



# Conceptualising peace and its preconditions: The anti-Pelagian imagination and the critical turn in peace theory

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## Abstract

This article examines the conceptualisations of peace and its preconditions manifested in the critical turn in peace theory: bottom-up approaches which begin with particular contexts and postulate diverse local actors as integral to the process of peace-building. This article argues that the turn is at an impasse and is unable to address the crucial charge that its conceptualisation of peace is inconsistent. To explain the persistence of inconsistency and to move us forward, the article analyses, evaluates and responds to the turn through the lens of Nicholas Rengger's work on the anti-Pelagian imagination in political theory. This is defined as a tendency to begin theorising from non-utopian, anti-perfectionist and sceptical assumptions. Through this examination the article argues that the critical turn is anti-Pelagian but not consistently so because it often gives way to perfectionism, adopts naïve readings of institutions and postulates demanding conceptions of political agency and practice. This inconsistency with its own philosophical premises makes the turn's conceptualisation of peace and its preconditions incoherent. Finally, the article sketches an alternative account of peace which draws upon a number of anti-Pelagian scholars and mobilises Rengger's particular defense of anti-Pelagianism. The suggested alternative, the article argues, provides us with a more coherent theory of peace and a way out of existing dead ends.

## Keywords

Anti-Pelagianism, critical turn, Nicholas Rengger, peace

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The critical turn in peace theory<sup>1</sup> is at an impasse. Having successfully challenged the hegemony of the liberal peace the turn has been mired in endless and somewhat repetitive debates, the most significant of which between critical and problem-solving accounts (Chandler and Richmond, 2015; Richmond and Mac Ginty, 2015) and between Eurocentric and properly de-colonial approaches (Sabaratnam, 2013; Shani, 2019). Though these debates have been valuable, they have yet to effectively confront or resolve the most damaging challenges to the critical turn: the argument that the critical turn's conceptualisation of peace is inconsistent because its proponents do not adequately acknowledge their own positionalities and the political and often paradoxical nature of their suggestions (Randazzo, 2016) and the argument that the critical turn threatens the transvaluation of peace itself (Bargués-Pedreny, 2018). Existing critiques have been unable to effectively explain the underlying reasons for and the persistence of these issues. Moreover, they have been either uninterested or unwilling to suggest alternative conceptualisations which may help us out of the current impasse and that can counteract the transvaluation of the concept of peace inherent in the critical turn.

This article addresses this twin problem by employing the framework of analysis of non-teleological and sceptical political thought outlined by the late Nicholas Rengger (2017). As I show below, this framework is appropriate to an analysis and evaluation of the conceptualisation of and preconditions for peace found in the critical turn because these accounts are premised on the three philosophical assumptions that Rengger argues characterise what he called 'the anti-Pelagian imagination' in political theory. These assumptions are (1) a complex understanding of human nature and institutions, (2) a non-teleological understanding of politics and (3) scepticism regarding the ability of theory to positively affect practice. It is the article's contention that though they have not claimed the label for themselves, theorists in the critical turn can be accurately characterised as anti-Pelagians. Through an analysis of the framework and by using it to read and analyse the turn, the article illustrates that a fundamental problem for the turn is that it is not consistent in its adherence to this set of underlying assumptions. This leads it to fall into one of the traps that anti-Pelagian thought tends to: perfectionism. Thus, the article demonstrates that the underlying reason behind the impasse in the critical turn in peace theory is that it indulges in some forms of ontological and teleological perfectionism which undermine the consistency and coherence of its theorisation of peace.

Moreover, by mobilising Rennger's type of anti-Pelagianism, found in his own work and in the work of theorists he admired, this article proposes an alternative conceptualisation of peace and its preconditions. This takes the form of accounting for and accepting the more general patterns of our politics, studied by anti-Pelagians and to an extent embraced by the critical turn, and developing a formal rather than substantive conceptualisation of peace and its preconditions which is consistent with those patterns and coherent in itself. Thus, the conception developed here provides a much needed alternative and corrective to the theorisation of peace current in the existing literature.

The article proceeds in three sections. The first section outlines Rennger's framework. The second section analyses and evaluates the critical turn's approach to peace. The final section sketches an alternative conceptualisation which draws from the work of Rennger and various anti-Pelagian thinkers. Finally, the conclusion discusses the consequences of this approach.

## Rengger's study and critique of anti-Pelagian political and international theory

A significant portion of Nicholas Rengger's work was concerned with pessimistic, sceptical, anti-perfectionist and non-utopian thought. This took the form of engaging with particular authors including Michael Oakeshott, Bernard Williams, Judith Shklar and John Gray, among others, whose work explicitly opposed what Rengger called the 'Pelagian' character of modern political and international thought. This characterisation, which is not unique to Rengger but has been a staple of debates in political theory (Fuller, 1996; Paipais, 2016), takes its name from the British monk Pelagius who in the fifth century denied the doctrine of original sin and that salvation could only come through the Grace of God. Instead, Pelagius held that human beings were intrinsically good and could aim for and will perfection (Rengger, 2017: 4). Rengger contends that from the seventeenth century onwards political and international thought can be seen as a secularised version of the Pelagian heresy manifested in attempts to 'rationalise' institutions to solve, once and for all, perennial political problems such as poverty, inequality, conflict and war. Post-17th century political theory is predominantly Pelagian since it presupposes that human beings can find 'deliverance' from politics through the right type of political system. Pelagian political and international theories, according to Rengger (2017), entail the following three elements: an understanding of human nature and institutions as perfectible; a teleological conception of the end of politics as a secularised version of salvation - a utopia, which can be willed into existence, and a conception of political theory as a map to achieving it.<sup>2</sup>

A prime example of Pelagian political theory, according to Rengger, is 'democratic peace theory' which is inexorably related to the 'liberal peace'. In his critique of the theory he identified a number of flaws but here we focus in particular on the theory's Pelagian character which according to Rengger (2016: 50) manifests thusly:

It assumes that the problem of war is essentially solvable if we move away from political and social forms that encourage it (monarchy or the 'martial spirit') and towards political and social forms that discourage it (liberal republics/democracies) and that there is an historical process that can bring this about. This has given liberal and democratic thinking about peace in general an institutional flavour which has permeated much of the international relations theory of the twentieth century.

