

Dynamic Empowerment in Peace Education

Dynamic Empowerment in Peace Education:

A Three -Angle Approach

By

Sita R. Dasa

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To Isaiah Z. Husain
and
Tabor L. Zeller

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FOREWORD

Critical peace education (CPE) sets forth a process-oriented pedagogy with key tenets that include inquiry, reflection, dialogue, critical value-assessment, and empowerment. Empowerment is unique because, when viewed comprehensively, it is recognized as an integral element required for the actualization of all other tenets within CPE. Although empowerment may take on many forms within the CPE framework, this text establishes that it is a foundational component that rests upon three distinct elements; these include the following: the ability to establish and maintain authentic inner unification with peace (through the development of an integrated state of nonviolence), the ability to offer valid, normative justifications for one's claims, and an ongoing commitment and willingness to reconstruct the conception of peace in pursuit of justice and fairness in a diverse biosphere. The prevalence of violence (specifically structural violence experienced as dehumanization, marginalization, and oppression) coupled with the rise of societal polarization, ingroup bias, and groupthink, highlight the need for a greater focus on and understanding of empowerment in CPE.

Empowerment is a matter of justice which necessitates normative presuppositions for the validation of claims as well as ongoing reflection and praxis in the pursuit of justice as peace; however, without authentic commitment to external as well as internal obligations to peace, empowerment efforts in all forms will remain insufficient. This assertion underscores the need for a three angle approach to dynamic empowerment in Peace Education. This work identifies these angles through exploring the philosophies of Satyagraha, Moral Reasoning, and Existential Biocentrism Adaptation. This three angle approach highlights the underpinnings of ingroup bias and groupthink and offers a pathway to overcome these deterrents to peace. It presents a secular approach to inner peace and identifies the need to expand our conception of outer peace, underscoring that the outer spheres of peace cannot be achieved without true commitment to the inner pathway.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CP	Critical Pedagogy
CPE	Critical Peace Education
DISN	Development of an Integrated State of Nonviolence
EA1-DISN	Empowerment Angle One: Development of an Integrated State of Nonviolence
EA2-MRNJ	Empowerment Angle Two: Moral Reasoning as Normative Justification
EA3-EBA	Empowerment Angle Three: Existential Biocentrism Adaptation
EIIA	Embodied Integrity and Impartiality Assessment
EIOP	External and Internal Obligations to Peace
MBIs	Mindfulness Based/Meditative Interventions
3A-DE-CPE	Three Angle Approach to Dynamic Empowerment in Critical Peace Education

CHAPTER ONE

CRITICAL PEACE EDUCATION AND EMPOWERMENT

Historically, peace has been defined in its negative sense as freedom from direct physical violence and the absence of war and organized warfare (Galtung, 1969; Snauwaert, 2020, 2023). Peace education that focuses on negative peace typically falls within reform and reconstructive approaches, which aim to prevent war and reconstruct international systems to create global conflict-resolution and peacekeeping. However, peace educators, theorists, and philosophers have expanded upon the concept of negative peace (or absence of direct violence) to include the absence of all forms of violence (entailing indirect/structural and cultural violence) and have conceptualized an approach to peace education that reflects this expansion, this approach is known as Critical Peace Education (CPE).

CPE is a transformative approach (that goes beyond reform and reconstructive approaches) that seeks to elicit development of critical, ethical, and contemplative reflective inquiry to further the pursuit of justice as peace through the identification of dehumanization and oppression, thus linking peace efforts to social change through a process-oriented pedagogy that entails inquiry, reflection, dialogue, critical value-assessment, and empowerment (Baja, 2008; Brantmeier, 2010; Reardon, 1988, 1999; Reardon and Snauwaert, 2011; Snauwaert, 2011, 2023). This critical, transformative approach aims to reject violence in all forms and seeks to elicit learning and the development of the capacity for critical, ethical, and contemplative reflective inquiry that furthers the pursuit of justice as peace.

Critical peace education is built upon critical pedagogy within social foundations of education which has us “employ normative interpretations to assist ... educators to develop inquiry skills, to question educational assumptions and arrangements, and to identify contradictions and inconsistencies among social and educational values, policies, and practices” (Tutwiler, 2013, 112). We explore this discipline while we contemplate how to curate educational experiences and philosophies that promote equality, reciprocity, recognition, and impartiality, these comprise the presuppositions to

fairness (Rawls, 1971; Shelby, 2004; Snauwaert, 2020, 2023; and others). Critical peace education (CPE) requires (as noted above) that we not only seek to ensure the absence of direct violence and establish negative peace (Galtung, 1969), but that we identify peace in its positive form where it is defined as the absence of structural and cultural violence and is experienced as justice (Snauwaert, 2023). With a focus on justice as the experience of peace, CPE seeks enacted and achievable plans to create a more peaceful world through the transformation of society.

