their practical application (*sīrah* of the Prophet) acknowledge war as a human reality and introduce strict rules of engagement. This ultimately aims to establish peace and justice in the world. As underlined by Allen (2022), the matter's complexity and contextual openings in religious tradition can be a positive force for non-violence and peace. If the nuances of the Islamic tradition and life of the Prophet are thoroughly understood and other forms of the *jihad* are recognised, it can be seen that the religion is not the problem per se, but its reception and how the *sīrah* of the Prophet is depicted are, in fact, the core problems.

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Notes

1 Among Islamic disciplines, the *sīrah* genre deals independently with the life of Prophet Muhammad, his biography based on critical incidents in his life, generally in a chronological format.

2 For instance, Qur'an 16:127, 32:24 and 39:10.

3 For further details on the Prophet's stance towards peace and war in Meccan period, see (Sertkaya 2020; Peters 2011).

4 The city of Medina before the arrival of the Prophet was known as Yathrib. For historical reports on the city's name, see (Ahmad ibn Hanbal n.d., IV/285; Sālihī 1997, III/296).

5 These armed forces are like contemporary patrol units (police and defence forces) used for security purposes in civilised nations. The patrol units send abroad for these reasons are called *sariyya* in *sīrah* works.

6 *Al-jihad fi sabil Allah* [to strive/struggle in the path of God and/or for the sake of God] is mentioned numerous times in the Qur'an. Apart from within this the term, *jihad* is rarely used in the Qur'an.

7 It is worth noting that Qur'an 2:190 is also mentioned as the first verse by some exegetes like Ṭabarī. See (Tabari 1988, vol. 3, p. 561).

8 In this respect, classical sources talk about a letter sent by Abu Sufyan, one of the senior leaders of the Quraysh, to the Ansar (people supporting the Prophet in Medina) demanding to lift their support from Muhammad and not intervene in the matter. Otherwise, he threatened they would "wage a war they have not seen thus far." For further details on this and similar attempts, see (Ibn Habib n.d., p. 271; Hamidullah 1987, pp. 69–70).Another letter the Meccans sent to the Prophet's allies in Medina included a threat: "You have given protection to our companion. We swear by God that you must fight him or exile him, or else we will come at you in full force. We will kill your fighting men and take your women." (Dawud 2005, haraj, 23; Bayhāqī 1985, III/178–79).

9 For further details on the essentiality of peace in Islamic tradition, see (Kurucan 2020).

10 This is the *sariyya* of Batn al-Nakhla lead by Abdullah ibn Jahsh in the last ten days of the month of Rajab in the second year of hijrah (approx. January 624 CE). (Ibn Hisham 2006, II/183–84; Waqidi 2004, I/13; Ibn Sa'd 2001, II/9).

11 In this calculation, incidents like the Conquest of Mecca, Khaybar, Hudaybiya and sieges regarding three Jewish tribes are not counted. This is because their status cannot be considered military expeditions due to reasons that will be discussed later in this paper. Some sources increase the amount of these moves to 80 and argue the Prophet lead 27 of them. See, for instance, (Hayward 2022).

12 The seven expeditions are: Badr, Uhud, Second Badr, Khandaq, Hunayn, Taif and Tabuk. (Haylamaz 2016, p. 57).

13 These findings are based on two meticulous studies by Resit Haylamaz: *Sefkat Gunesi* [Sun of Compassion] and *Siyer Edebiyatinda Orantisiz Savas Anlatimi* [Disproportionate Description of War in *Sīrah* Literature]. Early and classical primary *sīrah* works, such as Ibn Ishaq, Ibn Hisham, Waqidi, Ibn Sa'd and Tabari, are also consulted. Comparison and cross-examination of prominent modern sources on the topic are also exercised by the author to verify and strengthen these arguments. Among the modern literature, primarily the following works are consulted: (Hamidullah 2001; Hayward 2022).

14 Conflict with the Banu Qurayza tribe is not discussed in detail here despite their case falling into the same cause category, i.e., internal rebellion. In terms of its consequences and the controversy over the number of casualties as well as evaluation of the depiction of the case in *sīrah* sources, see: (Salahi 2012, pp. 467–73; Arafat 1976; Kirazli 2019).

15 Hamidullah, who does not provide the total amount of time spent, makes similar comments on the number of battles and emphasises the low figures. In this regard, he claims the battles lead by the Prophet are the most intriguing, advanced and humane that humanity ever faced. (Hamidullah 2001, pp. 12–13).

16 Casualties in physical fighting are: Badr 84, Uhud 93 and Hunayn 5. (Haylamaz 2016, pp. 61–62).

17 Such as 79 companions who were assassinated in Bi'r al-Mauna.

18 Like the Jews of Banu Qurayza.

19 This is apparent, for instance, in Badr, Uhud, Khandaq and Hudaybiya, as well as in the Conquest of Mecca, Hunayn and its continuation Taif.

[20] The location of each battle is also sufficient proof for this argument. Badr is 130km from Medina and 450km from Mecca; Uhud is currently inside the city of Medina and the trench was excavated around the city of Medina. Only Hunayn is close to Mecca and, as discussed, Hawazin instigated this battle.

[21] For critical evaluation of defensive and offensive theories of war, see (Shah 2013).

[22] Despite this fact, the Prophet sent an ambassador to Mecca and offered a few options. However, they attempted to kill the envoy and rejected those options. Waqidi, Maghāzī, I/783; Ibn Sa'd, Tabaqāt, II/134, Salihi, Subul, V/201.

[23] Young commander Malik ibn Awf's inexperience, obstinate nature and the reason for this decision are other concerns.

[24] *Ayyām al-Arab* is the term used during the pre-Islamic era (*jahiliyyah*) and in the early periods of Islam for the accounts on wars between Arab tribes. (Sertkaya 2022).

[25] Seealso the next chapter (Jones 2012) on the development of the *sīrah* genre, as all point to these genres being a continuation of the oral works found in *ayyām al-ʿArab* tradition.

[26] The earliest available *sīrah* work by Ibn Ishāq, for instance, was originally titled *Kitāb-Mubtada' wa al-Mabhath wa al-Maghāzī* [The Book of Beginning and End and Expeditions].

[27] Although there is perennial discussion among scholars whether warfare emerged with civilisation as an invention and some argue there was no warfare among prehistoric groups, striking scientific examples and skeletons indicate that violence occurred among hunter gatherer groups dated 12,000–14,000 years ago at Jebel Sahaba, Sudan. There appears to be a general tendency that warfare is encoded in human beings' genes. For more details, see (Peacey 2016; Keeley 1997).

[28] Although it is not a battle between two groups, it is apparent there was a fight and violence between the two and Cain killed his brother Abel. Several religious traditions and sacred texts narrate this story.

[29] Based on *sīrah* sources, about 40 recorded assassination attempts were aimed at the life of the Prophet and those who were captured were released without any punishment. For further details, see (Sertkaya and Keskin 2020).

[30] Among his other publications, *Sefkat Gunesi*, which was quoted several times above, tackles this matter from various angles.

[31] Details of this anecdote are recorded in early classical *sirah* works. See, for instance, (Ibn Hisham 2006, II/55; Waqidi 2004, pp. 200–1).

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Essay

Islam, Salafism, and Peace: Facing the Challenges of Tradition and Change

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Abstract: Moving away from both the apologetic and polemical frames that have become ubiquitous in public discourses about Islam and Muslims, I position Salafism within the interpretative battles of the mainstream Sunni tradition. Through that analysis, I also highlight how the salafi orientation presents a difficult challenge for contemporary Muslims who seek to promote peace, pluralism and harmony within their communities and with other groups and communities in a fast-changing world.

Keywords: Islam; Religion; Interpretative Communities; Theology; Peace; Conflict; Pluralism; Tradition

Is Islam a religion of peace? Such a question has become ubiquitous in all sorts of political and academic conversations in the last few decades. Before attempting to engage with some elements of this problematic, let me start this essay by boldly claiming that there is no such thing as "Islam". My point is simple. What is accessible to us, as observers of the religious scene or as participants in it, is not an abstract "Islam" but a series of interpretations and practices. These interpretations and practices, and not "Islam" in the abstract, have constituted an important element in the lives of varied communities around the world for many centuries. This point is valid both from a theological point of view and through a sociological lens.

1. The Theological and the Sociological in Approaching Islam, Peace, and Violence

In Islamic theological discourses, only God is viewed as perfect; the perfectness of God does not transfer to people who read and interpret the Qur'an or the Sunna of the Prophet (his exemplary and normative practice). Equating God with human beings is termed *shirk* and is considered the greatest sin. And since seeking to understand the Qur'an and Sunna is unquestionably an exercise performed by human beings, who are often dealing with texts open to various meanings and with others that are seemingly contradictory, the resulting interpretations cannot simply be equated with "Islam", if by Islam is meant the will of God in the absolute sense.

At the sociological level, when we analyze the realities of communities that define themselves as "Muslim", it is obvious that their religious practices and beliefs are diverse and deeply connected to local socio-economic realities, political settings, and cultural frames of reference. This is the case historically as well as in our contemporary times. Muslim life in 10th-century Baghdad was different from Muslim life in the mountains of 15th-century South Asia; contemporary Muslim life in Nigeria is different from contemporary Muslim life in Indonesia; etc.

If we take this discussion to the topics of peace and violence, we must note that whether one ends up with pluralistic and generally peaceful interpretations of Islam or with confrontational and violent ones has little to do with God and everything to do with the contextually bound humans who speak in his name. Those human beings are the product of particular environments, the impact of which is deep on the question of which texts are favored and which interpretations of those texts become prevalent. The truth is that for every Qur'anic verse or Sunnaic report that seems to promote peace, one

can find others that appear to glorify conflict. It is thus necessary to remember that the "Islam" of God is inaccessible and that religious doctrines, laws, and beliefs are the result of negotiation between complex historical human beings and multi-vocal sacred texts and discourses. Not only did this help create sectarian divisions within Islamic contexts, but it also engendered all kinds of schools of thought within such fields as law, theology, mysticism, and philosophy.

Refocusing the discussion on social actors and interpretive communities and what they do with their religious heritage is crucial for our understanding of the dynamics at play. This is not to downplay the role of religious discourses in peace or violence. This role remains very important. Religious frames supply social actors with an emotional component that affects one's demeanor and actions in significant ways. It also provides a frame for social and political action. Today, in a world where all certainties have been shaken and all ideologies have seemingly failed, religious language and rituals give seekers a sense of identity and belonging. Therefore, we ought to take religious discourses seriously in any analysis, but religion is never divorced from the realities of social actors.