Here we might add that the theory's institutional flavour entailed the belief that theory could and should become action, a belief which was embraced by the UN for two decades with disappointing results.

Anti-Pelagian scepticism in Rengger's reading follows from a number of different ontological assumptions. For example, for Christian realists like Martin Wight and Jean Bethke Elshain scepticism stems from metaphysical pessimism (Rengger, 2017: 23–34; 120–122). On the other hand, for 'dystopic liberals' - liberals who defend a limited liberalism of toleration as opposed to more ambitious utopian projects of rational consensus and redistribution- scepticism stems from decidedly non-metaphysical premises: recalling the historical memory of human-made atrocities (Rengger, 2017: 64–79) For

others yet, like John Gray (Rengger, 2017: 98–110), scepticism results from a recognition of the imperfect and contingent nature of human reason and from an appreciation of permanent and ineradicable pluralism. Despite significant differences, the anti-Pelagian imagination as a whole ‘finds human experience to be so varied and complex that no plan for ordering and reconstructing human affairs could ever succeed’. (Fuller, 1996: ix) Politics, in this account, might help us keep the ship afloat but will not deliver us to the promised land.

Rengger’s final book engages with a number of anti-Pelagian thinkers to highlight the diversity, of anti-Pelagian thought -which counts liberals, realists and critical theorists in its numbers, and the difficulty in articulating a consistent and coherent anti-Pelagian position. The difficulty, according to Rengger, is two-fold. On the one hand, he shows that anti-Pelagians themselves often inadvertently slip into Pelagianism in the form of giving way to perfectionist/utopian tendencies, leading them to reach conclusions inconsistent with their premises and/or to formulate incoherent/ self-contradictory theories by trying to serve two opposing agendas. A pertinent example of inconsistency is the case of ‘dystopic liberals’ like Williams, who while rejecting ‘moralism’<sup>3</sup> and in an effort to secure the otherwise modest goal of negative liberty, argued for the necessity of ethical, hence pre-political, preconditions for legitimacy, like adherence to human rights (Rengger, 2017: 68–69). An example of incoherence is Hedley Bull in whose earlier work Rengger identified an ambiguity between scepticism and perfectionism. Bull’s work, according to Rengger (2017: 19–34), became increasingly incoherent, as he embraced moral universalism, while not abandoning scepticism.

The second difficulty facing anti-Pelagian thought is the tendency to become ‘the mirror image of what it opposes’ (Rengger, 2017: 5). Rengger’s targets here are thinkers like Gray, Shklar and Hans Morgenthau. Though these are very different thinkers, Rengger critiques their work along two broad lines. First, he argues that their reading of politics in general is far too pessimistic, reliant on generalisations of complex phenomena. For example, Rengger argues that Gray’s latest work, is deeply pessimistic about modern political thought which he claims amounts to a secularised form of apocalyptic religious thinking. However, Rengger (2017: 98–108) cautions against this pessimism, arguing that ‘religion’ is a far more complex phenomenon than Gray allows and that not all religious thought is apocalyptic and thus utopian. He charges that Gray’s overly pessimistic reading leads to a skewed reading of religion, of Christian thought and of the debt of the realism Gray favours to Christian scepticism. Rengger also objects to the general pessimistic readings of the human condition found in the work of anti-Pelagians like Morgenthau and Shklar. Describing the human condition as ‘tragic’ or ‘dystopic’ as Morgenthau and Shklar do respectively, Rengger argued (2017: 162–168; 76–77), would be to describe perfectly ordinary and human phenomena as extraordinary and as a reason for pessimism and exceptional action. The pessimism these theorists express according to Rengger is inconsistent with a complex understanding of human beings who are both greedy and charitable, avaricious and merciful. The second criticism is that in trying to oppose Pelagian tendencies of perfectionism, theorists tend to a ‘nostalgia for a better-ordered past’ which often leads to theorising which closely resembles rationalistic prescription or to ‘a return to utopia, however inverted or misconceived’(Rengger, 2017: 166–167; 108).

Rengger prefers a third tentative position which he develops by the end of his book that is influenced primarily by Oakeshott's idealism and distinct 'moral sensibility'. Firstly, Rengger follows Oakeshott (1966) in stating, *contra* realists like Morgenthau, that we do not have access to 'the world' but only to our understandings of it which is always conditional upon the mode of our engagement. He argues that political theory and practice are related in that political theory must truthfully reflect practice if it is to understand it, while it can also help correct misunderstandings of political practice for either the public or practitioners by resisting 'false attempts to portray the world in a different light' (Rengger, 2017: 167). However, he insists that political theory cannot *itself* become practice (Rengger, 2017: 167). This is because theory and practice have different ends: the theorist's goal is better understanding of political conduct, the practitioner's more prudent doing. Writing political theory with an eye on 'doing' corrupts understanding since it engenders simplifications and the temptation in normative theory to be swayed by wishful thinking or a desire to arrest, once and for all, inevitable complications and messiness.

This position denies that theory should be primarily measured by its usefulness for practice and affirms the now unfashionable notion that theorising as a mode of experience is valuable because it enables us to see the character of the world more clearly. Thus, the relative success or failure of particular theories is determined by the end of theorising which, according to Oakeshott (1996: 20) is:

to distinguish the more permanent elements of the pattern of our politics, to accept them, not in the degree in which they are acceptable (for that becomes irrelevant) but in the degree in which they are unavoidable . . . to find oneself a little less perplexed and a little more understanding of the unpleasing surface of politics.

Consequently, though theory is necessarily related to practice and can help us evaluate it, from the outside, conflating doing and theorising is a non-starter since it wrongly presumes that there is carry-over from theory to practice (Rengger, 2017: 166–168). This position is not only different to 'ideal' and realist theory, it is also distinct from the metatheoretical claims of critical theory, which presumes that theoretical construction necessarily breeds domination, since this wrongly presumes the identification of theory with practice and disregards the fact that theorists often have little effect on practice, predominantly because they are terrible rhetoricians as Rengger (2017: 16) argues. This is of course not to claim that theory never carries over into practice, rather it is to illuminate their distinction and that there is no *necessary* link between the two; rather, any carry-over is often accidental and contingent.