Peace educator, Edward Brantmeier argued that peace efforts toward social change need be linked to social justice; in this CPE approach, we must consider how “power, oppression, privilege, marginalization, difference, and social stratification in relation to gender, class, race, dis/ability, sexual orientation, religion, national origin, and language are essential to peace education efforts” (Brantmeier, 2010, 11). He described CPE as a blending of social theory and peace education approaches which aims to transform society through addressing the structural violence that privilege some and exclude or oppress others. Of this approach, Brantmeier wrote, “The main focus of critical peace education is transformation via raising consciousness, vision, and transformative action. Thus, critical peace education is action oriented by promoting social and cultural change toward a nonviolent, sustainable, and renewable future” (Brantmeier, 2010, 13). Within this pedagogy, there must be engagement in social transformation, which requires the employment of a critical lens upon all institutions. There must also be realization of the existence of multiple perspectives, as well as a willingness to accept the failings of social institutions to initiate positive change toward peace/justice. This engagement requires praxis through which participants move between theory and practice with periods of reflection that guide further action (Freire, 1970/2003; Reardon & Snauwaert, 2015). Such praxis requires the engagement of critical consciousness, or conscientization, a process by which the understanding of social and political contradictions is acquired through reflection upon the sources of oppression (Freire, 1970/2003). Through the employment of critical consciousness and consciousness raising, the integration of new awareness (of the nature of oppression and violence) can take place.

Critical consciousness and consciousness raising that promote the praxis of CPE, require a deep embodiment of its tenets. It is not enough to be able to define, write, and teach about these core tenets; nor is it enough to be “active” in social/environmental justice and peace/nonviolence initiatives. There must be an inner integration that brings about change within the individual and *empowers* her/him/them to meet the aims of this pedagogy.

Underdevelopment of any of the core tenets stifles peace initiatives. It is my contention that there exist at least three theoretically underdeveloped elements of the core tenet of empowerment in CPE. These elements collectively generate the idea of *dynamic empowerment* (to be discussed in *Chapter 2*); they include self-purification (identified as a prerequisite to effective practice of satyagraha/nonviolent peace initiatives), the centrality of normative justification (specifically moral reasoning as set forth by framers of critical theory, Habermas (1990) and Forst (2012)), and a reimagining of existentialism (highlighting the importance of self-responsibility, self-awareness) to extend peace efforts that promote social and cultural change toward a nonviolent, sustainable, and renewable future (Brantmeier, 2010).

The prevalence of violence, both direct and indirect (structural) remains a clear and undeniable reality. This violence manifests as the ongoing presence of war in the world, the prevalence of severe injustices experienced by marginalized societies, social unrest and degradation, tribalism (strong ingroup loyalty), and continued human induced ecological ruin. Peace efforts are lacking, and although we have plenty of philosophies and theories that offer potential pathways to greater peace, there remains within our species a propensity for violence. Collectively, we are not only failing to see and accept the greater conception of peace as justice, but we are also resisting the deeper contemplation of our individual responsibility for the perpetuation of violence.

Issues related to the prevalence of structural violence (which highlight the need for focus on empowerment) are multifaceted and multidimensional. The focus of this work, which seeks to amplify empowerment efforts in CPE, makes implicit the multitude of violence and injustices experienced by historically marginalized communities, as well as ever-emerging oppressive behaviors and policies affecting more recently recognized marginalized peoples and communities. However, the purpose of this text is to identify insufficiencies (or underdeveloped elements) of empowerment related to the development of inner peace/justice, to outline sufficient justification of claims regarding peace/justice, to promote a greater collective and solidified effort for sustainability and environmental peace/justice, and to provide a model for human evolution (as it is being revealed in the science of genetics).

Therefore, this work emphasizes empowerment of the individual to achieve a greater level of inner unification with peace and justice (to ensure authentic alignment with the core tenets of CPE). It also focuses upon

empowering the individual to offer normative justifications for one's claims regarding peace/justice through effective moral reasoning so that one can advocate for oneself, one's counterparts, and one's environment from a place of fairness (entailing embodiment of equality, impartiality, reciprocity, and recognition (Snauwaert, 2023)). The objectives of this focus are centered within the development of an integrated nonviolent state or inner peace, the ability to reason fairly, and capacity to expand one's conception of peace to ensure a sustainable future. For these objectives to be met, individuals must be centered in authentic peace where they are able to resist polarization, identity politics, and tribalism (and all that is built upon "us vs. them" dichotomies and in-group biases).

