The Heart of Justice:
Peace's Process as the Essence of Liberating Choice, Moral Systems, and Consciousness

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Humans have the power to act as both experimental creators and careful observers within the sets of living creations and systems which move in ways both inside and outside of our control. In this unique position, we have the choice (personally and as a part of the collective sum of our parts) to move *toward peace* with intention, by taking the principles of elements inside our control into actionable consideration. This intention also requires an understanding of the elements of peace, its processes, and evidence for and against its existence across sets of realities. Peace is a fundamental component of basic human rights, and evidence of peace is evidence of justice. Snauwaert (2022) identifies peace's fundamental connection to social organization and describes peace as both the operative absence of structural violence and the functional presence of structural justice, consisting of variations in *value*, relating to its substantial nature, and *spheres*, relating to the spaces it occupies. Peace encompasses the foundational elements of security and justice which all humans in any society, under any nation or agency, are owed (Snauwaert, under review).

In order to understand how this peace is to be provided to and accessed by all members of our shared global society, we can examine the world's existing components of peace throughout the disciplines which *define* (using conceptions of

the past) and *further* (using conceptions of the future) its components' existence in a certain way. These disciplines include: *History*, which asks us to examine its elements in connection to the shaping of present sets of conditions and experienced realities; *Philosophy*, which asks us to compare the most fundamental elements of our internal realities and identify where these realities are shared, in order to make sense of the order of natural and unnatural systems of being; *Psychology*, which asks us to attempt to understand the developmental mechanisms and methods which humans use to internalize, process, and externalize experienced sets of realities, through diverse perspectives; and most notably; *Education*, which guides methodical and creative inquiry each of these fields toward what comes next and how sets of realities and knowledge are shaped by and into meaning. The development and shape of the compounded effects of each of these fields are guided by their *systematic evolutions* and the *moral consciousnesses of its members*.

Shaped by these fields, in between our shared history and shared future lies the present, and in the present lies the connection and potentiality to point our shared experiences toward peace and justice. The central focus of this paper aims to outline the means and considerations which might form a basis for the development of communally experienced peace, throughout moral consciousnesses and shared systems; it must be noted that experiences must be first modeled in order to be mirrored. To create this model, educational dynamics (in both macro and micro level contexts) must be built upon the foundation of intentionally-rooted methods of peace, apply principles and practices which create experiences of and through peace for all members of a given group, understand the processes through which people become capable of exercising peace-oriented moral reasoning methods, and point to an experientially shared goal (to share the conditions of living through peace) capable of withstanding resistance.

Peace as process: growing a method

To learn and teach peace, it must be understood primarily as alignment with process and means rather than as a fixed goal, end, or set of conditions. Consistent with Dewey's conception of education, meaningful movement of a valued element (such as peace) is more aligned with an educational aim than is the containing of any certain set of informational knowledge about the aspect (Dewey, 1903). The aim is to transfer a method, and in this way, the material factors secondary to the capacity to think and act meaningfully about the principled process of an element of learning, (Dewey, 1903) such as the element of peace. With this in mind, the process of peace exists or does not exist (*yet*, speaking optimistically) across multi-tiered levels of perspectives, spaces, and times. In other words, the experienced existence of peace occurs variably across perspectives, shifts throughout different

nations/cultures/places, and differs along with the conditions of a given time period. If and when peace becomes thoroughly conceptualized as a core necessity of life in its true essence, *throughout* each of these levels, then its sustainability becomes self-sustaining. As is true in any systemic process, the seeds which are planted, nurtured, maintained, and watered manifest within the growth of the fruits it produces. These fruits spread and continue the cycle; if the seeds are of peace, peace will grow. If the core of the seeds are rotten, rot will spread. Systems founded on violence produce violence until its violent roots are plucked. Peace sustained in any sphere requires awareness of the work it takes to grow and attention to its roots *and* fruits; its history and origins, as well as its impacts and outcomes. Resistance to the process of peace can be evidenced by the observance of systemic violence and injustice (Snauwaert, 2022). If grounded and nurtured by the shared value (of peace) at its core, peace's processes will build and spread.