This distinction is crucial for Rengger's brand of anti-Pelagianism and important for the argument made in this article. Rengger does not dispute that Frankfurt-school-style Critical Theory is anti-Pelagian in nature. However, he charges that it is mistaken in assuming that solely critiquing other theories is the only defendable position for the reasons given above. Thus, the theorists Rengger engages with both critique existing theorisations and also theorise different phenomena by starting with 'the more permanent elements of the pattern of our politics'. Rengger (2013) for example critiqued well-meaning and increasingly permissive theories of the use of force by examining the

pattern of war and international (dis)order. This article's final section seeks to do something similar with our understanding of peace.

By its nature any such theorisation is formal, even universal. However, it is crucial to note that it is interpretive rather than prescriptive. In other words, its aim is to provide clearer understanding rather than a 'how to guide' or any institutional recommendations. Thus, anti-Pelagian thinking might be universal but it is not universalising. Furthermore, any such theorisation starts with the assumption that it can never provide 'an absolute position, an ultimate ground of decision or choice' (Rengger, 2016: 53). At this point the reader might reasonably contend that despite all these caveats, any theorisation produced would be to an extent ethnocentric. While I must concede that the tradition of anti-Pelagian thinking outlined here has been developed in the West, drawing upon particular resources including Judeo-Christian thought, arguing that this means that it cannot produce any formal or universal theory would be to give into absolute relativism, a position which is contentious to say the least. Acknowledging the particularity of this and any approach and embracing pluralism, as Rengger (2015: 36) argued, 'does not by any stretch of the imagination imply that one approach cannot be correct and others incorrect'. His response to the reality of difference and to his own particular position, which I share, was first to urge humility and secondly to reject absolute relativism which suggests 'that all truth claims are relative to the perspective of the person doing the claiming' (Rengger, 2015: 36). Consequently, though general and universal, anti-Pelagian theories do not preclude different reasonable theories, including ones formulated in different contexts. Indeed, they are best read as making a modest claim: that they are *plausible* thus worthy to be admitted to the larger conversation and debate and that they should be judged by the standards by which we judge political theorising: that they are consistent with the facts and within themselves.

The following section reads the critical turn through the prism of the anti-Pelagian imagination and evaluates it by these standards, while the final section develops an alternative theorisation of peace and its preconditions which aims to be more consistent and coherent.

## On the inconsistent anti-Pelagianism of the critical turn

The critical turn in peace theory entails a number of different responses to the conundrum of post-Cold War peace-making which foreground local contexts – in terms of the agency, norms and effects of peace-making. It is a reaction to what became known as the 'liberal peace' which is the latest manifestation of liberal internationalism. The term, as it is usually used, does not connote a unified set of policies. Instead, it captures 'the ideology of peacemaking, the socio-cultural norms of peacemaking, the structural factors that enable and constrain it, its principal actors and clients, and its manifestations' (Mac Ginty, 2010: 393). The liberal peace that the critical turn sought to critique and correct was Pelagian in origin and made the following errors. First it presumed that liberalism was non-partisan (Sleat, 2013a: 363), discounting the variability of the human experience and expressions of the good, and limits to our understanding and knowledge. Thus, it offered a vision of a global order based on the assumption of the disappearance of competing versions of the good life, both secular and religious. This

was a fully anti-political conceptualisation and one which entailed a belief in the ability of people to construct political and economic institutions which could bring this order into existence.

The critical turn draws upon Critical Theory, post-structuralism, post-colonialism and feminism. This grouping should not be taken as an indication of uniformity or even agreement among different scholars, as we will see. Despite their differences critical works are characterised by two common concerns: revealing the dominating silences of the ‘liberal peace’ (and post-liberal peace-making) and proposing different epistemologies and methodologies that would allow theorists and practitioners to listen to the silences of the subaltern. In addition, many critical works have been concerned with theorising the conditions for the construction of a silence-free, positive peace.<sup>4</sup> These approaches are commonly anti-Pelagian since they start from the complexity of peace-building environments where the conceptions of the good and the interests of local and international actors are diverse and often in conflict. Further, they highlight the permanence of power and conflict -in short of politics- in the process of peace-making. The following discussion touches upon all three elements of the critical turn, focusing on the third, since this most closely relates to our concern with the conceptualisation of peace.

### *The critique*

Theorists of the critical turn accuse ‘liberal peace’ theorists of producing three types of dominating silence: epistemic, cultural and structural. Critics point to the epistemic silence over the conditions that produced the ‘liberal peace’ present in the works of policy-makers and scholars. In particular, they argue that the ‘liberal peace’ did not seek to respond to the horror of intra-state wars but to the danger that the proliferation of ‘failed states’ posed to international security (Richmond, 2009: 564). As a result, the goal of the ‘liberal peace’ was not to emancipate local populations but to provide security for the leading states of the Global North. A similar accusation has been waged against the ‘liberal peace’s’ insistence that marketisation is conducive to liberty and economic development. Rather than serving those goals, Michael Pugh (2006: 271) argues, ‘peace operations can be considered an integral part of the world ordering project that has accompanied projects for stabilising capitalism’.

These epistemic silences are related to a number of cultural/ideological silences – the sort of silences that legitimise structural silencing – produced in the power imbalance between the interveners and intervened. First is the silence imposed upon the have-nots both in scholarship and policy and, secondly, that imposed by Eurocentrism, which was constitutive of the conviction that the ‘liberal peace’ was a manifestation of universal values, when it was a manifestation of particularly Western ones (Jahn, 2007; Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2013: 768; Richmond, 2011: 1). These silences (re)produced structural inequalities which served, critics argued, to further marginalise the poor while safeguarding the interests of interveners and local elites.