This work seeks to establish that the preeminent function of empowerment is the development of authentic inner peace which is extended to acknowledge, consider, and address the needs of others and our natural environment. Through this empowerment, individuals may come to understand that others are ends in themselves and seek to develop the capacity for normative justification that reflects justice as fairness. This includes environmental justice and ethical consideration for our natural environment (our sustaining force of life) underscored by acknowledgement of the interdependent nature of all things, as well as acceptance of the precarious, yet powerful ability of our species to preserve or destroy nature and ourselves.

Further, where human power and potential are concerned, this research points to important developments in the biological science and study of genetics. As will be briefly discussed in the final chapter (as consideration for future research in CPE), significant and enterprising findings in the field of epigenetics—the study of above (or outside) the gene influences on genetic expression and DNA function (Lim & Maher, 2010)—indicate that peace and peace practices have a direct effect on gene expression and regulation. Although this research is in the early phases, it has been found that the sustained practices of peace and mindfulness appear to positively affect inflammation and disease responses, as well as slow (and sometimes reverse) the aging process (Bierhaus et al., 2003; Buric, 2017; Chaix et al., 2017, 2020; García-Campayo et al., 2017; Kaliman et al., 2014). These epigenetic responses relate to phenotype plasticity—the ability of an organism to change its phenotype in direct response to environmental influences (Ashe et al., 2021; Ehrenreich & Pfennig, 2016; Loison, 2021)—and to genetic assimilation and evolution. Understanding the evolutionary effects of sustained personal peace would be consequential to the furthering of CPE. Addressing essential, yet underdeveloped empowerments in CPE

(specifically the development of inner peace) would factor into future research in this area.

1. The Purpose of Dynamic Empowerment in CPE

In the introduction, the underdevelopment of the core tenet of empowerment in CPE was presented as problematic in relation to the stifling of peace initiatives and failure to meet CPE standards. Underdevelopment of the CPE element of empowerment can be identified by three specific problematic issues; they include lack of focus on nonviolence through development of inner peace/embodyment of justice, insufficient approaches to normative justification, and the need for greater focus on our responsibility for sustainability and protection of the environment as an urgent matter of peace. There exists the need for serious consideration of pedagogical approaches that promote greater development of these empowerment elements. Underdevelopment of these areas inhibit the realization of positive peace. Lack of these empowerments are problematic and exist for varying reasons. The following paragraphs will explore these reasons and issues, beginning with the first underdeveloped empowerment.

Peace educators argue that inner peace is a neglected dimension of peace education and requires further exploration (Brantmeier, 2007; Groff, 2002; Groff & Smoker, 1996). Although there have been attempts to introduce inner peace practices and MBIs (mindfulness-based interventions), they remain on the fringe even in higher education and CPE (Brantmeier, 2007). Reasons for resistance exists due (in part) to concerns related to dogma and religious affiliation; these concerns are warranted but misguided. The misconstruction of practices that help us understand the science of the mind (through rational and scientific means) have led to mis-categorization of MBIs as religious and metaphysical. This mis-categorization has led to either fear-based rejection of the practices or intellectually driven dismissal by academics (Brantmeier, 2007). Further, a fully conceptualized Western approach to a pedagogy for inner peace praxis is scarce, if not non-existent, in peace education. The comprehensive meaning of inner peace, its dimensions, and the assertion of it as a foundational underpinning to empowerment must be understood to better frame, comprehend, and remedy structural violence (entailing all forms of violence/injustice).

In problematizing the prevalence of structural violence (or absence of positive peace/justice) this work identifies causes for insufficiencies related to the capacity to embody peace, the inability to sufficiently justify normative claims regarding peace/justice, and the inability/resistance to expand the

concept of peace from a biocentric understanding that promotes sustainability. Lack of empowerment to overcome the aforementioned insufficiencies contribute to injustice in numerous ways, but one of the most insidious, problematic, and ever-growing issues is the prevalence of ingroup bias, the propensity to discriminate against those who are not part of one's identified social group (Fukuyama, 2018; Tajfel et al., 1971). Such bias leads to distorted identity politics—individuals' demand of public affirmation of their self-worth (Fukuyama, 2018) and groupthink—thinking that strives for group unanimity over reason (Janis, 1982). When ingroup bias, identity politics, and groupthink override reason, the prospect for peace becomes greatly diminished.

