

## **Research Statement**

What would it take for us to live together without war and large-scale violence? What do we lose when we assume that wars and large-scale violence are inevitable? Must we meet violence with violence? My work in social and political philosophy, and in ethics, engages with these questions; and my methodology is influenced by feminist and critical race approaches. I show how hope, trust, and solidarity help to orient us towards a nonviolent and peaceful future, and I raise critical questions about the necessity and utility of using violence as a response to violence.

Conflict, in the interpersonal, political, and international contexts, is to be expected. In situations of conflict, the temptation or instinct is often to focus narrowly on how best to defend oneself or one's interests. In American society, for example, which is marked by permissive gun ownership laws and shocking gun violence, rates of gun ownership are increasing as people seek to defend themselves and their loved ones. Rising gun ownership is part of a larger trend, towards decreasing willingness to trust and to expose ourselves to certain kinds of risks. Against this trend, my work explores why we should reason about what to do in situations of conflict (or potential conflict) – even under conditions of uncertainty and danger – from a more open posture that rejects the assumption that violence is inevitable.

This alternative, more open posture requires that we treat conflict as something that can be productive, rather than as something we should avoid or fear. If we can escape thinking in terms of a binary logic of winners and losers, where we must first defend or protect ourselves against others, we can focus on a wider set of questions and see a different set of possibilities. Hobbes famously warned that the person who trusts and otherwise acts morally, without assurances that others will act trustworthily and morally in turn, “make[s] himself a prey to others, and procure[s] his own certain ruin.” It is true that there is always the possibility that our hopes will be dashed, that our trust will be betrayed, and that our solidary acts will not be reciprocated. But when we reason about how to interact with others, guided by the principle of trying to minimize or lower personal exposure to risk, this can distort our relationships with them, making certain relationships impossible for us. We create a circle in which our fears lead us to act in ways that actualize, or contribute to, the outcomes we fear, which then serve to justify our initial fears. And this has the effect of narrowing the kinds of future that we can bring about. I think that the fact of risk does not settle the question of what a person should do, under situations of uncertainty and danger. In particular, I draw our attention to the moral, social, and political goods that become possible for us only if we are willing to bear certain risks. Should we take the risk for these goods?

The first strand of my research makes clearer what the goods at issue are: hopes for the future, trust in each other, and solidarity (including with those with whom we disagree). The second strand shifts our attention to the costs involved in failing to take the risk on hoping for a peaceful future, or in failing to take the risk on trusting others. Finally, the third strand of my research weaves together with the first two, to show that if we seek a peaceful world as our end, we must choose nonviolence as our means. I address each strand separately, below, in Sections I, II, and III, respectively.

## I. Hope, Trust, and Solidarity

The rationality of hope and trust are often taken to depend, to some degree, on probabilities – the probability that the hoped-for thing might come to pass, or the probability that the trusted person will do the thing they are being trusted to do. I argue that we might think differently about the rationality of hope and trust, focusing on the way in which both hope and trust offer us ways to develop our agency, and our relationships with others. In the face of uncertainty and danger, we can use hope and trust to orient ourselves towards the outcomes we seek, even when the probabilities seem to be against us. Hoping in the future and trusting in each other are not just ways to bring about outcomes that we desire. Our hopes for the future involve constructing a vision of a meaningful life and finding ways to live that life in the present, and our trust in each other partly constitutes our valuable relationships with others. Independently of what the future may bring, then, hoping and trusting can be rational and valuable for us in the present.

### A. Published Work

#### “Hoping for Peace”

*Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 98, no. 2 (2020): 211-221

When the odds of achieving world peace seem so long, do hopes for peace amount to anything more than wishful thinking? In this paper, I introduce the idea of meaningful hope, which can help us to understand hopes for peace as genuine hopes. When we act on meaningful hope, we draw on the value of the hoped-for future, in order to give our hopeful activities a meaning they would not otherwise have had. If my account is true, then meaningful hope, by loosening the grip that non-ideal conditions hold over how we live, gives us a way to move towards living a life of our choosing.

#### “Trust and Contingency Plans”

*Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 52, no. 7 (2022): 689-699

Trusting relationships are both valuable and risky. Where the risks are high, it might seem rational to try to mitigate the risks while still enjoying the benefits of the trusting relationship, by forming a contingency plan. A contingency plan involves contingent punishments for defection, which are meant to encourage the trusted partner to act trustworthily. I argue, however, that such contingency plans suffer from an internal tension wherein the contingency planner both seeks and undermines a particular level (or kind) of trust. There are two problems in particular, either of which is sufficient to undermine trusting relationships: one, the planner fails to see the trusted partner as sincerely engaged in the trusting relationship, and two, the planner separates herself out from the joint project of maintaining a trusting relationship by seeing her flourishing as separate from her partner's. Contingency plans, then, are not just about the future; they cast a moral shadow on what we are doing now.