Peace as process: defining components

Awareness and practice of components of peace include and account for peace's defining characteristics and its relation to human rights, violence, evil, and justice. Each of these can be experienced, modeled, and created across personal and structural levels. Snauwaert (under review) defines these in the following ways:

- *Peace*- Peace consists of positive and negative peace. The presence of justice (positive peace) and absence of violence (negative peace) are felt, from the organization and functioning of systemic cultural relationships, when peace is at the core of a society's structures.
- *Human rights*- Human rights are moral claims and justified demands for socially guaranteed ethical goods for all members, placed upon a governing organization of society.
- *Violence*- Violence is the core problematic of peace, and includes direct, cultural, and structural types of harm.
- *Evil*- Evil can be described as an inability to judge right from wrong, or inability to take on another person's point of view into account when attempting to respond morally.
- *Justice*- Justice is concerned with the organization and functioning of social structures, and is described as what is collectively owed to each and what each owes to the collective (consisting of rights and duties, including those to resist injustice).

Each of these terms define processes we all share and experience deeply amongst ourselves, and I believe it is significant to add one additional definition of my own to this list:

- *Love* = spread of peace and justice, through a system's organizations, principles, and functionings

Peace as process: our core choice

When we feel the impacts of an absence of peace, violation of justice or violation of human rights (Snauwaert, under review), we are faced with a choice, whether we are consciously aware of this choice or not. This choice defines responses to injustice, which determine the future's progression continuing toward or away from this direction. This choice is decided by our developed methods of moral reasoning, which determine our conceptions of rejectable injustice and the imagined possibilities of peace. Observing realities which are without peace, in these terms, leads to a *choice* to move toward creating peace where we hope to see its existence grow, spread, flourish, and sustain us and itself. I prefer to use the term *choice* here over *obligation* because I believe it encompasses the meaningful impacts of both elements of justice (rights and duties) in a way that distributes power (at least linguistically) democratically rather than authoritatively, as rights and duties without choice are not liberating. Love and liberation always prioritize choice, and that is also the power of peace; if its processes are chosen, its consequences naturally continue to sustain the choosing of justice, love, and liberation. Conversely, choosing paths which are foundationally disconnected from peace lead to unavoidable disconnections from widespread justice and love. Within this choice, all are free to decide one's own means of resistance to an absence of peace and justice.

Even the most influential educators, scholars, and activists do not agree on a consensus regarding any single most effective means of resistance to injustice. This is evidenced by unsettled philosophical and moral debates such as those between non-violent and forceful means of resistance, as can be explored through the lived philosophies of Civil Rights Movement activists, such as Martin Luther King Jr. (MLK) and Malcolm X, two of the most significant leaders during this societally transformative time. Both activists understood the systemic injustices in their shared society and chose responses to their observations and experiences based upon their own methods of moral reasoning. While they differed greatly (could even be argued as opposing) in their approach, their core, guiding beliefs grasped onto the hope of peace's possibilities to be embedded into transformed social consciences and systems. MLK said, "We have learned from our have-not status that it profits a nation little to gain the whole world of means and lose the end, its own soul. We must have a passion for peace born out of wretchedness and the misery of war. Giving our ultimate allegiance to the empire of justice" (King, 1967). His activism was monumental in gripping the public and institutional

attention which led to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965, which are transformative legislations in the ongoing fight for justice in America. Malcolm X, in comparison, operated through means of calculated confrontation, deemed violent actions occasionally necessary responses to systemic violence, and succeeded in many ways by shifting power into the shared hands of the people fighting for justice (Potorti, 2017). He believed in radical and occasionally forceful means of resistance, but also emphasized his belief in peace as a means to a liberating end; "You can't separate freedom from peace because no one can be at peace unless he has his freedom." (Malcolm X, 1965). Thanks to the efforts shared by Malcolm X, educational and social programs took shared action by opposing the course of systemic violence toward Black and marginalized communities, and public schools even began providing meals to students after mirroring student food programs of the Black Panthers (Potorti, 2017). Though incredibly different in approaches and actionable goals, both of their *chosen* means guided them *toward* shared access to peace, freedom from targeted violence, presence of justice, and faith in these elements' lasting, societal qualities through communal praxis and education on these matters.