It is easy and tempting for many to view violent religio-political groups as irrational. It is simple for others to blame this abstract thing called "Islam" for the violent crimes that those religio-political groups have committed. It is also appealing for Muslims to claim that these groups are not Islamic. However, a more sober look tells us that these groups are rational social actors with political agendas who also happen to be part of the religious market, providing a religious interpretation for consumption. Unfortunately, there are takers who find that interpretation appealing. They are certainly a small minority but even such a relatively small number is enough to wreak havoc on the world.

Muslims are right to politically distance themselves from all of these violent groups. They are also right to repeat everywhere that it is ludicrous to blame all Muslims for the actions of a small number of people. The potential backlash against Muslim individuals and communities could and has taken ugly turns, especially given the highly problematic and irresponsible rhetoric of far right-wing politicians in recent times. However, Muslims are wrong to keep denying any connection between Islam and the violence that we are witnessing everywhere. While individual Muslims are certainly not responsible for the actions of extremist groups, the Muslim community, as a whole, has serious responsibilities on at least two fronts.

Firstly, Muslims as a group have a duty to protect the present and future of their religion from its deteriorating reputation in large parts of the world. This cannot be achieved by simply repeating that Islam is peace and that the terrorists have hijacked it. What is truly required is a healthy dose of self-criticism. As carriers of an ethical message and a long tradition of spiritual teachings that have provided countless human beings throughout the ages with hope and love, Muslims cannot settle today for reactionary stances. Tough questions must be asked about the directions of Islamic thought in the contemporary world and about the failure of religious leaders to rise up to the challenges of our times.

Secondly, Muslims as a community have a responsibility toward the young Muslims who are falling prey every day to the recruiting effort and propaganda of terrorist groups. It is easy to vilify these young men and women, who are in search of identity and purpose in life, after they join violent groups and commit atrocious acts. What is needed is to ask difficult questions as to why no adequate alternatives were provided for them before such transitions occurred. It is imperative to contain the bleeding before the whole body succumbs to the wounds inflicted upon it. This is not simply a matter of reaching out to vulnerable members of the community; there is a real problem with the message of the religious scholars and the educational curricula in many Muslim contexts.

Although the majority of religious scholars condemn the actions and agendas of terrorist groups, they perpetuate the myths that sustain the appeal of these extremist groups in the minds of average Muslims from a young age. The religious scholars often preach about topics like the importance of jihad in Islam, the necessity of the institution of the

Caliphate, the obligation of implementing "God's Law", and many others. These scholars do not necessarily perceive these issues in the same light as the jihadist organizations, but they nevertheless skip any critical analysis of the historical character of these concepts and institutions. The result is the sustaining of a mytho-history in the minds of Muslim audiences.

2. Salafism and the Concept of *Salaf* in Islamic Discourses

To illustrate these dynamics, the following essay seeks to be a reflection on what I term the problem of the "Salafi impulse". A central aspect of the Salafi movement within Islam is its insistence on positing the *salaf* (the early Muslims), their behavior, and their perspective as uniquely authoritative for Muslims of all times and places. It is important to consider the implications for modern Muslims of positioning the *salaf* in these terms. I argue that the resulting dichotomy of *salaf*/*khalaf* (early Muslims vs. the following generations) not only creates a serious existential crisis for modern Muslims by amplifying the anxiety of living in a world that is drastically different from the world of the "Muslims" of the formative and classical periods, but also sets up conflictual relations with the religious other. Certainly, modern Salafis have been criticized by a variety of Muslim orientations. Perhaps, the strongest of these critiques is what can be termed the neo-traditionalist one. But because these critiques fail to consider the implications of keeping intact the understanding of the role and authority of the *salaf* in the contemporary world, they remain limited for the purpose of providing avenues for modern Muslims to fully engage with their times, to further participate in solving the current spiritual crises of the world, and to build meaningful and peaceful bridges with the practitioners of other religions and the non-religious populations.

Admittedly, defining Salafism is a rather tricky task, given that what might fall under its rubric might stretch from a very unique and exclusivist religious perspective to a significant and even close to mainstream one in the contemporary period. This partly depends on whether one speaks of a strict methodology, just an attitude, or something that falls in between. Without getting into the debate of when and how the term *Salafiyya* becomes part of the picture in Muslim contexts,[1] it is safe to say that there has constantly existed within the Muslim community "a reality without a name" (to use an analogy to the Sufi claim of Islamic authenticity) that stems from taking very seriously the perceived standard that expresses the earliest generations of Muslims. I will therefore continue to use the term "Salafi" for the purpose of the discussion, while stressing the caveat that the term neither necessarily entails a self-appellation by a person/group nor proposes the existence of a homogeneous sectarian movement.[2]

At a basic level, one can posit that Salafism regards the *salaf*, their religious understanding, and their exemplary behavior to be the exclusive way in which Muslims of all times and places ought to understand and practice their religion. Consequently, any perceived deviation from that ideal is not acceptable and must be fought in one fashion or another. What is at stake for the Salafis is nothing less than "true" Islam itself. By positioning themselves as the authentic followers of the *salaf*, the Salafis have constantly, and not surprisingly, clashed with both the realities of living "Muslim" communities in changing contexts and with the various developments of a historically adaptive and synthesizing mainstream Islamic tradition. Modern Salafism is no exception in relation to this conflict, especially as it gradually became aware of itself as a religious movement and not simply as a methodological orientation.

The Islamic tradition developed within a highly diverse civilizational framework. Long-established patterns of thought and practice have shaped and were themselves shaped by the communities and institutions in the lands that Muslims conquered. The slow transformation of Islam from a rudimentary and localized religious perspective into a universal, full-fledged, and complex religious system was a process through which various social actors negotiated their relation to a variety of historical, political, cultural, and intellectual tensions within their contexts. It was a process of integration, acculturation,

and compromise (Berkey 2003, pp. 113–59). Ultimately, many theological, mystical, and legal perspectives imposed themselves on the religious scene. In the midst of evolving socio-historical contexts and power structures, a workable orthodoxy[3] emerged from a creative mix of the elements available on the religious market. Thus, the Sunni mainstream comprised rationalist and mystical elements, living under an umbrella that is theoretically based on adherence to textual precedent.

Salafis have generally claimed to reject these compromises, particularly at times of upheavals or rapid change. Seeking to control the flow of religious legitimacy and to maintain a sense of stability that appeared to be under threat, Salafis have emphasized in one way or another their rejection of the hallmarks of the compromises made by the mainstream Sunni tradition. For Salafi thinkers, strict loyalty to the schools of law (*madhāhib*) and the insistence on the practice of following school precedent (*taqlīd*) when it stood against Hadith reports was tantamount to rejecting the authority of Muhammad himself. Similarly, Sufi rituals and practices that had no basis in the worship that Muhammad practiced, according to the prophetic reports collected by the Hadith experts (*muḥaddithūn*), were nothing but forms of heretical innovation (*biḍ'a*). And so it was for speculative theology, even when the latter reached acceptable positions to the Salafi worldview. Dialectical theology (*kalām*) was seen as misguided because of its use of "Greek" rationalistic tools and its delving into territories that were not grounded in the textual sources, as understood by the Salafis (Brown 2009, pp. 181–82, 194–95; see also Brown 2015, pp. 5–10).

In addition to having often shown themselves as very critical of the intellectual compromises of the mainstream Sunni tradition, Salafis constantly clashed with the folk practices of the larger populations. At the anthropological level, human communities inherit particular cultural and religious beliefs and practices from the previous generations. As times and circumstances change, shifts in these beliefs and practices occur. Often, these shifts might be barely noticeable in the short term. But at times of direct encounter with significantly different traditions and teachings, tensions between the way things "have always been" and the "new" directions are more acute. Importantly, the resulting cultural and religious structures are syncretic, mixing "old" and "new". This can be seen within the communities that arose over the centuries in areas that Islamic teachings had entered. Local populations have practiced and continue to practice popular forms of Islam that mix local traditional religious practices and Islamic notions. It is toward this folk religion that many Salafi movements and scholars directed their ire, particularly at times of instability and struggle over social and political control.[4]

3. The Neo-Traditionalist Response to Salafism

Not surprisingly, the Salafi perspective has been criticized from competing interpretive orientations within the Islamic tradition. This is the case in the modern world as well. The most sustained attack on the rise in popularity of Salafism in the 20th century came from the religious scholars (*'ulamā'*) who came to perceive themselves as the inheritors of what Jonathan AC Brown terms the Late Sunni Tradition.[5] As such, they also see themselves as the defenders of mainstream Islam against sectarian divisions and heretical beliefs. In many ways, they represent what remains of the "establishment" religious class. They often pride themselves as the carriers of a deeply sophisticated religious legacy. From that position, they realize that the increasing popularity of Salafism is first and foremost a threat to a whole class of "official" interpreters of the religion of God, whose prestige has been acknowledged by both Muslim rulers and Muslim populations. In other words, the popularity of Salafis becomes a threat to a dominant interpretive community and to a perceived consensus over what Islam is, *regardless* of how different in reality the Salafi interpretations are from the positions of the Late Sunni Tradition. In the words of the late Syrian scholar Al-Būtī (d. 2013), a strong critic of Salafism, non-madhhabism [rejection of different orthodox schools of law] is the most dangerous innovation that faces the *sharī'a*.[6]

The bulk of the response of those I call neo-traditionalist Sunni scholars to the Salafi challenge builds on one main point. They suggest that the Salafis are simply not knowl-

edgeable enough to realize that the mainstream Sunni tradition had already dealt with all of the points raised within Salafi circles about the Islamic authenticity of various practices and beliefs. As a result, whenever the Salafis raise the banner of the practice of the Prophet and the *salaf*, they do not understand that these precedents were taken into consideration within the Sunni schools, using sophisticated interpretative models (Al-Ghazālī 1996, pp. 14–15).

Khaled Abou El Fadl notes that Muslim jurists did not perceive the Hadith experts as "legitimate legal scholars". He highlights an analogy that the jurists utilized to describe themselves in relation to the Hadith experts. This was the analogy of doctors and pharmacists (Abou El Fadl 2001, pp. 49–50). While the latter have access to medications, they do not have the adequate training to prescribe them to patients. On the other hand, doctors, who have deep training in diagnosing the ills of their patients, are the ones who use their knowledge to indicate which medications are to be prescribed and at what doses they ought to be given to particular people. Similarly, the People of Hadith sift through available Prophetic reports to find the authentic traditions, but they cannot make legal rulings based on them. They need jurists who, like the doctors, have the required knowledge and training to recognize which texts fit what situation and to deal with seeming contradictions. Muḥammad Al-Ghazālī (1996) uses a similar analogy, insisting that the *ahl al-ḥadīth* only provides the building materials, but it is up to the architects, i.e., the jurists (*ahl al-fiqh*), to decide what use to make of them in order to erect buildings (Al-Ghazālī 1996, p. 32). By not respecting this hierarchy, those who claim to follow the practice of the *salaf* are in fact corrupting the practice that they seek to defend, because they are unable to deal with the subtleties of the received traditions on one hand and of the realities of changing circumstances on the other hand.