## B. Current Work

### “On the Need for Civic Solidarity”

In preparation (draft available upon request)

In this paper, I examine what might explain the recent proliferation of calls for solidarity. I begin with a brief overview of how solidarity has been traditionally understood, and offer a conjecture for why the American liberal tradition adopted *liberté* and *égalité*, but rejected *fraternité*. I argue that a just society requires not only a conception of justice, but also a conception of solidarity. I introduce the idea of what I call civic solidarity – solidarity between co-members of a political community – and I argue that a just society requires civic solidarity for two reasons. First, civic solidarity offers us a way for us to break out of social hierarchies that are imposed on us. Solidarity is a way for members of privileged and oppressed social groups to act together as social and political equals. And second, civic solidarity attunes us to the social and political needs of others that might not be captured by claims of justice (as traditionally understood).

## II. Imagining, and Preparing for, Bad Futures

Much of the literature on trust focuses on the risks involved in trusting, and there are interesting arguments about why we should only trust those who are trustworthy. But I think it is also important to think about the risks involved in not trusting, or under-trusting. When we fail to trust, and regard others with fear or suspicion or doubt, we can end up creating an undesirable reality that *ex post facto* justifies our initial distrust. When we imagine others as threats or try to predict the ways in which others might fail in their moral obligations, this may itself tend to distort our moral relations with them, in ways that might not reflect an antecedent reality. And this has the cost of closing off certain shared futures for us.

### A. Published Work

#### “The Problem with Preparing to Kill in Self-Defense”

*Journal of Applied Philosophy* (forthcoming)

In a society marked by permissive gun ownership laws, and an increasingly militarized police force, how should we think about cases where a homeowner shoots a person who has mistakenly knocked on the wrong door, or where a police officer shoots someone who is unarmed? The general tendency – by shooters, courts, and many observers – is to use the framework of self-defense. However, as I will argue, relying on the framework of self-defense is inappropriate in these cases, because theories of self-defensive killing are built up around a very specific type of case, namely, a random, sudden, one-off encounter between roughly equally matched strangers. When a person who acts in self-defense has undertaken certain preparations to kill in self-defense – such as buying a gun, or undergoing certain kinds of training – they transform what would have been defensive violence into offensive violence. But because the self-defense framework distinguishes only between defensive and aggressive violence, it cannot easily register the unique moral features of offensive violence. Relying on the self-defense framework, then, produces judgments that are overly permissive of killings by gun owners and police, masking them as self-defensive when in fact they are much more morally fraught.

**“Talking to Children About War”**

*Journal of Pacifism and Nonviolence* 1, no. 1 (2023): 52-64

(An earlier version of this paper was awarded Honorable Mention by the Marc Sanders Foundation Public Philosophy Prize.)

I explore the question of how we should talk to children about war. From a young age, children are exposed to scenarios of violence (for example, in books, toys, and advertisements). My conjecture is that we often intentionally surround children with scenarios of violence in order to teach them to enjoy the “good” kind of violence and to abhor the “bad” kind. We teach children that defensive war is the good kind of violence, and aggression is the bad kind. But, I argue, if we raise children in the expectation of war, and shape their moral development to accommodate this perceived reality by teaching them that killing is sometimes necessary and good, we mold their moral personalities and constrain their imagination in ways that make it difficult for them to seek genuine peace. Instead, we should be teaching children to contribute to the possibility of peace through nonviolence.

**III. War and Pacifism**

Questions about the morality of war are largely decided by the framework of the just war tradition. This tradition has a long and venerable history, tracing back to Augustine, and its central questions persist unchanged: When is it permissible to go to war, and, once at war, how should the war be fought? Just war theory’s central questions are enduring and difficult, but there are other important questions concerning the morality of war that deserve our attention. For example, the just war tradition holds that the aim of a just war is a just and lasting peace, but the tradition offers almost no discussion of what peace itself is, or how exactly war is supposed to contribute to it. I think that if we start with peace, instead of starting with the regulation of war, a different moral landscape is revealed.

My work defends a novel approach to and justification of pacifism, a theory that remains underexplored in contemporary philosophy. My research makes three interesting contributions to the literature on war and peace. First, in contrast to the traditional focus on the moral regulation of war to bring about peace, my work argues that peace should be understood independently of war. Once we understand peace as a positive ideal, and not merely as something that appears at war’s end, we can examine more neutrally what the relationship is between war and peace.

Second, my work shows that nonviolence – as a philosophical, tactical, and strategic position – is much more viable than is generally recognized, and this suggests limits to the justifiability of defensive war. For example, some theorists argue that defensive wars are necessary to defend sovereignty. However, wars always involve tremendous moral costs with no assurance of a victorious or just outcome. So if nonviolent resistance can be even partially effective, this raises the justificatory burden for war.