When the possibilities of peace are imagined, and the principles and practices of peace are prioritized, taught, modeled, and nurtured, then individual choices on resistance to systemic violations of peace are afforded and are likely to vary from one another; still, the core *value* and occupied *sphere* of peace (Snauwaert, under review) remain the same through the presence of choice. Conversely, when the possibilities of peace are not considered, they become impossible. The ability to choose *how* to personally engage in moral reasoning methods is crucial for democratic dispersion of power. A prerequisite to the availability of this choice is the ability to use one's own moral reasoning methods to see beyond fear and to understand the scope of the matters of justice, peace, violence, and evil. *Evil*, whose methods lead to the continuation of structural violence, can be defined by an inability to use one's own reasoning processes to approach the making of just choices (Snauwaert, under review). Or in other words, evil is a procedural failure to develop an understanding of the presence of personal choice between peace and violence, between love and fear, or between right and wrong. As such, *failure to teach and learn the moral reasoning methods* which create routes for the choices of peace to take shape becomes the *origin point of procedural, cultural evil*. If this is the origin point observed in current unjust realities, it is also a springboard from which collective education can catapult the shift of our relation to these moral developmental processes. The freedom to know the alternative choices to evil is instrumental in this process.

The ability to choose one's own outcomes, one's own personal responses to moral judgements, and the right to choose one's own justifications for self-determination are fundamental to the freedoms prescribed to the existence of democracy and peace (Snauwaert, under review). All members of a society should be equipped with educational access to knowledge and experiences which steer the development of the moral reasoning toward encouragement of creativity, curiosity, critical thinking, and choice. Education and systems which lead to accepting singularized beliefs, limited outcomes, and narrow views of choice oppose the course of peace. Today, the world's religious, military, and political leaders demonstrate their chosen or developed use of their methods of moral reasoning to sanction systemic violence, to uphold their own interests in their own power and gain. In his article, *The Morality of Obliteration Bombing*, Ford (1970) highlights his narrowly framed choice in matters of morality and discusses his moral beliefs, which lack any alternatives to violently destructive methods of transnational relations. Through his outlined ideologies, he portrays the belief that the only options, in matters of morality in global affairs, are "violence" or "obliterating violence". He unquestionably accepts the position of war itself as a moral necessity (and explicitly assumes the majority of all others within his religion also accept this position), and he explores the answers to his moral inquiries within the framework of only these identified options. There is no thought mentioned (on the part of Ford, *or* the collective consciousness his position represents, *or* the national and international systems who closely align with his narrow morality framework) of consideration for alternatives to the options of structural violence; there is no questioning of the moral priorities of war[1] itself; and there is no questioning of the justifiability of those who speak and act as authority on matters of war.

These positions, (which are notably *representative of the most materially powerful, organized systems and collective moral consciousnesses of the modern world*), are devastatingly troubling for their atrocious moral values and inability to comprehend the choice we *all* have to depart from *evil* (evil means, not necessarily evil intentions) as conditional to ways of living in a global society. Not only do these perspectives fail to comprehend the existence of moral reasoning outside the interests served through violence, but they also entirely miss any possible notion of relating to and through peace. Effective moral reasoning will look different in each person who employs its methods, but only truthful *educational* moral reasoning

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[1] Global discussions and attempts to apply justified principles of war (such as Just War Theory's principles of jus ad bellum, jus in bello, jus post bellum) should be noted here. These attempts are helpful and justifiable in theory, but after reflecting upon the actual, experienced issues caused by sanctioned global violence, and after reflecting upon the justifications used by nations and agencies to evade responsibility to adhere to these principles, their power seems to dissimulate the truth of the matter more than they uphold any type of justice in global and national contexts. The interests of a hierarchical State's power serve themselves and release themselves from any actual responsibility to practice regulating themselves according to principles or practices of justice.

frames choices in light of their connection to peace. While we cannot say what all realities of peace might look like because we cannot predict what each person's independent methods of moral judgment might come up with (because there are endless possibilities), we can, however, say with certainty that an absence of peace takes the form of a lack of choice, or at least a belief in a lack of choice.