4. Rethinking the Notion of *Salaf*

The various forms of criticism that the neo-traditionalists level against the Salafis highlight both the latter's often unpractical and anti-pluralistic understanding of Islamic teachings and their reductive view of a rich tradition of religious thought and practice. However, I would argue that these forms of criticism fall short of opening the needed space for contemporary Muslims to fully engage their time. Even though the neo-traditionalists are aware of the importance of contemporary realities, they maintain a structure that ultimately disregards the need to take those realities in a very serious and methodical way.

I see this to be partly the result of failing to critically question the centrality of the religious perspective of the *salaf*. The critiques above keep intact the dogma of the first generations of Muslims being the best of all generations. The neo-traditionalist response to the Salafis primarily seeks to defend the intellectual and cultural/religious developments and compromises of Sunni orthodoxy over the centuries. In other terms, the bulk of the response to the Salafis wants to show that the Sunni mainstream tradition had not deviated from the way of the *salaf*. This response predictably accepts the premise that the religious perspective of the *salaf* is indeed supreme; it rejects, however, the narrow Salafi view of what the perspective of the *salaf* entails. The problem is that while the responses to Salafism are useful in the hands of modern social actors and political entities that fear its uncompromising character, they do not consider the serious implications of the *salaf*-centered religious worldview for modern Muslims.

The dichotomy of *salaf* vs. *khalaf* remains within the domain of the *unthought* in Islamic thought, to use Mohammed Arkoun's terminology.[7] Putting aside the textual claims used to sustain this dichotomy, I would suggest that what occurred in the historical setting and ultimately produced the dichotomy is what might be termed the *construction of the salaf*. I see this as a lengthy process of religious and political negotiations that ultimately led to the creation of the image of *who* the *salaf were* and *what* their legacy *meant*. In this regard, I insist that the formation of more concrete Islamic identities by the 9th/10th centuries (identities that can partially be seen in the intellectual production of the scholars of Islam) cannot blind the historian to the strong competition over meaning that preceded these more concrete identities (Arkoun 2003, pp. 28–46).

I would argue that within what would mature as the Sunni context, a particular image of the *salaf* became the norm because it served an important role in the formation of a stable religio-political identity. The religious primacy of the *salaf* guaranteed the legitimacy of Qur'anic revelation, particularly in its written form of the official codex (*muṣḥaf*), [8] against the claims of those who raised doubts about its integrity. In response to and in negotiation with other still forming Islamic orthodoxies in their Shi'i and Khariji versions, the Sunni "middle ground" embraced the universal probity of the Companions of Muhammad (*'adālat al-saḥāba*).[9] Not surprisingly, this was concomitant with the rise and ultimate success of the Hadith movement and its drive to localize the Sunna (normative practice of Muhammad) within Prophetic reports. It is here that one might find the fertile ground for such ideas as the best generations being the ones that came right after the Prophet, possessing a rightly guided path to be strongly held onto. This ideal image clearly clashes with what survived in the historical record. It would not be a stretch to think of the early years of the post-Muhammad community as much more chaotic in political terms and as much more spontaneous in religious terms. Accordingly, the *construction of the salaf* had much more to do with those involved in negotiating Sunni orthodoxy in the 9th and 10th centuries than with the Companions of Muhammad themselves. Importantly, once the constructed notion of the *salaf* became at the center of the Sunni perspective, the battle over religious authority became tied to being able to position one's perspective within the range of the religious thought and practice of the *salaf*.

Beyond the question of considering the basis of the dichotomy *salaf*/*khalaf*, it is crucial to highlight why this is not simply a description of what a "correct" Islamic theological perspective ought to be. What this dichotomy creates is, on one hand, a hierarchy of human beings in relation to God and on the other hand, a powerful political tool to be harnessed by social actors in a variety of contexts. Regarding the first question, one of the basic elements that the Qur'an constantly stresses and that can confidently be seen as central to Muhammad's vision is the notion of the equality of believers in the eyes of God. The basis of the community, as Muhammad seems to have envisioned it, was to move beyond the hierarchies of Arab society and to establish an egalitarian framework based on faith. Certainly, there is a new hierarchy that is part of the Qur'anic message itself. Arguably, this hierarchical view postulates awareness of God (*taqwā*) as the criterion of superiority (Rahman 1980, pp. 28–31). "The most honored among you in the eyes of God are the most aware of Him (*atqākum*)", states the Qur'an.[10] However, this is an open field of competition. Theoretically, anyone from any generation or place can reach a high position, based on one's cultivation of *taqwā*. This is in contrast to the dogma of the superiority of the *salaf* as an undisputable starting point.

The latter dogma is especially problematic when the tradition itself recorded a big number of instances of ethically questionable behavior on the part of the first generations of Muslims. One must add that the historicity of these accounts is irrelevant to the argument made here, because whether the specifics occurred or not, they did become part of the memory of the later generations of Muslims and were featured in the works of Muslim historians. Yet, the *salaf* were given moral and religious primacy, thus establishing a hierarchy with serious ramifications. Moreover, in Sunni thought, the term *salaf* became associated with the adjective "pious" (*ṣāliḥ*), thus their *ṣalāh* (piety) became both a religious dogma and an important component of the religious memory of Sunni Muslims in all contexts. This makes the hierarchy *salaf*/*khalaf* even more challenging. If piety is connected to one part of the dichotomy, it does not take much to perceive the religious worth of the *khalaf* as low and their religious perspectives as accordingly lacking. Even more impactful is the position that every generation of Muslims is worse than the one that preceded it. This is clear in the statement attributed to Muhammad in the hadith collection of Bukhari, according to which, "a time period will not come upon you but with the one following it being in a worse state (*lā ya'tī'alaykum zamān illā wa-lladhī ba'dahu sharrun minhu*)". Therefore "*khalaf*" is not a simple description but a political statement made with the purpose of

discrediting the religious perspective of opponents at every juncture of Islamic history. This takes us to the question of the dichotomy *salaf*/*khalaf* as a powerful religio-political tool.

The dogma of the primacy of the perspective of the *salaf* becomes a powerful tool in the hands of those who speak in its name. Long after the *salaf* had left this world, those who have claimed to speak in their name have been able to impose a particular religious perspective that *supports* and *is supported* by a political order whose legitimacy stems from defending the "true" religion (Arkoun 1986, p. 31). As stated above, once this framework becomes dominant, any religio-political opposition must present itself as adhering to the perspective of the *salaf*, if it hoped for any success. It is not surprising that neo-traditionalists, modernists, and Salafis all stress that the religious perspective of the *salaf* has primacy, although they differ as to what constitutes a deviation from it. This is also why the Salafi argument *has been and will continue to be potent*. Arguably, the Salafi message is more consistent with the constructed notion of "*salaf*". So, when an acute identity crisis hits, the certainty and straightforwardness of that message becomes more appealing. I would suggest that this is the case at both the individual and communal levels.

5. Religious Claims of Authenticity and the Realities of Historical Change

The tension that is inherent in the *construction of the salaf*, as a basis for religious authenticity, is that the human condition inevitably changes. Even within the same geographical area, social, economic, and political conditions shift and thus create new challenges to the communities and individuals who reside in that area. Adapting to change is always a necessity. However, the tension is much more acute when a religious perspective that develops within a particular socio-linguistic and cultural setting is exported elsewhere. This is why the mainstream Sunni tradition had to negotiate, albeit unevenly, with each new environment and with each local cultural and religious perspective. In many cases, local practices, often with a Sufi garb, were introduced into the scholarly world. Significantly, the primacy of the *salaf* remained untouched at the theoretical level despite being compromised in practice. At the popular level, local populations often went way beyond what the scholarly elite would tolerate. Syncretism was the norm. As mentioned above, Salafi scholars and movements decried both the compromises of the mainstream scholars and the syncretism of the Muslim populations. What remains in the domain of the *unthought* for the Salafis is that religious syncretism is a natural and unavoidable element in the growth of any religious perspective. The religious perspective of the *salaf* itself is a syncretic one. How can it be otherwise? A religious perspective is born and grows in an already existing cultural framework and using an existing language and an existing stock of symbols (Abū Zayd 1994, pp. 130–31). Even the rituals that came to be the five pillars of Islam are adaptations of existing religious practices. This is clear in the case of pilgrimage (Ḥajj) and fasting (*Ṣiyām*), but even daily prayers (*Ṣalāt*) fits this description (Mohammed 1999, pp. 17–28). In other words, there is no such thing as religion in a historical vacuum. The religious perspective of the *salaf* is intimately tied to the cultural, religious, and linguistic setting in which they operated as social actors. Freezing the Muslim religious experience in the particular experience of the *salaf* is untenable because there is no way around historical changes in human mentalities, knowledge production, and cultural frames. The mainstream Sunni tradition survived and continued to be relevant because it made compromises and engaged with the new settings that it came across. But by maintaining the primacy of the *salaf* at the theoretical level, it carried within it the powerful Salafi impulse.

The most significant attempt within Islam to break free from the constructed notion of the *salaf* and from the primacy of their religious perspective is the Sufi experience. The Sufis stressed the here and now, although in terms of their spiritual experience, time was relative (Abū Zayd 2002, pp. 127–29). Generally, Sufism challenged the reliance on past religious experiences and instead focused on having direct interaction with the divine through a spiritual process that allowed the true Sufi to ultimately become one with God. This was a serious challenge to the more legalistic forms of Islam because the language of the latter positioned God outside the world even though He, of course, interacted with

it. Sufism, by contrast, based itself on the notion of the unity of the world; thus, God was the only reality. This led to serious misunderstandings, as witnessed by the experience of al-Ḥallāj (d. 923), who was excommunicated and ultimately executed for stating "I am the Truth (*anā al-ḥaqq*)" and refusing to recant. This moment must be read in the larger religio-political context of a struggle over meaning in Islamic contexts.

What the Sufi experience brought to the table was the ability of every Muslim to reach the highest of religious levels. Therefore, the Muslims *of the here and now* mattered and their religious experiences and perspectives had the *potential* to be equal to or higher than what was inherited from the *salaf*. It is no accident that a number of Sufi figures perceived themselves as friends of God (*awliyā' Allāh*) and even as quasi-prophets (see Abū Zayd 2002, pp. 29–62). I would argue that this was a religiously and politically subversive position and that this is partly why it could not be sustained without compromise.