These critiques effectively recovered the political, thus non-teleological, nature of peace-making from the clutches of Pelagian notions of the ‘end of history’. They challenged depoliticisation by rejecting the argument that peace could be built on a priori principles which ignored context, and which presumed the disappearance of different

versions of the good or of conflicting material interests. They also indicated the illiberal means by which the liberal peace had been enforced (Chandler, 2006). Finally, critics illustrated that the peace constructed at the end of ‘liberal peace’ interventions was not liberal but hybrid: a contingent amalgam of local and liberal practices whose composition depended on many variables including the robustness of local institutions (Mac Ginty, 2011).

### *Listening for peace*

In addition to revealing the silences of the ‘liberal peace’, the critical turn has been committed to listening to the voices of the subaltern. Thus, they suggest different ontologies, epistemologies and methodologies for those studying peace-making or partaking in it. Generally, critical peace theorists adopt reflexive and relational ontologies, which then lead to the abandonment of a privilege standpoint in either studying or practicing peace-making. These commitments entail an anti-Pelagian awareness of the limits of human knowledge and of the political nature of peace-making. For example, Oliver Richmond (2016: 17) argues that the study of what he terms ‘peace formation’, to which we return later, requires ‘as close an approximation as possible of an acute anthropological reflexivity ( . . . ) requiring sensitivity to context ( . . . ) and an acceptance of cultural legitimacy, agency and authority’. In sum, the works of the critical turn go a long way to revealing both the diverse interests and effects of the agency of traditionally marginal local actors, allowing us to listen for the voices of the subaltern, and go some way to addressing the silences that are constitutive of the field (Chandler, 2006; Mac Ginty, 2010; Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2013).

Nevertheless, what has been termed the ‘critique of the critique’, points to inconsistencies in the positions of many of the critical turn’s authors. For example, David Chandler (2015) points to the impasse of culture which permeates the work of the leading critical theorists. Similarly, Meera Sabaratnam (2013) and Giorgio Shani (2019) effectively point to what the former termed the ‘avatars of Eurocentrism’ which still loom large over these critical accounts. These avatars are manifested partly in the creation of the ‘local’ as an essential other to the West’s self who tellingly, as Elisa Randazzo (2016) notes, is also spatially determined. The ‘local’ in early accounts had little variation, allowing scholars to construe themselves as the magnanimous subjects who extend an ear to that other. In so doing, Chandler argues, they did not serve the interest of the subaltern. Instead, they opened the social and the ‘everyday’ to the incursion of power in the form of governmentality and biopolitics (Chandler and Richmond, 2015: 12–20).

### *Conceptualising peace*

Though many critical peace theorists chose to focus on critique, some have also sought to provide alternative normative theories of peace and its preconditions. Oliver Richmond and Roger Mac Ginty are arguably the most influential of them. Here we mainly focus on the conceptualisation of peace and its preconditions entailed predominantly but not exclusively in their work.

Up to the 1970s peace was generally understood as the absence of war. This conceptualisation admitted to a lot of interpretations accompanied by distinct preconditions (Mac Ginty, 2011; Richmond, 2005). Johan Galtung (1969, 1990) challenged this conceptualisation, arguing that we must de-couple peace from war and give peace a distinct hypostasis: peace he argued is a state of emancipation, where direct, structural and cultural violence is absent, allowing people to live life as they choose. Many theorists in the critical turn adopt and some expand on Galtung's conceptualisation. In particular, they focus on the local level and the plurality inherent therein as the ideal space for constructing a genuinely emancipatory peace. *Contra* the teleological and apolitical 'liberal peace', they did not specify the institutional form of peace. Furthermore, to circumvent the danger of depoliticisation, they stressed that peace must be conceptualised as both a state of emancipation *and* agonism which entails the permanence of tame conflict, as opposed to a state where conflict disappears. The particular type of agonism adopted is that theorised by William Connolly (1991: 94) who argued that identity creation and the concomitant creation of difference entail cruelty and exclusion, while politics is 'the medium through which these ambiguities can be engaged and confronted, shifted and stretched'. Agonistic politics, in this account, entail a pluralisation of difference which ultimately enables 'self-government, self-determination, empathy [and] care' (Richmond, 2009: 570). In short, peace is conceptualised as a state where everyone is free to live as they choose, and which entails tame conflict amenable to the pluralisation of difference. This is a condition which admits to different institutional arrangements.

Though early works assumed that peace defined thus was possible, criticism which stressed the permanence of power, led Richmond and Mac Ginty (2015) to argue that since power cannot be wished away, each order will inevitably institute exclusions and violence. Therefore, they admitted that emancipation for all was impossible. Despite this presumably 'non-ideal' limitation, they argue that peace should be conceptualised as a state of emancipation where these conditions disappear. This ideal peace can serve as a goal which will never be reached and as a way of accounting for the process by which agents are attempting to institute it. Here we should also note that unlike the 'liberal peace' this conceptualisation is not determined by the goal of inter-state peace. Indeed, it is contrary to liberal internationalism and presumes that local emancipatory peace will reverberate globally in ways which challenge the current state system (Richmond, 2009).

On the face of it this conceptualisation is consistent with anti-Pelagian premises since it is non-teleological, does not hide the political nor the permanence of power, pluralism and conflict. However, retaining the conception of peace-as-emancipation, even as an unreachable ideal state, inevitably conjures the perfectionist spirit of Pelagianism (Rengger, 2017: 14) since it implies that critical peace theorists 'believe that there is a "solution to the puzzle" – at least in principle' (Renner, 2016: 37). In short, retaining this conception of peace seems to presume that ideally the end of politics is perfection or salvation at both the domestic *and* international levels, as opposed to accepting that politics can have no other function than 'keeping the boat afloat'. Defining peace as emancipation is, thus, inconsistent with their otherwise anti-Pelagian premises which necessarily recognise the impossibility of that goal. Retaining it as an ideal end, even while accepting the permanence of power, violence and exclusion, indicates an unwillingness to

effectively deal with the consequences of this permanence for how we can conceptualise peace.