Third, my work argues that the moral regulation of war cannot produce peace. I show that genuine peace cannot be had through war, because the means and the end must cohere. An analogy that Gandhi often used was that the means are to the end as the seed is to the tree. That is, the means reflect the end in process. So if our aim is peace, we must use peaceful means.

In summary, my work explores peace as a positive ideal, and examines how that ideal should bear on our practical reasoning about how to respond to conflict in our actual world. I aim to understand the relationship between pacifism and nonviolence, and to show why peace cannot be secured by force or threat of force.

### **A. Published Work**

#### **“Pacific Resistance: A Moral Alternative to Defensive War”**

*Social Theory & Practice* 40, no. 1 (2018): 1-20

It is widely believed that some wars are just, and that the paradigm case of a just war is a defensive war. A familiar strategy used to justify defensive war is to infer its permissibility from the case of self-defensive killing. I show, however, that the permission to defend oneself does not justify killing, but instead calls for nonviolent resistance. I develop an account of self-defense according to which the appropriate way to respond to a war of aggression is not by prosecuting a defensive war, but by engaging in a form of nonviolence I call pacific resistance.

#### **“Narrowing the Gap Between Anti-Militarism and Pacifism”**

*The Acorn: Philosophical Studies in Pacifism and Nonviolence* 23, no. 1/2 (2023): 104-109

Ned Dobos raises a novel challenge to just war theory, by critiquing an implicit inference contained within the just war framework, namely, that since it is permissible to fight wars, it is permissible to prepare to fight wars. Dobos shows how this inference is unwarranted, by bringing to light the many costs – moral, social, and political – that are involved in preparing to fight wars. As an important limitation on his argument, Dobos argues that these costs do not by themselves show us that preparing to fight wars is impermissible. Rather, we need to balance these costs against the goods to be gained through fighting wars, and make a case-by-case determination.

However, I think that Dobos’ argument proves more than he is willing to take credit for. The kinds of costs that Dobos brings to our attention are costs that we, as a society, should be unwilling to bear as a matter of justice. It might be helpful here to draw on the criticisms coming out of the Black Lives Matter movement regarding policing. If it is true that the costs of policing include, e.g., the overpolicing of Black communities, the creation and maintenance of a school to prison pipeline, and disproportionate acts of police violence against people of color, then we cannot just balance out these costs against the benefits we hope to enjoy from policing. Since these are costs that are not to be borne, if the goods of policing cannot be had without producing these costs, then we must find other ways of attaining the goods we seek. Similarly with war, if it is true that it’s not possible to prepare to fight wars without incurring intolerable moral costs, then we must find other ways of securing the goods we seek, e.g., through nonviolent resistance.

## B. Current Work

### “What is the Aim of a Just War?”

Under review at *Jurisprudence*

(An earlier draft of this paper won the APA’s Frank Chapman Sharp Memorial Prize, which is awarded biennially to the best unpublished essay on the philosophy of war and peace. I am also honored to be the first woman to have been awarded this prize since its inception in 1991.)

Just war theory has long held that the aim of a just war is peace, and not victory alone. Peace, however, does not feature in either of the two traditional pillars of just war theory: *jus ad bellum* (which governs the conditions under which we may go to war) and *jus in bello* (which governs the scope and manner of killing in war). This paper examines the question, which has so far been ignored in the literature, of how exactly just war theory orients a war towards peace. Establishing this foundational claim, which I will refer to as the Peace Claim, is crucial in order for just war theory to hold the middle ground between its two main rivals, realism (which holds that we must pragmatically pursue victory) and pacifism (which holds that we must pursue peace nonviolently).

### “Fight Till the End? How to Think About Losing a Defensive War”

Under review at *Social Theory & Practice*

What should a state do if it is aggressed against, but cannot win a defensive war? While just war theorists have discussed the question of when and how to end a defensive war, a major underlying assumption is that the state can win, is winning, or has won its defensive war. But what if the state cannot win, is losing, or has lost? Then it seems that there are two options: (1) the state can choose to fight, risking violation of the injunction against fighting futile wars; or (2) the state can choose to surrender, which seems to involve a failure of self-respect and a failure to uphold the principle against aggression. I argue that under these circumstances, states should take seriously a different framework – nonviolent resistance. I show how nonviolent resistance offers a productive solution, making nonviolence not only a permissible option, but a good one, as well.

## IV. Directions for Future Research

I plan to develop my research into a book tentatively titled *Pacific Resistance: Towards A World Without War*, which will offer a sustained defense of pacifism. As an anti-war position, pacifism remains a misunderstood and often caricatured position, dismissed as utopian, naïve, or simply incoherent. My book will defend pacifism against these charges. Even if just war theorists and others ultimately reject pacifism, it deserves more of a hearing than it has received.