The mainstream Sunni tradition ultimately incorporated Sufism into its fabric, but at a cost to the religious perspective of the here and now. A dividing line was drawn between the acceptable and unacceptable forms of Sufi spirituality. By the time Sufism reached its institutionalized forms, the Sufi paths (*ṭarīqas*) had elaborated chains of transmission (*silsila*) of their religious practice, reaching back through the *salaf* to the Prophet (Brown 2009, pp. 192–95). It was then becoming common, in a way reminiscent of the Shi'i perspective, that Muhammad's teachings included an esoteric component that was passed down through some of his prominent companions and their successors.

Here again, we see the power of the constructed notion of *salaf* which became the only way to guarantee the authenticity and legitimacy of Sufi practices. Salafis remained skeptical, not without reason, of the Sufi claims of being grounded in the practices of the *salaf*. It must be stressed, however, that unlike what Salafis have often claimed, "unorthodox" Sufism has always been Islamic, in the sense that the spiritual experiences of the Sufis could not exist in the forms that they took without the seekers being an integral part of the world of symbols and discourses initiated by the Qur'an and Muhammad. However, in my opinion, the softening of the radical spirituality of Sufism, as a way to include it within the mainstream tradition, was a big blow to the right of Muslims belonging to the "*khalaf*" to define their own Islamic perspectives in ways that are uniquely meaningful to them.

6. Islamic Discourses and the Challenge of Modernity

If the issue of historical change has always been central to the tension between the demands of the time and the inherited notions and beliefs, it is no surprise that the tensions would intensify after the Muslim encounter with European modernity. The advent of modernity in Europe led to tremendous shifts in the way social, political, and economic interactions occurred in European societies. This was obviously not a sudden shift, but rather the result of a long process, the elements of which can arguably be traced all the way back to the 15th century, if not earlier. Importantly, this process was far from being a smooth transition. Bloody conflicts and major setbacks were part of the transmutation, to use Marshall Hodgson's term. Nevertheless, the severe changes proved inevitable, not only in Europe, but eventually in the whole world.

Modernity has been a challenge to traditional societies in general. At one level, one can argue that modernity's building was constructed on the base of the notion of doubt. Whereas premodern societies generally found their stability in assuming an ontological reality that was beyond doubt, modernity shifted its focus to human reason and through it, questioned everything else. In other words, traditional societies put a transcendent reality at the center of the world and everything else was built around this "truth". Modernity allowed human reason to move beyond this center. Certainly, one can argue that human reason itself was the new ontological reality, but in hindsight, it was inevitable that a more relative approach to human reason would find its way into the framework of modernity. In all cases, the cataclysmic results of the shift away from the premodern transcendent truth as center are still felt today in important ways.

Not surprisingly, the impact of the modern framework in Europe was felt in the field of religion. Modernity challenged both the authority of traditional religious clergy and the sacred character of religious texts. In premodern times, the interaction of living communities with religious texts that they came to recognize as authoritative created lasting and sophisticated traditions. In this structure, the "managers of the sacred", to use Weberian terminology, played a major role as speakers in the name of the divine. Importantly, the religious and the political were in constant negotiation because the rulers needed to legitimize their standing in the eyes of populations, for which religion provided meaning at all levels of existence. Modernity brought about systemic changes that limited this traditional religious authority.

Slowly, access to the interpretation and study of religion moved away from being the exclusive prerogative of a particular group of religious professionals. In many contexts, the separation of church and state and the relegation of religious practice to the private sphere also limited the reach of religious education. In time, religion, like any other human activity, came to be "scientifically" approached in modern universities. Religious texts have come under close scrutiny. No longer considered exclusively and simply sacred depositories of God's words, scriptures were studied from outside their religious traditions. As a result, light was increasingly put on the human side of these texts. Philological, historical, and linguistic tools were put to the service of dissecting them and understanding the way in which they developed in specific historical circumstances.

In addition, modernity brought with it a renewed focus on the individual. With that, the right of an individual to dissent and to go against the beliefs of the community was slowly becoming the norm within Western societies. In the premodern societies of the Mediterranean Basin, the identity of the individual was generally inseparable from that of the religious group; one could almost not exist outside the strict control of the community. With the rise of modernity, people became increasingly aware of their individuality.

It would not be an exaggeration to describe the changes introduced into the Muslim contexts as a result of the encounter with modern thought as cataclysmic. It suffices here to briefly highlight four elements that have had a huge impact on the paradigm of the religious primacy of the *salaf*. Firstly, modern technology and communication tools made the pace of change much faster than ever before in human history. Muslim societies have changed irreversibly, though unevenly, in the last two centuries. Secondly, modernity brought to the Muslim world a much higher awareness of each person's individuality. The spread of education and economic independence on a much larger scale has created individuals that are more likely to challenge communitarian limitations imposed on them. This process will continue to make things more complex as literacy rates climb and as globalization expands its reach into more territories. Thirdly, although the rethinking of religion that has occurred in Western contexts has only partially entered the Muslim study of Islam, it seems inevitable that new approaches to Islam will develop, as more Muslims become acquainted with the scholarly tools that have reshaped human knowledge. Fourthly, awareness of the religious other has shifted in a significant way. It is true that in premodern times, members of different religious communities did interact, but the interactions remained limited because interaction generally and mostly occurred when it was necessary and only within an internalized hierarchical structure. Understandably, one's identity was closely tied to one's group. One grew up, learned a craft (or received a religious education), married, and died within the confines of one's community. Thus, converting to another religious path was tantamount to betrayal and even treason within charged political contexts. In contrast, within modern contexts, the concept of citizenship, even when misapplied and misappropriated, has allowed individuals belonging to different religious denominations to interact on a more intense level than before. As a result, there arises a sense of egalitarianism that has challenged, at the level of everyday practice, the hierarchical tendencies of premodern religious dogmas.

As a result, in no other time in Islamic history have Salafi positions and actions seemed so anachronistic. In this context, I might argue that change in the modern world is so

radical that the neo-traditionalist attempt to compromise with lived realities would neither satisfy the needs of modern Muslims in convincing ways nor will it be able to persuasively show the Salafi character of their compromises. The neo-traditionalist perspective can only present a hybrid that is sustained by the weight of tradition in the minds of the Muslim populations and the need for legitimacy of political regimes that are not grounded in popular sovereignty. Within such contexts, a worldview centered on the religious views of the *salaf* has created and will continue to create sharp identity crises that push idealist youth into clashing with the realities of their world and fermenting conflicts that threaten peaceful interaction within Muslim communities and with other religious and non-religious groups and communities.

7. Conclusions

Jacques Derrida once wrote, "if there is a categorical imperative, it consists in doing everything for the future to remain open" (Derrida and Ferraris 2001, p. 83). In this essay, I reflected on a question that imposes itself within Muslim contexts, namely, whether the centrality of the religious perspective of the *salaf* is sustainable in the long term. Can the Muslim future remain open within such framework when the pace of change in the world is growing faster every day? From artificial intelligence soon reaching amazing new heights to the creation of life in laboratories that is already upon us, to the possibility of manipulating human genes, to the fact that living on other planets is on the agenda of scientific research, etc., human existence will change faster and in much more unpredictable ways than ever. The sky is not the limit anymore, yet humankind needs moral, ethical, and spiritual guidance more than ever before. This requires adherents of all religions to grow and sustain interpretations of their traditions that uphold human dignity and peaceful interactions with others. I suggest that an open Muslim future is possible in those terms, but the Salafi impulse must be ethically, intellectually, and spiritually scrutinized. The concepts developed within a religious system are tools and means and not goals; consequently, if they fail to reach those goals, they must be rethought.

In relation to peace and violence, the right question to ask is not whether Islam is peaceful or violent; it is to ask which interpretations of Islam can participate in creating a peaceful future for the coming generations, Muslims and non-Muslims alike. My hope is that this essay opens a few doors of reflection and debate beyond polemics and apologetics.

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Notes

1 Commins makes a good case for the Syrian origin of modern *Salafiyya* in (Commins 1990, pp. 34–48).

2 For a good summary of premodern "proto-Salafis", see (Brown 2015, pp. 117–44).

3 For a good definition of orthodoxy, see (Arkoun 1982, pp. 158–59).

4 See, for instance, the world of the reformer dan Fodio in (Hiskett 1994).

5 Brown astutely discusses the Late Sunni Tradition in terms of the stabilizing institutionalization and consolidation of various forms of religious knowledge (Brown 2009, pp. 56–57).

6 This is the title of one of al-Būti's books in which he responds to Salafī scholars. See (Al-Būtī 2005).

7 For an elaboration on the concepts of the "unthought" and the "unthinkable", see (Arkoun 2002, pp. 24–34).

8 For the implications of the establishment of the muṣḥaf, see (Arkoun 1994, pp. 37–39).

9 For a critique of the notion of *ʿadālat al-sahāba*, see (Abū Rayya 1994, pp. 310–17).

10 Qur'ān, 49:13.

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Article

War and Peace in Modern Hindu Thought—Gandhi, Aurobindo, and Vivekananda in Conversation

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Abstract: Mohandas Gandhi (1869–1948) and Aurobindo Ghose (1872–1950) hold distinct, yet overlapping, positions on the topic of war and peace, violence and nonviolence, and how evil ought to best be confronted. To some extent, the overlaps in their views can be seen as an effect of them basing their respective ideals on a shared foundation of Hindu teaching. More specifically, at least some portion of this overlap can potentially be seen as a function of the influence exerted upon both of these thinkers by the teachings of Swami Vivekananda, who was an inspiration to many modern Hindu thinkers, including both Gandhi and Ghose, as both figures attest. This paper will argue, apart from any historical influence he may or may not have had upon them, that Gandhi's and Ghose's views both, in different senses, comport well with the teaching of Swami Vivekananda. Specifically, the argument will be what could be called the utopian and realist orientations of Gandhi and Ghose, respectively, regarding the topic of violence, and we can find a logical reconciliation in Vivekananda's philosophy of karma yoga: the path to liberation through service to the suffering beings of the world.