The second element which makes up the concept of peace is pluralistic or even pluri-lising agonism. This pertains both to the interactions between local and international actors as well as to the interactions of local actors themselves, highlighting critical peace theorists' commitment to a political, hence anti-Pelagian, understanding of peace-making as a whole. Furthermore, this addition is supported by empirical evidence gleaned from sustained studies of peaceful cooperation among people who had either been on opposing sides during conflicts or were presumed to be so. These actors often have a limited role due to their lack of power; however, it is cautiously argued that they are crucial in pushing for a pluralistic and emancipatory peace (Richmond, 2016). Nevertheless, agonism, as described here is a demanding type of politics, one which is predicated on a pre-political commitment to pluralisation, which is itself based upon subjectivities which are open to difference and change. This is obviously a more demanding type of politics than that of toleration, which demands that citizens not demonise otherness while interacting with them in matters of co-existence (Hampshire, 1996) but does not require a significant engagement with difference or change. Conceptualising politics in the context of peace thus is predicated on focusing upon the better angels of our natures, and those groups who embody them, but seems to disregard those who don't. Therefore, this conceptualisation tilts into Pelagianism because it defines peace in a way which disregards significant aspects and types of human behaviour.

The preconditions for peace, defined thusly, are rooted in the maxim that local legitimacy beliefs, institutions and processes are most important for building a sustainable-come-emancipatory peace. In his earlier work Richmond proposed that putting the liberal-peace-building-self in dialogue with the non-liberal-peace-building-other would produce a legitimate and possibly emancipatory peace which would necessarily be hybrid in character. A necessary precondition for this dialogue would be for the interveners to 'check their power', as it were, thus ameliorating biases (Richmond, 2009: 565–568, 593). Mac Ginty (2010) in his work focused on the hidden transcripts of peace-making by focusing not on dialogue-qua-dialogue but on the indigenous and traditional methods of peace-making and the way in which they relate to the 'liberal peace'. Thus, critical peace theorists argued that we should focus on 'the everyday', (Richmond, 2009: 570–572) defined as the site where individuals navigate their way and find space for their activities. Focusing on it as a site of investigation, intervention and dialogue would allow scholars and international practitioners to harness already existing practices in the service of peace-building, thus turning subjects into active citizens, able to engage with the politics of self-government and self-determination. This, Richmond (2011, loc. 5041) argued would transform peace-building from a process of power-accumulation into 'a dialogic and pedagogic process which reconstructs the everyday according to how its subjects need and want to live'.

These early theorisations of the preconditions of a legitimate peace, namely that it is based on a dialogue between (elite and non-elite) local and international actors which harnesses the 'everyday', were challenged by other critical scholars. They were criticised for inadvertently romanticising the essentially other and for being too problem-solving rather than critical, thus obscuring greater structures of power inequality (Chandler,

2017; Tadjbakhsh, 2011). In the context of our reading of the critical turn, these works were perhaps more Pelagian than anti-Pelagian, retaining the belief in both perfectibility through an ideal form of politics (the ‘ideal’ dialogue of international and local actors) and in theory’s ability to provide a map for the journey.

Furthermore, they were arguably based on an ultimately apolitical conception of legitimacy which assumes that liberal legitimatory beliefs, which presuppose that one must find ‘a way to justify a political system to everyone who is required to live under it’ (Nagel, 1991: 33), could co-exist with non-liberal conceptions which reject this commitment. Moreover, critical theorists presumed that such illiberal beliefs, like faith-based beliefs which deny equal status to men and women or shun queerness, could be at least ideally reconciled with the ideal end of emancipation and with pluralising agonism. However, this is unlikely because emancipation presupposes that we treat people as ends in themselves rather than means to an end. Further, it demands that the polity (state or otherwise) acts to remove all violence, if it is to be legitimate. This in turn would be incompatible with secular and non-secular versions of the good life that seek to prescribe how people live in the service of achieving a particular end. The ethic of pluralisation would be similarly incompatible with such beliefs which are often predicated upon the exclusion of difference. Thus, early theorisation of the preconditions for a legitimate peace was predicated on a Pelagian blindness to the depth of conflict between existing versions of the good life, which has no prospect of being resolved.

A second precondition for peace is that the order and institutions constructed be hybrid. This is a precondition which, similarly to the addition of agonism to the definition of peace, is partly descriptive. Indeed, procedural and institutional hybridity is a far more widespread phenomenon than agonism (Mac Ginty, 2010). On the other hand, as critics note (Bargués-Pedreny and Randazzo, 2018; Millar, 2014), hybridity often appears as a prescriptive requirement for peace (Johnson and Hutchison, 2012; Richmond, 2009). Theoretically, this requirement is problematic due to the contradictory nature of the elements it suggests should be blended. For example, blending rule of law institutions which presume that all are equally subject to the law with traditional, often hierarchical, institutions which deny that, is unfeasible. Another incongruity potentially exists between traditional *and* liberal institutions, on the one hand, and the perfectionists and demanding ends of peace as it has been defined by the critical turn, on the other. In fact, empirical studies demonstrate that institutional hybridity does not act as a check against the establishment of coercive institutions or ensure the establishment of emancipatory ones (Simangan, 2018). Indeed, presuming that it could entails a characteristically Pelagian, because naïve, understanding of institutions. Finally, the precondition that institutions have a hybrid character entails a further slip into Pelagianism, since it is, however loosely, prescriptive, thus presupposing the notion that theory may indeed guide practice towards a perfectionist end.

The ‘critique of the critique’ led to a second wave of theorisations of the preconditions of peace. Later works, for example, recognise that the ‘local’ is not uniform nor necessarily a-liberal (Rampton and Nadarajah, 2017; Richmond, 2011) and that power permeates the local as well as the global (Hughes et al., 2015; Richmond, 2016; Richmond and Mac Ginty, 2015). They also warn against trying to construct hybrid orders, since local traditions are also not necessarily conducive to the end of emancipation (Mac Ginty and

Richmond, 2016). Elsewhere, Mac Ginty and Richmond (2013) acknowledged that the conceptualisation of peace as emancipatory *and* agonistic privileges ‘critical and resistant agencies’. These, they argue, may give rise to ‘emancipatory forms of peace that are open to alternatives and anti-hegemonic, bottom-up, freed from the constraints of statehood and imposed norms, and balancing needs with rights, rather than a homage to a hierarchical order’ (Richmond and Mac Ginty, 2015: 184). In his work, Hartmut Behr (2019) argues for privileging particular local ontologies and practices which embrace a continual process of dialogue and articulation of the multiple meanings of difference. Richmond (2016) has also focused on ‘peace formation’ which takes place among increasingly connected, critical, subaltern actors who, he argues, do not only contest local power but the state system itself. While recognising the limited role of these actors due to their lack of power, it is cautiously argued that they are crucial in pushing for a pluralistic and emancipatory peace which would be ultimately legitimate.

