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Chapter 10

Peace Studies Theory

We complete our look at the individual level of analysis with an examination of peace studies theory. Peace studies is a relatively new approach to the study of international relations and pushes boldly past many of the guiding principles that commonly characterize the study of foreign policy and the behavior of states. That is, peace studies theorists argue that the study of international affairs should reach beyond the more traditional evaluations and measurements of power, balance of power, and national security. Particularly in our increasingly interconnected world, issues such as poverty, social injustice, and environmental destruction, to name only a few, reach to the heart of our security as human beings. We might say that peace studies suggests there can be no national security in the traditional sense until there is social, economic, and political justice on a global scale.

These elements come together to form a foundation for a theory emphasizing nonviolence, equality, and working—both independently and together—for the collective good. As the name implies, peace studies involves the study of peace and ways to promote peace within the international community. Though proponents aspire to this global cause, we have included peace studies in our look at the individual level of analysis. The reason behind this classification, as we will discuss in greater detail later, is that profound change on an international level begins with personal transformation. **Personal transformation**, in this sense, is a change or shift in an individual's outlook, habits, or worldview in a way that makes that individual more socially conscious of the global effect of his or her actions. The implication is that each of us, working as individuals, can have a positive influence on a much larger, even global, scale—a positive energy "ripple effect," if you will. In this way, peace studies opens up some new possibilities about how we might view the world and our own role within the global community.

Any discussion of peace studies theory must begin with a brief examination of the impact of Mahatma Mohandas K. Gandhi. Gandhi remains the preeminent contemporary example of the nonviolent approach to resolving conflict. Gandhi was born in Western India in 1869. As a young man, his family sent him to study law in London. After he began practicing law, Gandhi moved to South Africa where he worked ceaselessly to improve the rights of immigrant Indians living in that country. It was there that he developed his creed of passive resistance against injustice. Mahatma Gandhi was a pacifist who sought political change through non-violent means. **Pacifism** is the rejection of the use of force for dealing with domestic or international conflicts. Gandhi's philosophy is encapsulated in his famous statement, "Nonviolence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind. It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of man." Staying true to his philosophy, Gandhi organized and led a passive resistance movement in South Africa. He was frequently jailed as a result of the peaceful protests that he led. Eventually, the South African authorities agreed to reform many of their laws and practices resulting in dramatically improved conditions for Indians living in South Africa.

Back in India, it was not long before Gandhi began leading India's long struggle for independence from Great Britain. From 1919 to 1947 Gandhi worked tirelessly to promote his strategy of nonviolent resistance to British rule. He never wavered in his unshakable belief in nonviolent protest and religious tolerance. When Indian Muslims and Hindus committed acts of violence he fasted until the fighting stopped. Mahatma Gandhi's unyielding commitment to nonviolent resistance represented a triumph of human will over violence and military might. The selection by Gandhi contains an outline of his nonviolent approach to resolving conflict.

Peace Studies: An Interdisciplinary Approach to International Relations Theory

Though the study of international relations, with its theories and levels of analysis, generally falls in the realm of political science, peace studies is actually an interdisciplinary field. It incorporates information, analyses, and discourse from not only political science but also the traditional hard sciences (such as physics and mathematics), psychology, anthropology, sociology, and areas of the humanities (such as literature and Linguistics). This intellectual crossover is one of several key characteristics that distinguish peace studies theory from other paradigms found in the study of international affairs. Using this broad base of information, the theory can examine a full range of human activities and behavior—from peaceful to violent—and can analyze these activities from hard science and social science perspectives.

Another inclusive characteristic of peace studies as a theory and method for studying international relations is its broad historical look at human interaction. The historical reach of peace studies extends farther back than most other fields in examining the patterns and traditions in our relationships with one another. It also projects various scenarios for future world orders. These projected scenarios are based on alternatives to the traditional nation-state structure commonly used as a standard for analysis by other theorists in the international relations field. This means that links between individuals or groups might be based not simply on territorial boundaries or geographic proximity (states or blocs of states within a region), but on common interests, ideas, beliefs, or goals (religion, environmental concerns, etc.).

In addition to the inclusive approach of peace studies theory, this paradigm is also a prescriptive, rather than simply descriptive, paradigm. A prescriptive theory is a set of principles and guidelines that contain overt value judgments about how the world ought to be, rather than how the world actually is. A prescriptive theory actually contains specific recommendations with regard to foreign policy and the conduct of international relations. Consequently, peace studies offers policies, political agendas, and other criteria and conditions designed to promote nonviolence and achieve peace. Thus, just as a physician prescribes medicine to cure an illness, these theorists prescribe a particular course of action to attain a particular end.