Keywords: Hinduism; Hindu philosophy; modern Hindu thought; nonviolence; just war theory; Gandhi; Mohandas K.; Ghose; Sri Aurobindo; Vivekananda; Swami; Vedanta

1. Gandhi and Ghose on the Question of War and Peace: Thesis and Antithesis

As is the case with any religious tradition that is ancient and commands a wide following, it is next to impossible to state with any accuracy what 'the' Hindu position is on issues related to violence and nonviolence. Any statement about Hindu beliefs regarding violence and nonviolence is going to be a very broad generalization. The most accurate answer to the question, "What is the Hindu view on violence and nonviolence?" is "It depends on which Hindu, or Hindus, you ask, or which Hindu texts you consult." Concerning texts, it also depends upon whose interpretation one consults. Interpretations of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, for example, vary widely on this topic. Mohandas K. Gandhi, for example, who is known for his profound commitment to nonviolence, saw the ideal of nonviolence to be affirmed in this text, while Bal Gangadhar Tilak read it as a justification for revolutionary violence (Gosavi 1983, pp. 45–48). If one must generalize about a tradition as vast and ancient as Hinduism, one can say that Hinduism, on the whole, affirms an ideal of nonviolence, but that it also concedes a limited necessity for violence in practice (Long 2022, p. 14). This is a statement true of both Gandhi and Aurobindo Ghose, though the specifics of what it means in each of their cases, of course, vary.

In terms of modern Hindu thought, specifically, the affirmation of the ideal of nonviolence is most prominently associated with Gandhi, while in contrast to Gandhi, an especially articulate affirmation of the occasional necessity for violence can be found in

the writings of Aurobindo Ghose. To be sure, it would be dangerous to oversimply either Gandhi's or Ghose's positions by using facile labels—to think of Gandhi as affirming a position of absolute nonviolence (which he did not) or to think of Ghose as a warmonger (which he was not). Both are complex and subtle thinkers and the values that unite them are of far greater moment than what divides them. Both of these figures also, of course, varied in their thinking at different points in their complex lives and careers. If we think of Hinduism, again, as, on the whole, affirming an ideal of nonviolence while simultaneously conceding a limited need for violence in practice, this is actually a fair characterization of the positions of both Gandhi and Ghose. It is important to emphasize this point, especially because it has become fashionable on social media of late to mischaracterize Gandhi as an absolute pacifist for rhetorical reasons, and occasionally to set Ghose against Gandhi as though the two were diametrically opposed. In fact, the Gandhi who would disallow violence under all circumstances is a straw man who does not resemble his online caricatures. Similarly, while Ghose was sharply critical of Gandhian nonviolence, and while he actively supported the cause of violent revolution against the British in his youth, his ideal for independent India, rooted in dharmic principles, was not dramatically at odds with Gandhi's. As Robert McDermott explains:

> Like [Mohandas K.] Gandhi. . .Sri Aurobindo [Ghose] was less concerned with political independence than with what India would do with independence; a political solution would be temporary at best if it were not based on a heightened consciousness and the discipline of selfless action. (McDermott 2001, p. 19)

While, however, the deep affinities of Gandhi and Ghose need to be borne in mind, it is also true that they did differ on the topic of violence. While neither thinker was either an absolute pacifist or a raging warmonger, they occupy distinct positions within what could be viewed as a spectrum of possible stances on the topic of war and peace, of violence and nonviolence, in the Hindu tradition. Neither of them stands at either of the extremes of this spectrum, but Gandhi is clearly much closer to one end of the spectrum and Ghose to the other.

One end of this spectrum could be articulated using the very ancient formula, found in the *Mahābhārata*, that *ahiṃsā paramo dharmaḥ*, which can be translated as "Nonviolence is the supreme duty."[1] The other could be articulated using a statement that is not actually derived from the *Mahābhārata*, but which has nevertheless become popular among many Hindus as an addendum to *ahiṃsā paramo dharmaḥ*, namely *dharma hiṃsā tathaiva ca*.[2] This addendum can be translated as "Violence is thus also a duty." The gist of this addendum is that precisely because nonviolence is the ideal state—precisely in order to sustain nonviolent social conditions—violence may occasionally be necessary. What this addendum suggests is not that nonviolence is *not* the ideal state or the supreme duty. What it suggests, rather, is that we live in a highly imperfect world in which the ideal state is extremely difficult to realize without the need for moral compromise. If *ahiṃsā paramo dharmaḥ* is taken as a commitment to absolute non-violence, then *dharma hiṃsā tathaiva ca* is its antithesis, inasmuch as it rejects the idea that ahiṃsā can ever be absolute in this world.

To be sure, characterizing Gandhi's position as one of *absolute* nonviolence in practice is incorrect. As Douglas Allen has noted:

> Many supporters and critics focus on various passages in Gandhi's writings and turn him into some rigid absolutist, uncompromisingly insisting on Absolute Truth and Absolute Nonviolence. (Allen 2019, p. 27)

As Allen argues, nonviolence is, for Gandhi, an absolute *ideal*. It rests in the realm of absolute truth. We human beings, however, in the cycle of history, the cycle of time, space, and causation, or *saṃsāra*, are in the realm of relative truth. Our *ahiṃsā*, therefore—our

nonviolence in thought, word, and action—is inevitably imperfect. Absolute truths are "regulative ideals." We can be closer to or further away from our ideal, but we must be wary of confusing the relative with the real. As Allen observes, "Much of human egoistic arrogance, violence, and untruth consists in claiming that our relative truths are Absolute Truth." (Ibid., p. 28).

What does it mean to say that Gandhi saw nonviolence in this world as inevitably imperfect? It means that in the practical, relative realm, there could be occasions when violence, while always regrettable and tragic, might be necessary. He believed, for example, that "even in a non-violent State a police force may be necessary. This, I admit, is a sign of my imperfect Ahimsa. I have not the courage to declare that we can carry on without a police force as I have in respect of any army." (Gandhi 1969, p. 11). He also famously wrote that, "Where choice is set between cowardice and violence, I would advise violence. . .I prefer to use arms in defense of honor rather than remain vile witness of dishonor." (Mandela 1999).

At the same time, he was quite clear in his affirmation of the overall superiority of nonviolence over violence, writing the following in his journal *Young India* in 1920:

> I do believe that, where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence, I would advise violence. . .But I believe that non-violence is infinitely superior to violence, forgiveness is more manly than punishment. Forgiveness adorns a soldier. But abstinence is forgiveness only when there is the power to punish; it is meaningless when it pretends to proceed from a helpless creature. (Cited by Kapur 2019)

While Gandhi clearly does concede the possibility that in the realm of relative truth, the realm of history, there can and do arise occasions when violent force is needed in order to prevent greater suffering (thus necessitating the existence of a police force and an army), as well as situations in which the choice to be violent might be morally superior to another course of action (such as if that other course were to emanate from cowardice rather than from a genuine conviction in favor of nonviolence), his ideal nonviolence, and his aim is that a nonviolent solution should always be possible, if we are sufficiently creative to discover it. He sees his concession of the need for a police force and an army, for example, as a sign of his "imperfect Ahimsa." This is a contrast with the thought of Aurobindo Ghose, who appears more ready to concede the inevitability of violence.

For Ghose, as for Gandhi, as long as we remain in *saṃsāra*, in the cycle of karma and rebirth, and of time, space, and causation, we shall always fall short of that highest perfection that the ideal of ahiṃsā—of nonviolence in thought, word, and action—expresses. Ghose, however, underscores that violence and warfare are therefore inevitable parts of life. In his words:

> War and destruction are not only a universal principle of our life here in its purely material aspects, but also of our mental and moral existence. . .It is impossible, at least as men and things are, to advance, to grow, to fulfill, and still to observe really and utterly that principle of harmlessness [ahiṃsā] which is yet placed before us as the highest and best law of conduct. (Ghose 1972, p. 39)

Because Ghose views violence as an inevitable part of life in the material world—as "a universal principle of our life here in its purely material aspects"—he "never accepted the centrality of Gandhi's message of 'nonviolence' nor Gandhi's emphasis on voluntary suffering and self-abasement. Sri Aurobindo was not a 'Gandhian.'" (Minor 2003, p. 87). Gandhi, to be sure, saw the limits of ahiṃsā in practice, but was always willing to push the boundaries of what was possible in this regard, to an extent that Ghose did not find acceptable.

The contrast between Gandhi's and Ghose's thinking on this topic is well illustrated by their views on the *Bhagavad Gītā*, a central Hindu text on which both gave extensive commentaries. Gandhi sees the battlefield of Kurukṣetra, on which the *Bhagavad Gītā* is set, as a metaphor for the struggle of life. He is thus able to reconcile the fact that Kṛṣṇa, in this text, enjoins the hero Arjuna to be brave and fight the battle before him with his commitment to the ideal of ahiṃsā. He does not so much address this concern directly at the outset of his commentary but rather sees the ideal of ahiṃsā as emanating naturally from the mode of life outlined by Kṛṣṇa in the remainder of the text (where it is, in fact, mentioned as one of the qualities of one who pursues the path of yoga).[3] As Gandhi explains his approach to this classic text of the Hindu tradition:

> The *Mahābhārata* [of which the *Bhagavad Gītā* forms a portion] is not history. It is a work treating of religious and ethical questions. The battle described here is a struggle between *dharma* and *adharma.* It is a battle between the innumerable forces of good and evil, which become personified in us as virtues and vices. The Kauravas represent the forces of evil, the Pandavas the forces of good. We shall leave aside the question of violence and nonviolence and say that this work was written to explain man's duty in this inner strife. (Gandhi and Desai 2012, p. 27)

Gandhi is far from being alone in the Hindu tradition in reading both the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* as a metaphorical text: an allegory for the spiritual life. In the modern tradition, Swami Jyotirmayananda taps into an earlier practice of reading these texts metaphorically, as illustrated in the fourteenth to fifteenth century *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*. Jyotirmayananda sees the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* primarily as guides to spiritual life and descriptions of the process of God-realization. While Jyotirmayananda does not deny the traditional view that these texts depict events which actually occurred, he does not see the depiction of history, in the conventional sense, as their primary objective. The importance of the texts, for Jyotirmayananda, as for Gandhi, is the moral and spiritual lessons that they impart. This is why, in his view, they have been preserved for so many centuries. Such texts need to be read for multiple levels of meaning. There is the surface, or literal, meaning, in which they depict events such as battles and the kinds of struggles that mortals typically face in the world, but there are deeper levels of moral and spiritual meaning as well that are pertinent for all who seek *mokṣa*: the highest goal of life, as described in the Hindu traditions. Speaking of the *Mahābhārata* specifically, Jyotirmayananda writes:

> In the Indian literary tradition, the *Mahābhārata* is referred to as an 'itihāsa,' which means history. It must be understood, however, that although there is a historical element in scriptures, historicity is not the important aspect. For sages, historical scriptures recounted not only the lives of kings, but the experiences in human life that reveal the mystery of creation and give insight into the spiritual laws of life. The scriptures were written to give you guidelines on the path towards liberation through stories and parables that have profound mystical meaning. The teachings of the *Mahābhārata* are universal. Its wisdom is not merely intended for those interested in Indian history or religion. Like any profound scripture, if the *Mahābhārata* is studied with proper guidance and with the right spiritual perspective, it will inspire all that is good in human personality and lead aspirants to the attainment of the highest goals of human existence. (Jyotirmayananda 1993, pp. 18–19)

Ghose, by contrast, gives greater emphasis to the historicity of the text, while at the same time not denying the spiritual symbolism that is present within it. He strongly rejects, however, a wholesale 'allegorization' or 'spiritualization' of the text. It is important to him that, "The Gita is. . .addressed to a fighter, a man of action, one whose duty in life is that of

war and protection, war as part of government for the protection of those who are. . .at the mercy of the strong and the violent." (Ghose 1972, p. 45).