Research on ingroup bias and groupthink suggest current peace strategies remain static and denote lack of self-awareness, ineffective approaches to discourse, and poor understanding of individual motivation (Bouvier, & Machin, 2021; Buyse, 2014; Capeheart & Milovanovic, 2007; Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018; Ng, 2020; Udupa & Pohjonen, 2018). Further, these findings indicate that ingroup bias and groupthink are perpetrated by insufficient normative justifications for acts of injustice (Janis, 1982; Lin, 2021). Lack of development of inner peace contributes to the adherence to insufficient normative justifications that perpetuate ingroup bias, polarization, and identity politics.

Fukuyama highlighted the problematic nature of this phenomena and examined identity politics, polarization, and ingroup bias (all of which contribute to what he refers to as *the new tribalism*) and their contribution to the degradation of democracy and justice (Fukuyama 2018). He contended that there exists a need for societies to protect marginalized individuals, human dignity, and the right to individuality and cultural identity while simultaneously defining a larger, more inclusive, and integrated national identity that makes implicit the inherent diversity of democratic societies. Fukuyama insisted that identification of core values and unification under the adaptation of a national creed will bring about true inclusion, rights to individuality and identity, and respect for human dignity. He argued that the fragmentation, resentment, and anger toward the *other*, on the rise in global affairs, can be explained by the growth of ever-narrower group identities and the belief that adequate recognition is not being given to these group identities (national, religious, ethnic, sexual, gender, or otherwise). The extreme focus upon identity and recognition, according to Fukuyama, is creating polarized segments that threaten the possibility of deliberation and collective action by society as a whole.

Fukuyama's thesis has garnered a plethora of criticisms from scholars and theorists across all areas of academics, from postmodern theorist and leftists to neoconservatives. For instance, Kochi argued that Fukuyama's thesis is dangerous and that it "legitimises a right-wing nationalist discourse of blame targeted at the mischaracterization of minority and left-wing 'identity' politics" (Kochi 2021, 155). Chavoshi contended that although Fukuyama's theory affirmed that focus on identity (as an unfixed phenomena) can promote creedal national identities over ideas of liberal democracy, his approach to correlating nationalism and the demand for recognition lacks adequate explanation as to how this results in social conflict (Chavoshi, 2020). Rademacher found Fukuyama's thesis philosophically and psychologically sound, but asserted that the prospect of redefining identity daunting, and noted that Fukuyama's examples of policy implementation would be even more difficult to accomplish (Rademacher, 2019).

Taking relevant critiques into consideration, acknowledging the validity of respective concerns, and conceding that lack of a pragmatic approach to his ideal theory potentially weakens his assertions, Fukuyama's thesis points to something of significance regarding tribalism/ingroup bias. Drawing upon the ancient Greek concept of *thymos*—a demand for recognition and respect, which takes two forms—megalothymia, a desire to be recognized as superior and isothymia, a desire to be recognized as an equal, Fukuyama argued, "The rise of modern democracy is the story of the displacement of megalothymia by isothymia" (Fukuyama, 2018, 22). He maintained, however, that we have spiraled into a dichotomized society fueled by ingroup bias and the prevalence of a polarized media. In one example, he argued that the conservative media outlets focus upon the assertion that liberals propound shortsighted approaches to championing isothymia (such as extreme political correctness). The result, he contended, is deepened ingroup bias which underscores megalothymia. Fukuyama further noted,

In reality, only a relatively small number of writers, artists, students, and intellectuals on the left espouse the most extreme forms of political correctness. But those instances are picked up by the conservative media, which use them to tar the left as a whole. (Fukuyama, 2018, 119)

The result of such political tactics, reporting, and subsequent consumption by the masses, according to Fukuyama, reinforces tribalism and ingroup bias and damages the prospect of effective bipartisan dialogue and discourse.

In this example, Fukuyama revealed an important distinction regarding the problematic underpinnings of identity politics, the need for recognition, and lack of self-awareness that drives tribalism and ingroup bias. The distortion,

magnification, broadcasting, absorption, and mass circulation of extreme forms of political correctness is indicative of a fundamental issue within the collective psyche. This issue is related to our species' propensity to seek acceptance and comfort within an established circle through which deeper contemplation of and commitment to self-understanding is avoided. This is the largest piece of Fukuyama's theory that is overlooked by his critics.