These works are even less prescriptive than earlier theorisations of peace and its pre-conditions, since they do not specify any method for legitimating peace nor the character of the institutions which are necessarily conducive to peace as emancipation, making these works more consistent with their anti-Pelagian premises. At the same time, these efforts do not rid these theorisations of peace of their contradictions. For example, at this second stage of normative theorising, critical scholars were forced to specify the (few) types of subjectivities and political positions which are presupposed by agonistic and emancipatory peace. At the same time, they refrained from specifying which types of subjectivities and positions are excluded. Thus, this was an attempt to limit the scope of pluralism without explicitly doing so.

These arguments point to the continuing incoherence at the centre of the conceptualisation of peace developed in the context of the critical turn attempting, as it is, to retain both, a commitment to pluralism, and even pluralisation entailed in the adoption of Connolly’s model of agonism, and a commitment to the end of emancipation which is incompatible with many versions of the good life (See: Bargués-Pedreny, 2018; Randazzo, 2016: 1355–1359). Put differently, these works theorise peace as embracing all understandings of the good –even aiming for the continual proliferation of difference, while affirming a perfectionist end which must necessarily exclude many of these understandings. Indeed, it might be said that the concept of pluralising agonism itself is contradictory since its existence is necessarily predicated upon the exclusion of those understandings of the good which reject its premises. As I argue in the introduction, this is perhaps the most damning critique of the turn. This paradox persists, this article has shown, because critical peace theorists engaged in theorising peace and its preconditions have been unable to exorcise the ghost of Pelagianism and the incoherence it generates for theories that begin from anti-Pelagian philosophical premises. The ghost is manifested in the persistence of teleological perfectionism in these accounts.

Moreover, these theories continue to presume a demanding, reflexive type of subjectivity which cannot be assumed or prescribed, nor serve as the starting point of a theory of peace any more than the presumption of rational egoism can. As argued above, this element illustrates the fact that these theorisations of peace and its preconditions are predicated upon an excess of attention on actors which are admirable and confirm theorists’

values, and on inattention to those actors who don't. A properly anti-Pelagian conception of peace and its preconditions must necessarily take both into consideration.

The effect of the contradictions inherent in this conceptualisation of peace is manifested at the level of practice. Most empirical studies of peace-building concur that the United Nations and individual Western states have made a turn to local contexts tempering their Pelagian ambition and ushering in different understandings of peace. For example, Chandler (2017) notes that there has been a notable switch from 'conflict resolution' to 'conflict management' as a goal for interventions, which occasioned practices like encouraging inclusive dialogue among local actors and adopting the framework of resilience<sup>5</sup> to deal with pre- and post-conflict environments. This change indicates that Pelagian simplification of post-conflict environments and local actors and notions of politics as the means to salvation have disappeared from the stated aims, strategies and mandates of international organisations and powerful states. Indeed, in their respective works, Chandler (Chandler and Richmond, 2015: 12–20) and Pol Bargués-Pedreny (2018: 106–108) argue that international peace-making agents have adopted the theoretical framework of the critical turn and by extension their conceptualisation of peace. Unlike Richmond (Chandler and Richmond, 2015: 1–12), they do not see this as a reason for celebration. Instead, Chandler argues that this switch has resulted in extending the reach of power while obscuring its contours. For Bargués-Pedreny (2018: 143), the most pressing issue is that these practices threaten the transvaluation of peace, whereby success at reaching a final solution, which presumably would limit pluralism and institute necessary exclusions, is seen as a failure and the failure to do so as a success. Both theorists suggest that in practice the adoption of the critical turn's understanding of peace leads to increasing interventionism, dependency and a deferral of sovereignty.

## A theory of peace and its preconditions

Though the critical turn in peace theory has improved upon the Pelagianism of the 'liberal peace' by affirming the impossibility of universal solutions and permanence of conflict and power, a coherent and consistent conception of 'peace' remains elusive. It has been argued that the reason for this is that critical peace theory and thought has fallen into one of the traps anti-Pelagian thought tends to: sliding into the perfectionist and often naive notions characteristic of Pelagianism. This section outlines an alternative conception of peace and its preconditions. This conception follows anti-Pelagian philosophical premises: that human beings and institutions are complex, that politics can at best help us 'keep the boat afloat' and that political theory should not aim to guide practice. Thus, the alternative sketched below is an attempt at theorising peace from 'the outside' as Rengger put it, as opposed to providing a theorisation which might help us 'do' better. Since peace is complex and rests on a number of general political patterns, I draw upon the works of various anti-Pelagian thinkers discussed by Rengger who have theorised these convincingly. Here it is worth noting once more that I do not purport to offer *the* final word on peace, nor the only possible one. However, my contention is that the theory developed here is plausible, consistent with its premises and the facts and coherent within itself, and that it provides a way out of the critical turn's current impasse.

We begin by defining peace not as emancipation but as a disposition to solve conflicts in a peaceful manner. This definition echoes Hobbes (1968: 56) who stated that ‘the nature of War consisteth not in actual fighting; but in the known disposition thereto, during all the time there is no assurance to the contrary. All other time is PEACE’. Furthermore, it is also reminiscent of Kenneth Boulding’s (1978: 13) definition of the stable peace as ‘a situation in which the probability of war is so small that it does not really enter into the calculations of any of the people involved’. This definition presupposes that as Rengger (2016: 53) put it ‘Peace may not always be attainable, and sometimes (...) might not be preferable, but for the most part, for most of us, most of the time, it will be’. It also has a temporal dimension: peace is not a momentary state, it exists only when a long-term disposition to solve conflicts peacefully exists.