> Arjuna is the fighter in the chariot with divine Krishna as his charioteer. There is a method of explaining the Gita in which not only this episode but the whole Mahabharata is turned into an allegory of the inner life and has nothing to do with our outward human life and action, but only with the battles of the soul and the powers that strive within us for possession. That is a view which the general character and the actual language of the epic does not justify and, if pressed, would turn the straightforward philosophical language of the Gita into a constant, laborious, and somewhat puerile mystification. The language of the Veda and part at least of the Puranas is plainly symbolic, full of figures and concrete representations of things that lie behind the veil [separating the material and the spiritual planes of existence], but the Gita is written in plain terms and professes to solve the great ethical and spiritual difficulties which the life of man raises, and it will not do to go behind this plain language and thought and wrest them to the service of our fancy. (Ghose 1938, p. 4)

Because Ghose resists the allegorical approach to the *Gītā*, he does not shy away from concluding that the battle of Kurukṣetra was exactly what it appears to be in the *Gītā* and in the wider text of the *Mahābhārata*: a battle, where people were killed, and in which Kṛṣṇa encouraged Arjuna to fight. This is consistent with his belief that violence is an inevitable part of life in this material world, and that the virtuous path is sometimes a path of violence, albeit one carried out under very specific conditions.

2. Gandhi's and Ghose's Approaches Unpacked: Nivṛtti and Pravṛtti

Gandhi's and Ghose's respective approaches to the question of violence and nonviolence, and of war and peace in particular, can both find justification in the wider Hindu tradition of which both are inheritors. Again, if one must generalize about a tradition as vast and ancient as Hinduism, one can say that Hinduism, on the whole, affirms an ideal of nonviolence, but that it also concedes a limited necessity for violence in practice. More specifically, one can find particular strands of the Hindu tradition that focus on the ideal of nonviolence and others that affirm the limited necessity for violence in practice. Gandhi's thought and Ghose's can both be characterized as fitting within this wide tradition, with Gandhi gravitating more toward its former current and Ghose toward the latter.

Ahiṃsā—harmlessness, or nonviolence in thought, word, and action—is closely inked in premodern Hindu traditions to two concepts: the unity of existence and the attainment of the ultimate goal of human life. In the *Dharma Śāstras*, or legal texts of Hinduism, four human aims (*puruṣārthas*) are outlined. These are traditionally listed as follows:

1. *Dharma*: duty, responsibility, and leading a good, moral life.
2. *Artha*: power, wealth, and the means for both enjoying and sustaining life.
3. *Kāma*: sensory enjoyment.
4. *Mokṣa*: liberation from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth.

Mokṣa, the ultimate goal, is in many ways set apart from the other three human aims.[4] Enjoying life, acquiring the means both to enjoy life and to fulfill one's social duties, and the fulfillment of these duties and the acquisition of wealth through morally acceptable methods, are all arguably universal human pursuits. There is nothing specifically Hindu about them, as human beings everywhere pursue these goods. We all want to enjoy ourselves. We all need the means to enjoy ourselves, and, if we may presume the moral universalism that underlies most religious ethical systems, we need to pursue these means in ways that do not harm others or the earth, lest we suffer in the long run (either

through the effects of bad karma, divine punishment, the degradation of society and the environment in which we exist, or some combination of all of these).

Mokṣa, however, is a good that is specific to the Hindu traditions and to the related Buddhist and Jain traditions alongside which Hinduism has existed historically. It stems from a distinctive value system from the first three human goals: an orientation toward life known in the Hindu tradition as *pravṛtti*, or 'world-affirming'. Mokṣa, on the other hand, stems from a *nivṛtti*—a 'world-denying' or 'world-negating'—orientation. What 'world-denying' means in this context is not some hostility or aversion to the world as such, but a renunciation of or detachment from worldly goods due to their ephemeral nature, which leads them to be unsatisfactory as ultimate goals or aims. This idea is captured well in the First Noble Truth of the Buddhist tradition: that conventional or worldly forms of experience all involve *dukkha*, or suffering. This means suffering both in the usual sense of the world—as arising from unpleasant or painful experiences—but also the suffering of separation from that which is pleasant. Such suffering is inevitable if we are attached to worldly goods as the source of our happiness.

Both Theravāda Buddhism and Jainism are strongly nivṛtti oriented traditions. A shift occurs in the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhist traditions toward the idea that one can experience liberation even in the midst of worldly life, as illustrated in the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra* (See Strong 2008, pp. 181–87). The nivṛtti stream of Hinduism can be found in such texts as the *Upaniṣads* and the *sūtras*, or root texts, of such *darśanas*, or systems of philosophy as Sāṃkhya, Yoga, and Vedānta. Ahiṃsā is enshrined in Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtra* as the first of the *yamas*, or moral restraints, which collectively constitute the first *aṅga*, or 'limb,' of his 'eight-limbed' (*aṣṭāṅga*) system of Yoga. It being listed at the start of the yogic path is consistent with the concept of *ahiṃsā paramo dharmaḥ*: ahiṃsā is the supreme duty.

The centrality of the practice of ahiṃsā to the path to mokṣa is articulated, particularly in the non-dualistic traditions of Hinduism, as stemming from the ultimate unity of existence. As articulated by a contemporary adherent of non-dualism, Pravrajika Vrajaprana, a member of the Ramakrishna Order:

> Unity is the song of life, it is the grand theme underlying the rich variations that exist throughout the cosmos. Whatever we see, whatever we experience, is only a manifestation of this eternal oneness. The divinity at the core of our being is the same divinity that illumines the sun, the moon, and the stars. There is no place where we, infinite in nature, do not exist. (Vrajaprana 1999, p. 60)

If all beings are one, then we owe to one another the same love and respect that we would wish to be shown to ourselves. In short, non-duality provides a metaphysical basis for the Golden Rule. To again cite Vrajaprana, "Love your neighbor as yourself because your neighbor *is* yourself." (Ibid., p. 14). As she further elaborates:

> Love, sympathy, and empathy are the affirmation of this truth; they are a reflexive response because they mirror the reality of the universe. When we feel love and sympathy we are verifying–albeit unconsciously–the oneness that already exists. When we feel hatred, anger, and jealousy we separate ourselves from others and deny our real nature which is infinite and free from limitations. (Ibid., p. 39)

As an essential virtue on the path to liberation, nonviolence is generally associated in the classical Hindu tradition with the path of the renouncer, who has given up family and other social ties in the name of focusing on the quest for spiritual freedom. In time, though, as seen in both the Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition and in the *Bhagavad Gītā*, the idea that a householder might also attain mokṣa begins to gain ground. The householder, by definition, is someone enmeshed in worldly life and worldly duties—that is, in dharma (and the other two 'worldly' human aims of wealth and sensory enjoyment). What one

sees commended in Mahāyāna texts and the *Bhagavad Gītā* is the renunciation of an inward variety (See Marcaurelle 1999). Arjuna is thus enjoined by Kṛṣṇa to take up his duty of fighting the unjust, but to do so with detachment (*vairāgya*) and with no hatred or enmity in his heart.

It is the bifurcation between the performance of a duty that is, on the face of it, violent, and the deeper nivṛtti ethos of the path to mokṣa that gives Gandhi his opening for interpreting the *Gītā* as a text of nonviolence. When presented with the idea of fighting one's enemies—in a literal, and not a metaphorical, sense—but doing so without hatred and with detachment regarding whether one is victorious or not, a very natural reaction might be to ask, "How is that possible?" Gandhi suggests that this is not, in fact, impossible: that if one actually lives according to the philosophy taught by Kṛṣṇa, practicing renunciation of the fruits of action (*karma-phala-vairāgya*), one will naturally become nonviolent. One will perceive the deeper oneness connecting oneself with all other beings, including one's opponents, and find oneself experiencing love, sympathy, and empathy for them, as described by Vrajaprana. Violence will become unthinkable for such a person, who has been transformed by the practice of the inner renunciation of temporary worldly identifications and the embrace of nonduality as a way of life.

Ghose's thought, however, on the topic of violence and nonviolence is more rooted in the pravṛtti strand of the Hindu tradition. While this strand of the tradition also upholds nonviolence as the highest ideal, it also recognizes, quite frankly, that we do not live in a world of spiritual aspirants. We live in a world shot through with ignorance and desire. Until they experience the dawning of spiritual consciousness–*mumukṣutva*, or the desire for liberation–most beings seek their good only in worldly things: in external objects and conditions. This leads many of these beings to resort to violence. This, in turn, requires further violence in order to protect those who would prefer to live a peaceful life. Without defensive violence, so the argument goes, the violence of those who pursue their ends *adharmically*, or unjustly, would destroy the conditions that make any peaceful (including spiritual practice) possible.

Again, this outlook also affirms the ultimate value of nonviolence. It allows for violence only as a concession to the inevitable fact that there will always be some beings who misguidedly pursue their good violently, thus requiring the larger society to defend itself. The goal in classical Hindu thought is not to create a world without violence, for this is seen as being simply impossible in the realm of saṃsāra. Part of living in a world where not all beings are enlightened is the possibility of violence. The goal, rather, is to contain violence: to limit it as much as humanly possible. This was done in ancient India by making legitimate violence the province of a particular class of human beings: the Kṣatriya or warrior community. As Ghose explains:

> Indian civilisation. . .made it its chief aim to minimise the indidence and disaster of war. For this purpose it limited the military obligation to the small class who by their birth, nature, and traditions were marked out for this function and found in it their natural means of self-development through the flowering of the soul in the qualities of courage, disciplined force, strong helpfulness and chivalrous nobility for which the warrior's life pursued under the stress of a high ideal gives a field and opportunities. (Ghose 1972, p. 47)

The Hindu epics, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*, are almost entirely preoccupied with the actions of members of this community. The Kṣatriya code of honor, or dharma, is outlined in these texts, as well as in the *Dharma Śāstras*. This code involves elements that would be familiar to anyone conversant with Just War philosophies in other traditions such as Christianity and Islam (Balkaran and Dorn 2012, pp. 659–90). This is the literary and cultural context in which the *Bhagavad Gītā*, a portion of the *Mahābhārata*, is set.