Peace studies also evaluates existing policies made and actions taken by governments with an eye to their impact—both direct and indirect—on society. By assessing actions and motives in this way, peace studies is considered a value-based theory. A **value** is an ideal or principle that people generally consider worthwhile and desirable. Peace studies assigns value to the actions, policies, activities, and methods of governments and individuals based on their benefit or harm to society. We might say that rather than the end justifying the means, both the means *and* the end are judged with respect to values and moral appropriateness.

And the ideal end for proponents of peace studies is not simply peace but positive peace. **Positive peace** is the absence of war in combination with the establishment of broader, worldwide forms of social justice, economic prosperity, and political power-sharing. This notion is contrasted with what some peace studies theorists call "negative peace." **Negative peace** is defined only as the absence of war, a condition in which direct forms of organized violence are absent but the underlying reasons for war, such as social injustice and economic exploitation, are left unresolved. Peace studies theorists would point to the period just after World War I as an example of negative peace. Although military operations and violence had ended, broader social violence (widespread homelessness and hunger, for example), as well as political and economic retribution on the part of the victors continued, helping to sow the seeds for World War II. True peace, positive peace, could not be achieved under such conditions, according to the principles of peace studies.

It is important to point out here that advocates of peace studies differentiate between violence and conflict. Even in a situation of positive peace, peace is not necessarily the absence of conflict. Conflict—as opposed to violence—is viewed by peace studies theorists as healthy debate, disagreement, or dialogue and an integral part of life and growth in human existence. The key, according to some theorists, is to manage and resolve conflict and prevent an escalation to violence, while preserving justice and freedom within society.

Part of prevention, according to peace studies theorists, is to look at the tools of violence. Here, we see the crossover between various fields of study that was discussed earlier. In peace studies, scientists and researchers are asked to look at the consequences (environmental, social, economic) of their work. The invention of the atomic bomb, chemical weaponry, and other such devices cannot be disassociated from their violent purpose. Peace studies encourages scientists, scholars, and social activists from all fields to work together in assessing the potential political, social, and environmental ramifications of these instruments, as well as future technologies and innovations. In short, the variety of work under the rubric of peace studies seeks not only to understand the many causes of war and conflict but also to go beyond them in its quest for possibilities of peace building.

As Robin J. Crews points out in her article "A Values-Based Approach to Peace Studies," the search for complete knowledge or "truth" cannot be conducted in separate inquiries among divergent parts of the scientific community. An interconnected inquiry is the only way to reach this goal. Crews emphasizes that epistemological issues—issues dealing with the nature and roots of knowledge—need to be addressed as part of reducing society's violent tendencies. Learning changes our experience as humans in numerous ways, and peace studies, as part of that process, is geared to help channel an individual's search for knowledge, enlightenment, and "truth" in positive directions. She suggests that we need to instill love in our search for truth, make appropriate changes in the curricula of our schools and universities, and take social responsibility for what knowledge brings to, and can do, in our lives. We can begin this process by analyzing current values, norms, standards, and practices within society in order to understand how and what must be done to improve our future.

As we touched on earlier, this kind of global improvement begins with the person's potential for growth and deeper understanding. The next article, "The Individual and Global Peace-Building: A Transformational Perspective," by Arthur Stein, focuses on the transformational approach to peace studies. The transformational, or transformative, approach examines the relationship between thought and deed, and seeks to reconcile the two. For example, concern for the preservation of our environment and natural resources must be accompanied by actions that promote this goal. One might begin by recycling on an individual basis, then take action to help develop a comprehensive town or county program. Besides ecological awareness, Stein highlights several key areas as targets for personal transformation, including human rights, civic responsibilities, shared economic well-being, and nonviolent social change. He illustrates the potential of each individual not only to change himself or herself but, through example, to make a positive contribution in transforming family, friends, neighborhoods, states, and the international community. Stein emphasizes the importance of the qualities of inclusiveness, civility, and empathy to the development of truly participatory democracies.

The final reading, "A Nonviolent Approach to the Intifada," by Raed Abusahlia is an excellent example of the application of the philosophy and principles promoted by peace studies. The author, a Palestinian priest and Chancellor of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, wrote this article in an attempt to persuade Palestinians to adopt a strategy of nonviolence in their struggle to achieve statehood for Palestine.