First, my book will engage with two common criticisms of pacifism – one practical, one more theoretical. A practical criticism often leveled against pacifism, by just war theorists such as Jean Bethke Elshtain, Cécile Fabre, Brian Orend, and Michael Walzer, is that it will not work. In the real world, it is objected, those who practice pacifism will simply be destroyed by their armed enemies. This debate includes an empirical component that remains unresolved and is difficult to

test. It also includes a philosophical component: If we take failures of pacifism as decisive arguments against nonviolent resistance, why do we not also take failures of war as decisive arguments against violent resistance? What is the sense in which, for critics of pacifism, violence “works” and nonviolence “fails”? In addressing these questions, I will examine what it means to defend rights, whether rights are best defended by killing those who threaten them, and what it means to “win” a war. Attending more carefully to these issues will help us to understand the ways in which both violent and nonviolent resistance can “work” to achieve important political goals.

Accompanying this practical critique, critics allege that pacifism is utopian because it involves illicit generalizations or idealizing assumptions about human nature or institutions. To put the critique another way, pacifism is an ideal theory for angels, while just war theory is a non-ideal theory for humans. However, as I will argue, just war theory, like any theory, involves generalizations and idealizing assumptions. For example, discussions in just war theory generally do not consider the ways in which war impacts men and women differently, or the ways in which power unjustly organizes the relationship between countries in the Global North and those in the Global South. I will argue that the kinds of idealizations at issue in pacifism are no more illegitimate than those made by just war theory.

Second, my book will canvas the historical and contemporary varieties of pacifism. Just as there are many theories that justify war, each influenced by the political climate in which they were produced, there are many kinds of pacifism with interesting histories. For example, before Christianity was adopted as the religion of the Roman empire, one influential strain of pacifism focused on the Christian imperatives to turn the other cheek, to love one’s enemies, and to return love for hate. This was a deeply personal and apolitical version of pacifism. In contrast, the pacifism developed by Jane Addams was bound up with her social work with children, immigrants, and women, and her efforts to alleviate poverty; and the pacifism of Martin Luther King, Jr., was shaped by his work as a leader of the civil rights movement.

Third, I will situate the version of pacifism I am interested in, which has both a critical and a constructive component. As a critical project, my preferred version of pacifism highlights the way in which war is not just an event, but functions as a system. War is a way of life that organizes our economic, political, social, educational, and moral systems, in ways that weaken our democratic institutions and threaten democratic values, perpetuate the values of “masculinity” over “femininity” and contribute to the subjugation of women, and entrench racist hierarchies. In short, war systems produce unjust social and political relations, both at home and abroad, and we feel the effects of the war system even if we never go to war.

The history of feminism informs this aspect of my criticism. Indeed, there has long been a connection between feminism and pacifism. Many early feminists, such as Bertha von Suttner (the first woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize), Jane Addams (the first American woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize), and Virginia Woolf, saw feminism and pacifism as part of the same project. This connection is worth reexamining and reconstructing, especially since the liberation and protection of women is often given as a justification for going to war.

Having shown how pacifism allows us to criticize the system of war, my book will then show how pacifism can also function as a constructive project. That is to say, pacifism can suggest fruitful ways of organizing and reimagining international politics. In the international arena, the lack of an international government, or of a higher lawful authority than states themselves, is taken to necessitate a situation where each state must be prepared to fight wars in order to defend its sovereignty against threats from other states. Contemporary developments in international law, such as the UN's "Responsibility to Protect" doctrine, also obligate states to intervene militarily in cases of where other states cannot defend themselves against atrocities: genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing. The picture of the international system is one of a Hobbesian state of nature, where the answer to violence is more violence.

Alternatively, we might interpret the international system as more Lockean than Hobbesian. Instead of understanding the fact of an international "state of nature" as necessitating certain kinds of war (i.e., defensive wars and humanitarian wars), we might see the state of nature as giving us an opportunity to ask a different kind of question: What does cooperation without coercion look like? How can individuals, groups, and states work together, when there is no sovereign wielding the public sword in threat? The lack of a higher authority that wields the public sword need not be seen as a problem in and of itself; rather, the international state of nature is what we make of it.

As a rich starting point, I will look to the familiar feminist critique of traditional, social contract approaches to cooperation. If we start by imagining people as independent agents who seek first to prevent others from violating their rights, we end up with a very different set of questions than if we start by imagining people as interdependent agents who seek to help and be helped in turn.

From this alternative starting point, we come to a different conclusion concerning the "problem" of international anarchy. The answer is not more war, but the abolition of war. That is, instead of trying to regulate war or to define a "just" war, we should try to delegitimize war. The movement for prison abolition, which positions itself against liberal theories that justify the use of state violence, compels us to ask whether we can really imprison our way to a just society. Similarly, we should seriously consider the question of whether we can war our way to global peace.