Applying this reasoning to current social realities paints a clear picture of a societal perception of *an inability to choose (or perhaps more accurately described as a fear which blocks the realization of this choice)*, and therefore an inability to access peace and justice. It is important to note the distinction between perception of choice and actual ability to choose; education provides access to the power of choice, and this power is essential to be shared, collectively, in order to escape current, atrociously unjust social realities. The way modern systems and collective moral consciousness are so far disconnected from peace is evidenced by widespread beliefs held by an unquestioning majority of people, claiming, in both theory and practice, that peace and justice are not even fathomable options for contemporary societies of humans' ways of living. This is an inherently violent belief to adhere to and compels knowledge to be used for actionable, powerful resistance to its structures for the sake of peace. When public consciousness does not question the inherently violent nature of systems of power, *educators for peace and justice must take responsibility to pose these questions ourselves*.

Peace as process: prioritize over belonging

Even more than we have a moral *duty* to resist injustice or move toward peace, we *share a longing* for lasting justice and encompassing peace. Connecting to the roots of our shared desires according to our most personal feelings and experiences is even more operative than claiming obligation or duties as a member of any nation or agency because we connect to this desire for peace more fundamentally than we connect to belonging within a bordered society. The refutation of this claim might assert that desire for belonging within a collective or society supersedes the desire for overarching peace. Both belonging and peace are fundamental human desires; however, organization surrounding principles of belonging does not necessarily lead to collections built upon justice and the deep-seated desire to resist injustice. Due to variations in moral reasoning methods (and arguably failure to provide appropriate reasoning-based education), it is possible to feel a sense of belonging within an organization, community, or nation who ultimately lacks shared peace and justice as evidenced by groups such as modern American nationalists. This caveat to belonging is especially important to consider, in theory and practice, when the groups within which belonging is sought are rooted in systemic injustice and a shared lack of basic human rights.

The conditions of late-stage capitalism in modern America are debilitating to *all* its members' ability to access security, basic rights, justice, education, and shared peace; these systemic orderings create wide-ranging and inescapable conditions of extreme poverty, financially and otherwise; many describe the need to *earn a living* by selling copious amounts of time, energy, and ideas to corporate interests, as synonymous with slavery. These conditions are detrimental to its members' personal and shared interests, well-being, and access to life's most fundamental necessities, such as education, healthcare, shelter, food, rest, community, and connection. (*But at least we can vote and "belong" here, right?*) Despite all this, *and* an increasingly violent and invasive presence of corporate government involvement across all spheres of living, millions of American people continue to accept this fate as "just how it is;" and millions even still celebrate belonging to the "greatest country in the world" as they say, and vehemently support its conditions, authority, and structures. The inability to imagine the potential for social realities and living conditions better than these is devastating. Organization, connection, and education founded on principles of peace, however, adhere to the core desires we share, and the consideration of present realities' relation to justice and injustice, where injustice is inherently rejected by all who contribute to its structures by simply engaging in its process. For these reasons, in organized groups and movements for justice, peace must be centered over feelings of belonging. How do we apply principles of peace to address systemic injustice? This is where communal collaborations for peace ensue and take shape through sharing the spheres and values built from personal peacemaking.