It is through this lens that Ghose interprets the *Bhagavad Gītā*: not as a metaphor for a spiritual journey in which ahiṃsā is accepted as an absolute guiding principle, but as an historical account of a war that was entirely justified in order to uphold dharma, and from which it was wrong for Arjuna to shrink. While Ghose certainly sees the message of the *Gītā* as universal, and in that sense, as containing lessons that can be extended to the struggles of life more generally, the specific duty in which Arjuna is engaged is not looked upon by him as being particularly problematic or in need of being explained as an allegory or superseded through a universalized practice of ahiṃsā. It is simply one of the duties that befalls those in the material world who are in a position to stop force with force.

3. A Further Contrast: Gandhi's Utopianism and Ghose's Realism

While it would again be dangerous to oversimply either Gandhi's or Ghose's positions by using facile labels—for both are complex and subtle thinkers and the values that unite them are of far greater moment than what divides them—the poles of the conversation on violence and nonviolence toward which each gravitates, respectively, might be tentatively labeled as *utopian* and *realist*.

First, what do we mean when we employ these terms? In the limited context in which I intend to use these terms, what I mean by *utopianism* is the conviction that it is possible through human action to realize our highest deals within this world itself.

Gandhi, it could be argued, was not a utopian in this sense, given his understanding of this world as the relative realm, only guided by an imperfect vision of the absolute. However, his push to realize the absolute ideal as much as possible in practice certainly places him in proximity to such Western utopian thinkers as Leo Tolstoy, with whom he shared a correspondence in the 1890s, during his sojourn in South Africa.[5] If we look again at his comments regarding the necessity of an army and police force, he writes, "Of course, I can and do envisage a State where the police will not be necessary. But whether we shall succeed in realizing it, the future alone will show." (Gandhi 1969, p. 11). To be sure, he does qualify this utopian aspiration with his expression of doubt about whether his ideal of a nonviolent state will ever actually be realized. However, his aspiration—his vision—certainly has utopian overtones.

Similarly, by referring to Ghose's *realism*, I am referring to the conviction that, based on historical human behavior, people are most likely to continue to behave as they always have done, which means that, even if it is mitigated by the right social conditions, some amount of violence should be treated as inevitable, and a wise society will prepare for this eventuality by maintaining a group of persons with the training to suppress violence with violence whenever necessary. This is a reflection of the ancient Indian tradition of aiming not so much for the elimination as for the minimization and the containment of violence, as reflected in the *Dharma Śāstras*, the epics, and such texts as Kauṭilya's *Ārtha Śāstra* (See Trautmann 2016).

As with Gandhi, though, qualifications must be made in this regard. While the view that Ghose typically expresses is one that accepts the inevitability of violence, in his *Essays on the Gita*, he affirms that, "A day may come, *must surely come*, we will say, when humanity will be ready spiritually, morally, socially for the reign of universal peace; meanwhile the aspect of battle and the nature and function of man as a fighter have to be accepted and accounted for by any practical philosophy and religion." (Ghose 1972, p. 45).

As mentioned previously, the Hindu tradition as a whole tends to maintain the tension between these two—utopianism and realism—by affirming an ideal of nonviolence while also conceding a limited necessity for violence in practice.

Is there a way, though, for utopianism and realism to be resolved into a synthesis? The need for such a synthesis is suggested by the inadequacy of each approach on its own:

an inadequacy of which both Gandhi and Ghose were aware, as is illustrated by the fact that Gandhi tempered his utopianism with a degree of realism, while Ghose softened his hard-headed realism with a hint of utopian hope.

4. Inadequacy of Either Utopianism or Realism in Isolation

What is the inadequacy to which I am referring? In the spirit of the Jain doctrine of *anekāntavāda*, or the non-one-sidedness of reality (to which Gandhi subscribed), my argument, briefly, is that both utopianism and realism capture important truths, but neither on its own is quite sufficient to address the question of violence and nonviolence satisfactorily. A synthesis of the core insights of both, rather, is needed (See Gandhi 1981).

The limitation of utopianism is suggested by the realist approach. From a traditional Hindu perspective, the realm of saṃsāra does not exist to be perfected. It is, in its very nature, imperfect. It is the realm of suffering (duḥkha), as well as the realm of violence (hiṃsā). This is precisely why the ultimate goal is to escape from it: to achieve mokṣa. Trying to perfect the world, from this perspective, is therefore wrongheaded, and likely to lead only to greater suffering. Indeed, Gandhi agrees that the aim of perfecting the world is extremely difficult and that it requires great self-sacrifice. The willingness to sacrifice oneself for this goal is indeed a cornerstone of his philosophy.

At the same time, there is something deeply dissatisfying about realism as well. As I have argued elsewhere, if we do not at least attempt to create a nonviolent world, if we dismiss such a goal as an impossibility, we will simply replicate the evils of the past (See Long 2006). If, in the name of avoiding utopianism, we do not make any improvement in the world at all, we have arguably failed in a vital moral duty. Indeed, if we look realistically at the trajectory of human history at the present moment, there is every reason to fear that we might destroy ourselves, and perhaps all life on this planet. To be sure, if one accepts the larger Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist cosmology of karma and rebirth, there is the reassurance that, if this world were to be destroyed, all souls would simply take rebirth elsewhere and continue their journey to liberation. However, there is something profoundly irresponsible about this stance, if we utilize it to justify giving up on the effort to make the world a better place. Indeed, such a course of action would be karmically disastrous. Even if we concede that some amount of violence and suffering will always characterize life in saṃsāra, certainly we are capable of creating a world better than the one in which we currently reside, with its genocides, its abuses and tortures of innocent beings, and the selfishness and shortsightedness that fuel all of these behaviors.

I would like to suggest that a synthesis of utopianism and realism can be found in the thought of another modern Hindu figure upon whom both Gandhi and Ghose have drawn as an inspiration: Swami Vivekananda.

5. Swami Vivekananda as an Inspiration to Both Gandhi and Ghose

Swami Vivekananda (1853–1902) is well known as the pre-eminent disciple of the Hindu sage Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa (1836–1886) and as the first Hindu teacher to have a large following in the Western world. With his speeches at the World Parliament of Religions, held in Chicago in 1893, and his establishment of the first Vedanta Society in New York in 1894, he brought Hindu thought to the consciousness of many Americans who would otherwise have known nothing about it. With his establishment of the Ramakrishna Mission, he founded "one of the largest Hindu institutions in the world. In just 2012–2013, they provided relief to half a million; welfare to 3.6 million old, sick, and destitute people; medical services to 8 million through 15 hospitals, 125 dispensaries, 60 mobile medical units, and 953 medical camps; spent US$40 million on education for 329,000 students; and

financed development projects benefitting 4.3 million rural and tribal people." (*Hindu Press International* 2014).

Vivekananda was an inspirational figure to many, including Gandhi and Ghose, both of whom spoke and wrote of their admiration for Vivekananda himself and his teacher, Sri Ramakrishna.

Gandhi, in fact, attempted to visit Swami Vivekananda in 1902, during a visit to Calcutta to attend a meeting of the Indian National Congress. The swami, unfortunately, was on his deathbed and could not receive visitors (Lelyveld 2011, pp. 50–51). Regarding Vivekananda's teacher, Sri Ramakrishna, Gandhi writes:

> The story of Ramakrishna Paramahansa's life is a story of religion in practice. His life enables us to see God face to face. No one can read the story of his life without being convinced that God alone is real and that all else is an illusion. Ramakrishna was a living embodiment of godliness. His sayings are not those of a mere learned man but they are pages from the Book of Life. They are revelations of his own experiences. They, therefore, leave on the reader an impression which he cannot resist. In this age of scepticism Ramakrishna presents an example of a bright and living faith which gives solace to thousands of men and women who would otherwise have remained without spiritual light. Ramakrishna's life was an object-lesson in ahimsa. His love knew no limits, geographical or otherwise. May his divine love be an inspiration to all.[6]

Of Swami Vivekananda, Gandhi said the following at an event held at Belur Math, the monastic headquarters of the Ramakrishna Order (the order of monks that Vivekananda established in 1897):

> I have come here [Belur Math] to pay my homage and respect to the revered memory of Swami Vivekananda, whose birthday is being celebrated today [6 February 1921].[7] I have gone through his works very thoroughly, and after having gone through them, the love that I had for my country became a thousandfold. I ask you, young men, not to go away empty-handed without imbibing something of the spirit of the place where Swami Vivekananda lived and died. (Sarvabhutananda 1983, p. 350)

Author Romain Rolland, an early biographer of Sri Ramakrishna, underscores the unity of the messages of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, and Gandhi, specifically with regard to their shared ideal of interreligious harmony:

> I was glad to hear Gandhi…quite recently…remind his brethren of the International Fellowships, whose pious zeal disposed them to evangelize, of the great universal principle of religious 'Acceptation,' the same preached by Vivekananda…At this stage of human evolution, wherein both blind and conscious forces are driving all natures to draw together for 'cooperation or death', it is absolutely essential that the human consciousness should be impregnated with it, until this indispensable principle becomes an axiom: that every faith has an equal right to live, and that there is an equal duty incumbent upon every man to respect that which his neighbour respects. In my opinion, Gandhi, when he stated it so frankly, showed himself to be the heir of Ramakrishna. There is no single one of us who cannot take this lesson to heart. The writer of these lines—he has vaguely aspired to this wide comprehension all through his life—feels only too deeply at this moment how many are his shortcomings in spite of his aspirations; and he is grateful for Gandhi's great lesson—the same lesson that was preached by Vivekananda, and still more by Ramakrishna —to help him to achieve it.