Certainly, the transformational perspective of peace studies—or peace building— theory clearly shows the proactive nature of this paradigm. Peace studies theorists are not content simply to describe the behavior of states and its impact on the international system. They begin by ascribing value to this behavior and proceed to make recommendations on how it might be improved. There is, as we have seen, a significant amount of thought, effort, and research behind such an innovative approach to international relations. We must now ask where peace studies theory excels and where it might fall short.

A Critique of Peace Studies Theory

Peace studies outlines specific goals and offers underlying principles and, in some instances, courses of action designed to fulfill them. The prescriptive, interdisciplinary, value-oriented nature of this theory is actually one of its primary strengths.

The goals are noble and broad-based: social justice, human rights, building positive peace, and changing the fundamental way we view the world and ourselves. Peace studies theorists suggest promoting these goals by creating a more communitarian, global ethic in which the fundamental causes of violence might be overcome by better understanding human nature. Such understanding can be enhanced by person-to-person contact that crosses boundaries and builds bridges of knowledge and communication on an individual level, yet in a global context.

Another goal of peace studies looks for balance within these new relationships. That is, we should strive for global equilibrium between the powerful and the powerless, the wealthy and the poor. Personal and community security, which then translates to global security, can be achieved by providing food and shelter to those in need, justice to those who are persecuted, and a voice to those who have been politically silenced.

It may appear somewhat like bursting the proverbial bubble to point out that a critique of peace studies can legitimately question its idealistic worldview, which some might even call Utopian. Peace studies theorists, indeed, have developed such an optimistic outlook that some critics argue it could be potentially dangerous in real-world situations. Though noble in intent, the policies fostered by peace studies could subtly weaken the resolve of people and states to resist or combat a nation bent on extending its power or influence through aggressive actions.

On a theoretical level, peace studies has been similarly criticized for underestimating the inherent conflict between nation-states. Certainly, a realist would describe the international environment as anarchic and characterized by the violence of an ongoing struggle for power between states. Under this scenario, peace studies falls short in explaining present conditions and projecting future behavior. As a theoretical construct, critics consider it disjointed and lacking a coherent framework for analyzing international relations.

Peace studies theorists respond to these arguments by stating that the only way to change the international environment is to build bridges (through both person-to-person and government contacts), which, in turn, will reduce the fear and insecurity that lead to war. They recognize that this kind of change comes about incrementally but believe it is a logical, productive course of action. By focusing on disparities of wealth and power, individuals, communities, nongovernmental organizations, and governments can formulate effective policies to redress these imbalances and create greater stability within the system. If these global disparities continue in a world of growing environmental, economic, and political instability, even powerful nations will no longer be safe.

The peace studies path to this kind of change is long and gradual. Proponents suggest, though, that the prescriptive nature of the approach and the transformational aspects may offer the only realistic route for long-term, positive change in our world. This transformational process generally proceeds upwards, from individuals to states to the global system, and relies on the idea that people's attitudes and actions can affect international relations. Within its value-based, moral context, peace studies theory emphasizes positive change, social justice, and greater balance between the weak and the powerful.

We might question, however, how successful such a social contract might be. The goals of peace studies contain what are many traditional leftist elements: to more equitably redistribute wealth, to empower the poor and powerless, and to equalize the distribution of power. At a time when we see more and more developing nations turn to capitalism and a free-market system, peace studies theory could face some significant challenges. Then again, peace studies theorists might suggest that we can change the world only by changing ourselves, and that effort begins with one individual at a time.

Key Concepts

Negative Peace is the absence of war. Direct forms of organized violence are absent, but the underlying reasons for war, such as social injustice and economic exploitation, are left unresolved. This term is contrasted with what peace studies theorists refer to as positive peace.

Pacifism is the rejection of the use of force for dealing with domestic or international conflicts.

Personal Transformation is a change or shift in an individual's nature, outlook, habits, or worldview in a way that makes that individual more socially conscious of the global effect of his or her actions.

Positive Peace is the absence of war in combination with the establishment of broader, worldwide forms of social justice, economic prosperity, and political power-sharing. This notion is contrasted with what peace studies theorists call negative peace.

Value is an ideal or principle that people generally consider worthwhile and desirable. Peace studies assigns value to the actions, policies, activities, and methods of governments and individuals based on their benefit or harm to society.