Peace as process: personal peace as the point of departure

If peace is to be *practiced* and collective resistance is to gain strength, then these methods are also to be *taught* and *learned*. Where are these teachings and learnings to be done? When and where does it start? How do we *all* participate in modeling the changes of peace? How do *I* educate, organize, and practice resisting what doesn't lead toward peace? How might the hopes of these collectively transformational efforts be embodied personally and locally? These questions, at the heart of the matter of peace as a foundational component of justice, ask us to organize deep introspection and to practice asking *who am I?* And *what does peace look and feel like to me?* Reflecting meaningfully on these questions creates the core of peacebuilding-work at the seat of each of our own, unique perspectives and capabilities. Clarity in awareness of the aspects of collective peacebuilding within our power is preceded by awareness of our inner positioning on the path of inner peacekeeping. This intimate knowing becomes the building block upon which the structures of peace pile and spread outward in connection with others and shared realities. While the inverse could also be argued as true (where the collective spread

of peace informs the personal), this approach is less powerful because in daily realities, individuals operate from the positioning of our own personal perspectives, rather than operating from some universally or collectively shared standpoint. With this in mind, the process of planting, growing, and spreading sustainable peace begins with every individuals' awareness of their own unique position, in relation to the process of peace. In teaching his followers the methods of going and spreading peace among the towns they pass through, Jesus tells his followers to be discerning in the places where they find rest and offer to rest their peace, and he continues, "if the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it. If it is not, let your peace return to you" (Matthew 10:13, NIV). Attention to the positioning of one's own personal peace is inner security and operates as the heart of the effective flow of greater societal peace.

Peace as process: creating community and classroom security over fear

Peace becomes an optionable systemic outcome, only through the process beginning with internal adoptions of its principles and then through shared external expressions; through these ways, peace can then be spread and developed with intentional direction. These efforts create methods of coexisting and relating interpersonally to one another which foster natural processes of peace, justice, and the sharing of these interests. When the interests of peace are embedded deeply within the mindsets of each person, the values of peace become shared and develop along with the groups to which these people belong. A focus on the shared interests of peace (which externalize when shared) cultivates communities who then prioritize internal *and* external peace over profit, over superiority or power over others, and over adherence to principles of authority which are deeply disconnected from peace's personal and shared values.

What does prioritizing peace over fear in the classroom and immediate communities look like? How is shared peace developed and upheld *over* other potentially competing core principles? The question of prioritizing peace over fear of other core alternatives brings up the security dilemma regarding potentially problematic questions in situations of conflict. The security dilemma refers to conflict stemming from the sequence of an agency's actions out of self-interest in relation to their own security, which then impact others, whose reactions to these actions are also out of self-interest in their own security, and results in dilemmas of seemingly conflicting security-based interests (Snauwaert, under review). In other words, "to defend one's self is to increase the probability of conflict" (Snauwaert, under review, chapter 4, p. 4). The conception of this dilemma is commonly understood in the context of international relations as seen in political realism theory, yet its application is relevant to all intergroup dynamic types. The existence

of this dilemma as a common core relational problem across contexts is telling of the nature of individual agency or state's interests and core values. What I mean by this is, in this dilemma, the agency's belief in a need to operate out of *fear* (fear of a lack of personal security or fear of the reaction of others) is what creates the dilemma itself and is mirrored in the responses which also operate out of this fear.

I argue that this dilemma only functions when the core value of fear across relations is centered more than the value of peace is centered in these spheres. What if we were to operate out of a core belief in the possibility of centering a principle of peace rather than fear? How do we create and shift relations from centering fear to centering peace? This is the core problem which blocks the actualization of visualized peace; the disconnection between the peace we imagine and hope to share *and* the living experience of justified fear of not actually experiencing this peace. The conscious effort it takes to make this transformation requires space to build trust in the idea that one's own primary interests are peace (which is interdependent with the peace of others), acts on these principles, and trusts that the process of peace will follow the course of these efforts. The fear of insecurity is justified when it reflects experienced truths, but becomes unjustified when the truth of the possibility of peace is instilled. We act on what we know to be true, so we must know peace more truly than we know fear. Going back to the security dilemma, we ask, where is this *insecurity* rooted? What do we believe we must ultimately defend ourselves *against*? Why do we believe our security must oppose the security of others? Why do we believe our own interests of holding security and peace will be reacted to with the infliction of harm to ourselves and these interests? If these processes are what we've experienced, we must acknowledge these realities for what they are to then move past them, create *new* experiences with security, and adjust our internal and external responses to others accordingly. To practice this adjusting is to practice responding to conflicts with others in ways that do not deter the entire path of peace toward one of potential fear and insecurity.