The discerning reader might point out that this definition remains open to both perfectionist and cynical theorisations of the preconditions of peace, since such a state can be achieved through domination or be interpreted as necessarily emancipatory. To avoid these pitfalls we further specify that peace is a state where those involved are predisposed to solve their conflicts in a peaceful manner while being free of widespread violent coercion or the fear/threat of such coercion. Characterising peace thus recognises that the rule of law or other legal systems, necessarily entail coercive elements. It also draws from the anti-utopian position, common to republicanism (Pettit, 1997: 1–128), dystopic liberalism (Shklar, 2004: 149–166) and realism (Morgenthau, 1946: 168–203; Williams, 2005: 1–18), that coercion which is productive of arbitrary violence and/or fear is universally bad, since it stops people from flourishing. This definition does not preclude the possibility of improvements, in the form of addressing injustices according to the common sense of the times, but it is not premised upon this. It is also not premised on the disappearance of hegemony, as accounts in the critical turn are. Consequently, peace in this account is modest while avoiding the trap of being equated with a state of widespread domination.

The first precondition of peace defined thusly is the mutual recognition of all participants – individuals and/or groups- as co-citizens. Stuart Hampshire (1996: 150) argues that such recognition is constitutive of political relationships which have always entailed balanced adversary thinking. If adversaries are not recognised, or their opinions entertained, even if only to be rebuked, then there is no political relationship. In cases of lack of recognition and of institutions with procedures to accommodate how different opinions will be weighed against each other, domination ensues (Hampshire, 1996: 155). Here it should be noted that this type of recognition does not promise a final resolution or that conflict disappears since, as Hampshire put it in his Tanner lectures, ‘there will never be a harmony in the soul or in the city’ (Hampshire, 1998: 148). Failure to recognise this would entail a slide into a perfectionist anti-Pelagianism which presumes that the better angels of our nature can be relied upon to prevail, if only favourable conditions are put in place.

This type of recognition is of course presupposed in the critical turn’s accounts we examined, though those accounts go even further by demanding not just recognition of co-citizens but constant self-reflexivity. As we have argued that is a demanding, if not naïve, conception of the political subjectivity presupposed by peace. Indeed, despite the fact that the precondition specified here is more modest than that entailed in the critical

turn, it still remains demanding. This is evident when considering the context of conflict-ravaged polities like Yemen or even relatively pacified post-conflict ones like Cyprus. In both these cases this type of recognition is not forthcoming. In Yemen, marginalised agents, including women and the young, were simultaneously excluded while being formally included in the National Dialogue Conference, since established elites refused to discuss politics openly with them (Gaston, 2014). In Cyprus, the long peace-making process between Greek-Cypriots, represented by the government of the internationally recognised Republic of Cyprus, and Turkish-Cypriots, attests partly to the difficulties of reaching and then codifying recognition. At the same time, the backlash against the candidacy and election of a Turkish-Cypriot for one of the six Cypriot seats in the 2019 European parliamentary elections, attests to the majority's unwillingness to recognise the other, emboldened by the populist tactics of opportunistic elites (Psyllides, 2019). This leads us to argue that the *feasibility* of our first precondition may rest upon two supplementary ones. The first that the elites must find peace thus defined to be superior to war or to mere pacification, for the pursuit of their ends (Cottrell, 1955). The second supplementary precondition borrows from Margaret Canovan's (1998) critique of liberalism which, she argued, omitted the crucial role of nationalism in the establishment of liberal polities. Following Canovan's argument and recent work on the relational aspects of peace (Söderström et al., 2019), we argue that the sort of recognition postulated here often depends upon the existence or creation of a common corporate identity which creates a bond and relation of fellowship among participants.

Since formal political recognition does not make power disappear, the second precondition of peace is the exercise of prudence in constructing institutions. Prudence as a virtue has long been theorised and contested (See: Kratochwil, 2018). While resolving debates around the subject is beyond the remit of the article, prudence, rather than the precise character (hybrid or otherwise) of institutions, is highlighted as a precondition, because building such institutions cannot be left to rationalistic formulas nor to naïve hopes that hybrid institutions will, by virtue of their character, produce the conditions for a non-coercive order. Consequently, a precondition for peace is that in building institutions we follow David Hume's (1742) maxim that 'in contriving any system of government, and fixing the several checks and controls of the constitution, every man ought to be supposed a *knav*, and to have no other end, in all his actions, than private interest'. Hume's argument allows us to sidestep debates about who can be prudent while clearly outlining the character of prudent institutions: that they effectively put in place checks and balances on power. This leaves open the processes by which such institutions are constructed as well as their precise form which is historically and contextually contingent (See: Hampshire, 1996: 155; Geuss, 2008; Oakeshott, 1975). Therefore, this precondition avoids the pitfall that critical peace theorists highlight: the supposition that the only political and institutional arrangements conducive to peace are the ones developed in the West and that these can be transplanted elsewhere. Furthermore, it also speaks to Rengger's (2016) concern with dispelling the notion that only particular political and institutional forms facilitate peace. At the same time, this precondition postulates a thin but also demanding end to such processes. Finally, this definition is particularly attractive since it rests on the pretense that everyone is a knave -rather than on unsupportable anthropological certainty; a pretense which we may abandon in all other aspects of our lives.<sup>6</sup>

The third precondition of peace, one that critical theorists rightly focus upon, is that the order constructed and its institutions must have the character of being legitimate whereby, legitimacy is defined as the recognition of the authority of a polity which engenders obligations (Oakeshott, 1975). Legitimacy is constitutive of peace since it is presupposed by the disposition to solve conflicts in a peaceful manner. Put differently, if most find the institutions of their polity to be illegitimate, especially those institutions which are central in conflict resolution, trust-building and security, they would not be obliged to follow the rules. In these circumstances, violent conflict would be highly probable. As with the shape of institutions, the sources of legitimacy are historically and spatially contingent. Furthermore, the basis of a polity's legitimacy is never set or finalised; instead it is constantly changing in conditions of -tame- conflict and unequal power relations (Sleat, 2016).