Regarding karma yoga in particular, which would become a central focus for Gandhi, and which we will discuss in the next section of this paper, Vinoba Bhave (1895–1982), a close associate of Gandhi and, in many ways, his intellectual heir, also points out the continuities between the thought of Swami Vivekananda and that of Gandhi:

> Swamiji [Vivekananda] made us see the truth that *tattva-jñana* [the knowledge of metaphysical principles], which had no place in our everyday relationship with our fellow beings, and in our activities was useless and inane. He, therefore, advised us to dedicate ourselves to the service of daridra-Narayana (God manifested in the hungry, destitute millions) to their uplift and edification. The word daridra- Narayana was coined by Vivekananda and popularized by Gandhiji. (Ibid., pp. 473–74)

Finally, author Will Durant, quoting from Swami Vivekananda, makes the following comment:

> "The first of all worship is the worship of those all around us...These are all our gods—men and animals; and the first gods we have to worship are our own countrymen." It was but a step from this to Gandhi.[8]

Ghose claimed that, during his time in jail for his anti-colonial activities, he was actually visited by Swami Vivekananda (who had by this time passed his way, or left his body, as the saying goes in the Hindu tradition), who passed teaching to him on the nature of consciousness (Purani 1978, p. 209). Writing of Vivekananda's influence not only upon himself but upon others as well, Ghose says:

> Vivekananda was a soul of puissance if ever there was one, a very lion among men, but the definite work he has left behind is quite incommensurate with our impression of his creative might and energy. We perceive his influence still working gigantically, we know not well how, we know not well where, in something that is not yet formed, something leonine, grand, intuitive, upheaving that has entered the soul of India and we say, 'Behold, Vivekananda still lives in the soul of his Mother and in the souls of her children.'[9]

6. Swami Vivekananda's Vedāntic Synthesis: The Philosophy of Karma Yoga

One of Vivekananda's most distinctive teachings was his philosophy of karma yoga. While the concept of karma yoga is ancient (and is indeed a prominent theme of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, its third chapter in particular), Vivekananda takes this concept beyond its earlier implications of fulfilling one's duties (one's *dharma*) selflessly (including, prominently, ritual duties) and links it explicitly to service of the poor and suffering beings of this world. While he may not have been the first to draw this out explicitly, he certainly played a pivotal role in making it a central theme of modern Hindu thought.[10] In the words of scholar Ruth Harris, Vivekananda "wanted more than pious devotions, insisting instead that service to one's fellow human beings *was* the ultimate service to God". (Harris 2023, p. 1041).

According to Vivekananda's thought, there are many yogas, or paths to liberation. In reality, there are as many yogas as there are beings on the way to the ultimate goal. However, these yogas tend to cluster into four forms, based on the psychology and the spiritual needs of their practitioners. These are the yogas of action (karma yoga), of knowledge (jñāna yoga), of devotion (bhakti yoga), and meditation (the dhyāna yoga, more popularly known as raja yoga).

Again, the idea of the four yogas is not new or unique to Vivekananda. Vivekananda's contribution, however, is to emphasize the idea that the four yogas are "direct and independent" paths to mokṣa, "and, accordingly, that all the Yogas have equal salvific efficacy".[11]

Though warrant can be found for this perspective in premodern Hindu sources (such as *Bhagavad Gītā* 5:4), it is a real departure from more traditional articulations of the yogas, in which it is more typical for one of the yogas to be seen as supreme—as the one yoga that actually leads to mokṣa—and the others as preparatory or purificatory practices. Śaṅkara, for example, and the Advaita tradition of Vedānta, typically takes jñāna yoga to be the one path to mokṣa, and paths such as karma yoga and bhakti yoga to be ways of preparing for it. Thinkers in the various theistic systems of Vedānta, however, such as Rāmānuja, Madhva, Caitanya, and others, see bhakti yoga as the path to mokṣa, and the other paths as ways of preparing for (and cultivating) bhakti.

With his yogic pluralism, Swami Vivekananda both builds upon the teaching of his master, Sri Ramakrishna, but also paves the way for subsequent Hindu pluralistic thinkers such as Gandhi and helps to inspire pluralistic thinkers in the West, such as John Hick (Maharaj 2018, pp. 117–52).

Swami Vivekananda's philosophy of karma yoga in many respects could be seen as a logical link between the perspectives of Gandhi and Ghose. Specifically, it endorses the pursuit of the utopian goal of improving the world while at the same time acknowledging that the world is an inherently imperfect place. Indeed, Vivekananda affirms that the very purpose of the world, as a realm of 'soul-making,' the place from which we pursue the path to liberation, is in part fulfilled through its very imperfection, and that our efforts to perfect are part and parcel of the spiritual path.

All the yogas function through attenuating, in various ways, the egotism thatr is the core issue that binds us to the cycle of rebirth, according to Vivekananda's interpretation of Vedānta (See Long 2024, pp. 144–51).

Jnāna yoga does this through the cultivation of Self-knowledge: that is, the knowledge that our true Self is not the ego at all, which is a mere construct, but the eternal *ātman* that is ultimately one with all beings. This is the path of nondual awareness.

Bhakti yoga does it through cultivating the attitude of absolute dependence upon God, the Supreme Being, in whatever form one finds to be the most compelling (one's *iṣṭa devatā*, or 'chosen form of divinity'). This is the path of theistic religion, such as found in Hindu devotional traditions like the Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, and Śākta traditions, and in the Abrahamic religions.

Raja yoga does it by calming the mind—and with it, the ego—enabling the true Self to be experienced directly. Vivekananda identified this path with the teachings of the *Yoga Sūtras* of Patañjali.

Finally, karma yoga serves this function through the practice of selfless service: by subordinating our selfish desires to the effort of working for the welfare of all beings. In Vivekananda's words:

> *Karma Yoga. . .is a system of ethics and religion intended to attain freedom through unselfishness, and by good works. The Karma Yogi need not believe in any doctrine whatever. He may not believe even in God, may not ask what his soul is, nor think of any metaphysical speculation. He has got his own special aim of realising selflessness; and he has to work it out himself. Every moment of his life must be realisation, because he has to solve by mere work, without the help of doctrine or theory, the very same problem to which the Jnani applies his reason and inspiration and the Bhakta his love..* (Vivekananda 1979, vol. 1, p. 111)

Why should we help others? Why should we work to make the world a better place? According to Vivekananda, karma yogis do such work not out of a sense that they can thereby solve all of the world's problems, but in a spirit of gratitude, because the suffering beings of the world have given us an opportunity to advance spiritually by serving them. As Vivekananda's explains:

> Our duty to others means helping others, doing good to the world. Why should we do good to the world? Apparently to help the world, but really to help ourselves. . .If we consider well, we find that the world does not require our help at all. This world was not made that you or I should come up and help it. (Vivekananda 1979, vol. 1, p. 75)

Vivekananda's statement that "This world was not made that you or I should come up and help it" is shocking if one is not attentive to the larger philosophical context in which it occurs. At the same time, it is of a piece with Ghose's perspective that saṃsāra is, by its very nature, imperfectible.

At the same time, though, Vivekananda argues, as a Gandhian would, that we do have a duty to put our selfish desires aside and serve the world. We are thereby, however, serving ourselves, on the spiritual plane.

Even more shockingly, Vivekananda states that: "This world is perfect. We may be perfectly sure that it will go on beautifully well without us, and we need not bother our heads wishing to help it." (Ibid., p. 76). What he is saying here is that it is not the world that is need of repair, it is ourselves, but the act of repairing the world, pursued selflessly, is precisely how *we* will be repaired.

The seeming imperfection of the world can be likened to the exercise equipment in a gym. We do not lift weights, ultimately, because those weights need to be moved, but to strengthen our muscles. We do not run on a treadmill to try to get somewhere, except metaphorically, to get to good health. Exercise equipment is there so we can do the work we need to do in order to realize our goal of health. Vivekananda uses this very same image: "The world is a grand moral gymnasium wherein we have all to take exercise so as to become stronger and stronger spiritually." (Ibid., p. 80). To quote Swami Atmarupananda, a contemporary monk of the Ramakrishna Order, "Life is problem-solving."[12] We may indeed solve specific problems, such as hunger, poverty, or sectarian conflict, but to expect the world to be free from problems, especially due to our own efforts, is not only cosmically arrogant but it is also to expect the wrong thing from a world that is here for our spiritual advancement. The seeming imperfection of the world is part of its perfect design. "This world is like a dog's curly tail, and people have been striving to straighten it out for hundreds of years; but when they let it go, it has curled up again. How could it be otherwise?" (Vivekananda 1979, vol. 1, p. 79). The world is perfectly imperfect.

7. Conclusions: Practical Implications of the Vedāntic Synthesis

Vivekananda's approach to the question of utopianism versus realism is an example of what Swami Medhananda has called a "soul-making theodicy", ultimately derived from the teaching of Swami Vivekananda's own teacher, Sri Ramakrishna (Maharaj 2018, pp. 292–304). In practical terms, what it suggests is an adoption of a Gandhian approach toward serving the world, but rooted in a classical Hindu understanding, closer to that of Ghose, of saṃsāra as a realm of inevitable suffering. Acceptance of the inevitable nature of suffering in the material world arguably has the psychological effect, for the Gandhian activist, of alleviating the sense that one has the duty of bearing the burden of the entire world on one's shoulders—an attitude that can not only lead to the phenomenon of burnout, but which is also, on analysis, a hubristic one. Swami Vivekananda's perspective injects humility into this equation.

At the same time, the idea that the pursuit of the perfection of the world, even if it is ultimately not attainable, is itself a means toward self-perfection takes one out of the defeatist mentality that can follow from giving up on the utopian project altogether. Karma yogis become, as it were, 'utopian realists', expending all effort possible to improve the world, but at the same time inwardly realizing that, as the *Gītā* teaches, it is not finally we

ourselves who do any action at all, for the fruits of our action are not ours, but are finally in the hands of God.

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Notes

1 *Mahābhārata* 13.117.37. Translation mine.
2 See, for example, the article by AdikkaChannels (n.d.), which simply takes for granted that *dharma hiṃsā tathaiva ca* is part of the original verse which contains *ahiṃsā paramo dharmaḥ*.
3 See *Bhagavad Gītā* 13:7. (Sargent 2009, p. 535).
4 Indeed, some *Dharma Śāstras* only speak of the first three as human aims, setting mokṣa apart as a separate category. See, for example, *Manusmṛti* 2.13 and 12.38. (Doniger and Smith 1991, pp. 18, 282).
5 Gandhi is characterized as a utopian by, for example, (Fox 1989). For the influence of utopian literature on Tolstoy, (see Alekseeva 2020).
6 From Gandhi's foreword to (Rolland 1977, p. xi).
7 The celebratory event at which Gandhi spoke these words occurred on 6 February 1921, but Vivekananda's actual birthdate is 12 January.
8 (Durant 1954, vol. I, p. 618). The selection from Swami Vivekananda is from his *Complete Works* (Vivekananda 1979, vol. 3, p. 202).
9 (Ghose 1938), cited in (Sarvabhutananda 1983, pp. 435–36).
10 Swaminarayan (1781–1830), for example, a prominent Hindu teacher of the early modern period and a contemporary of the reformer Ram Mohan Roy (1772–1833), also emphasized *seva*, or selfless service, including, much as Swami Vivekananda would a century later, concrete "humanitarian projects. . .ranging from digging wells to serving the ill". (BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha n.d.)
11 (Medhananda 2022, p. 78). Swami Medhananda is the monastic name of Ayon Maharaj, whose work is cited in the next footnote.
12 Personal communication, February 1, 2014.

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