Conflict among people and groups is unavoidable, but it must not be confused as synonymous with responding to conflict out of an essence of fear and insecurity. Our responses to conflict give us a choice between peace and fear; between moving in security or insecurity. Can we make the conscious choice to respond to conflicting personal or group interests without inflicting harm, with respect for the desire to stay in each's own process of peace? If we can continue to create a way for peace to move even in the face of conflict, we can also learn to teach and trust that others will be able to do the same. Various models of justice (such as alternative methods to retributive and even restorative modes of justice) dispel the actualization of fear-inducing reactions to conflict by creating communally shared spaces which build on and collect shared values, based on each member's own interconnected desires for peace and needs for security, such as

reclaimative and transformative models of justice (Gerson and Snauwaert, 2021). Adopting these means in the classrooms and other immediate community environments we live, work, and connect in brings the principles of peace to fruition and in these spaces, produces alternatives to the core premise of the insecurity dilemma. Our interactions and interventions with others must, and more importantly *can*, remain in connection with the heart of peace as it continues to flow through its own and others' systems.

Peace as process: shared morally, consciously, and systemically

The social and educational conditions necessary for peace to be shared as a core process of reasoning are not currently widespread; however, they are not entirely missing from current realities, and this core is not an impossible aim. Where we find peace (within ourselves, in nature, in community, in cultural and social groups) we must choose to center and amplify it from the hearts and bodies of our methods. To center peace in moral reasoning, systemic actions must provide access to the possibilities (or freedom to imagine possibilities) of peace. Hoffman (2003) outlines how the evolution of 1) international systems and 2) human consciousness shape the stage upon which humanitarian intervention is discussed and played out. This stage displays not only the evolution of humanitarian intervention, but also the evolution of the compounds of systems of human order, awareness, and shared realities. Intentionality throughout this evolutionary process and awareness to the stage must be attended to if our interests are tied to the evolutionary productions of our realities' collective narratives. If we want to stage a narrative of peace, we must prepare the stories and roles accordingly. As participants in this staging, remembering our role as individual components in a bigger picture is essential to systemic processes. We cannot tell the whole story of peace without first breaking down and knowing its moving parts. Systems built on the core of peace stem from the ground up, not the other way around, which is why the process must be approached according to attending to and maintaining our own peace, our local community's peace, and *then* our systemic peace might be uncovered.

Conclusion

At its core, the power of peace relates the value of choice to the disintegration of the core problem of insecurity. The peace (and security, justice, and liberation) of all of us relies on the knowledge that the peace within ourselves also relies on the existence of peace within all others in order to be experienced truthfully. If peace cannot be dispersed and commonly shared, it lacks the space needed to continue to breathe and grow. When the shared realities of collective

societal organization lack even consideration for the thought of truthful peace, its moral reasoning methods also lack peace in its true essence. This is not to say that peace does not or cannot exist in places and times within these social structures; rather, it means systems and consciousnesses in modern times do not value peace as a leading or rooted principle. We must understand, learn, and teach the components and steps toward peace, guide inner and outer methods in this direction, and share inquiries toward the process of peace and its development, planting, and spreading roots of a new social order governed by peace. To hold knowledge of these governing needs for the shared experiences of peace is to also hold responsibility to act on its principles. This responsibility is not to be taken lightly, nor is it to be used to superior-ize one's individual role in peacebuilding. With education comes not only power but also new choices upon which to act, and we must remember the power of choosing peace for ourselves and us all. Together is the only way toward peace.

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