In the place of the critical turn's conception of legitimacy, which requires pluralisation and difference-minded ontologies and practices, we adopt a more modest understanding based on John Horton's *modus vivendi* theory of legitimacy. *Contra* the demanding conceptions of legitimacy adopted by critical peace theorists, Horton (2010: 443) argues that to be legitimate 'a particular set of political arrangements ( . . . ) has to be broadly 'acceptable' or 'agreeable' to those who are party to it, even if only reluctantly so and for diverse reasons'. Crucially, he notes that a *modus vivendi* arrangement is only legitimate if 'uncoerced acceptance is widespread and covers the majority in the groups who are party to it'. The reasons or beliefs that legitimise an order, he argues, may be 'moral, intellectual, cultural, pragmatic, etc., as well as self-interested'. This theory of legitimacy is simultaneously pragmatic and broadly inclusive. It is pragmatic in recognising and providing for the multifarious nature of compromise at any time in the life of a polity which recognises that compromise does not only involve considerations of one's conception of the good but also other less elevated, but not less important, reasons. Simultaneously, it is inclusive because it adequately provides for pluralism in the inter-related understanding of oneself and of the good, which can encompass subjects who are not only liberal or other-minded. This theorisation does not prescribe how to go about creating a legitimate peace but it specifies its character which excludes coercion between and within groups. Thus, a precondition for peace is that *the majority in the groups that make-up the polity finds it agreeable, thus legitimate, for a variety of reasons*.

The fourth and final precondition of peace is that it must exclude other possibilities. This precondition is of course implied but unacknowledged in Mac Ginty and Richmond's (2013) work as we saw above. Peace defined thusly, excludes the possibility of dominating orders and as such must exclude those who seek to institute these by destroying it. Peace, therefore, necessarily limits pluralism because its end is a state where those who are part of it are predisposed to solve their conflict peacefully out-with widespread dominating coercion or the fear of such coercion. However, this entails that some agents -for example in Yemen some members of the Al Qaeda of the Arabian Peninsula, would be excluded and would thus experience the order as dominating. One might say that this is paradoxically since peace here is defined against domination while being unable to escape it. In fact, peace has been conceived as a state which precludes *widespread* domination and arbitrary coercion. This qualification allows for this necessary precondition to any order: that it must exclude that which seeks to destroy it.<sup>7</sup>

## Conclusion

As a way to get to the root of the inconsistencies in the theorisation of peace entailed in the critical turn and thus to break through our current impasse and avoid the threat of the transvaluation of peace, this article drew upon Nicholas Rengger's systematic study and characterisation of anti-Pelagian thought to analyse and evaluate the critical turn. I argued that the turn is anti-Pelagian in character since it is, in principle, non-teleological, sceptical of the relation of theory and practice and acknowledges the complexity of human nature and institutions. After establishing that the critical turn lacks a theory of peace and its preconditions which consistently follows from its anti-Pelagian premises and which is internally coherent, the article sketched an alternative which follows Rengger's anti-Pelagianism in seeking to understand peace 'from the outside', thus allowing us to address the gap at the center of the critical turn.

Consequently, peace has been defined as a state where the people involved are predisposed to solve their conflicts in a peaceful manner while being free of widespread dominating coercion or the fear/threat of such coercion. The conception sketched here is consistently anti-Pelagian in as much as it follows from non-teleological, non-utopian, sceptical and non-voluntarist presuppositions. First, it presumes that human nature and politics are inescapably complex. Secondly, it is based on the non-utopian desire to avoid the universally bad state of fear, arbitrary violence and dominating coercion. Thirdly, it presupposes a distinction between political theory and practice. Peace, in this account, is both similar to but also markedly different from the critical turn's theorisations of peace which, while cognizant of the inescapability of politics, posit the maximalist end of emancipation and the adoption of a hugely demanding type of politics, pluralising agonism, while falling into incoherence and prescribing ever more demanding conditions for its attainment especially as these relate to the agents and subjects of peace. At the same time, it also avoids the pitfalls of equating peace with a state of widespread domination. Following Rengger, we must emphasise that this conception is not designed to help us decide when peace is desirable or how to institute it, and nor do I claim that it is the only possible conception of peace. Nevertheless, I argue that it is plausible, consistent and coherent and that it can help us move our debates beyond their current impasse. Finally, this theorisation arguably escapes the ever-present temptation of Pelagianism by defining peace modestly while pointing to the messiness and indeterminacy of politics and by leaving space for political judgement as to when peace is desirable and to its substantive shape.

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## Notes

1. Here it should be noted that since the end of the Cold War a great proportion of peace theory (liberal and critical) has been concerned with intra-state peace. This is because the end of the Cold War led to an explosion of intra-state conflict. It is also reflective of the argument, made originally by Kant in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, that getting peace ‘right’ within states is a precondition for peace between them. The critical turn deals predominantly with intra-state peace.
2. Here it should be noted that Renger’s pre-occupation with the debate between Pelagian anti-Pelagian thought shares some similarities with the debate between ideal, non-ideal and realist theory which has been raging in political theory since at least 2008 (Geuss, 2008; Sleat, 2016) and has recently ‘migrated’ to international political theory (Brown and Eckersley, 2018). Though he deals with some thinkers engaged in those debates Renger’s analysis is related but distinct from the framework established by the existing debates.
3. Whereby pre-political, moral imperatives either provide limits to political action or direct it (Williams, 2005: ch.1)
4. Here it should be noted that not all critical peace scholars partake in this final exercise, however we focus on those who do in line with the subject of the article.
5. Approaches which seek to use culture as a toolkit for peace-building and involve local (elite and civil-society) and other actors (NGOs, donors, IOs) in flexible and ever-changing arrangements which seek to create polities which can withstand and absorb challenges and shocks.
6. For this distinction, I thank Professor Noël O’Sullivan.
7. Debating the manner of the exclusion is beyond our remit but a discussion of this can be found in the work of Chantal Mouffe (1993) and Sleat (2013b), among others.

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