Another noteworthy consideration is that critiques are coming from all sides, which may underscore his thesis as it relates to ingroup dynamics. Fukuyama's theory is unique in that it doesn't seek safety in a side, but instead asserts that sides exist due to the desire for recognition. And although we must understand that this desire comes dressed in a multitude of pluralities with intersecting marginalization (and legitimate claims to the right to dignity and greater justice), it drives both isothymia and megalothymia. Thymos, sought without the empowerment of inner unification with peace (holistic peace/nonviolence) and effective claims to justification, can become megalothymia disguised as isothymia.

How we seek recognition matters, as does how we seek justice and peace. The moment we use terminology to identify the "other" in a pejorative manner, our democratic pursuit of isothymia becomes a pathway to megalothymia, where we inadvertently take up the tools of oppression. However, problematizing the perpetuation of injustice through critiquing positionality and privilege is necessary, as is prioritizing justice for marginalized and oppressed peoples; these are conversations that must continue to take place. Unlike Fukuyama, I do not believe we are at a place of empowerment where we can, as a collective, establish a national creed and common core values (although I understand the aim of his ideal theory and feel that he is pointing to something significant). I agree with the critics who contend that there must first be a legitimate application and prescriptive aspect to Fukuyama's concept, and I believe the method to the bridging our deep societal rift can only be found by first determining the source and site of the fracture point.

If democracy depends upon transitioning from megalothymia to isothymia (as Fukuyama asserted), then identifying the relationship between injustice and identity remains crucial. We must be able to discuss the ways in which marginalized individuals are being refused their equal standing based upon their identity, so that the promise of positive peace (experienced as justice) can become a reality. However, we must also establish definitive personal intentions related to the seeking justice/peace, as well communication skills that promote engagement in effective, civil, civic discourse. I agree with

Fukuyama's assertion that all sides (or we the people) are failing in these areas. As uncomfortable and difficult as it may be to consider this assertion, it prompts an important and timely conversation. This assertion problematizes the underdevelopment of the empowerment of holistic nonviolence through inner unification with peace (which helps guard against the propensity for groupthink and polarization). It also highlights the underdeveloped empowerment of effective normative justification; an underdevelopment that perpetuates and reinforces irrational claims.

Without the empowerment of these two elements, individuals are destined to seek identity and justification within an existing group. This problematic tendency also underscores the underdevelopment of the empowerment of self-responsibility for sustainability and environmental justice. This underdevelopment jeopardizes our very existence as a species. This is not a statement of conjecture, but one based upon research related to the human being's propensity for ingroup bias. It has been determined that the human mind is geared toward group affiliation/difference, the perpetuation of group identity, and illogical competition steeped in the need for group advantage over a better overall outcome for all groups involved (Klein, 2020). Our proclivity towards ingroup bias and tribalism is a human tendency that exists within all of us. This tendency, rooted in thymos, is connected to our need to belong. Research has revealed that this need often promotes discriminatory intergroup behavior driven by arbitrary categorization and the desire to punish outgroup members, even at the cost of loss for the ingroup (Klein, 2020; Tajfel, 1970; Tajfel et al., 1971). Although this distinction carries with it negative consequences, the desire for group acceptance and belonging is embedded within our species as an evolutionary adaptation stemming from our early survival instincts.

Our drive for social group formation is a part of our inherent biological response adapted to ensure and increase our chances of survival—through efforts to obtain and maintain a food supply, as well as protect ourselves from predators (Hari, 2018; Heath, 2014; Vivek, 2017). Thousands of years of exposure to this response has increased the valuation of social connections to the extent that absence of this (once protective) force triggers a neurological fear-based stress response (Hari, 2018; Vivek, 2017). This means that we have a biological propensity to fear loneliness and exclusion. However, we have exceeded our programming, and have become an ultrasocial species that continues to use specifically tailored social instincts (needed for managing life in small-scale tribal societies) to function and make decisions in large-scale systems (Heath, 2014). Even at our current state of evolution, our brains do not always recognize the difference

between life-and-death situations and non-life-threatening experiences (Klein, 2020); this can make us prone to react from an inherent reflex instead of from a place of centered peace and self-awareness (evidenced by responsive reflective thinking). Therefore, our propensity for tribalism has gone from a necessary protective mechanism to an unconscious, reactive-based response that can elicit destructive tendencies.

One such prevalent destructive tendency is groupthink, which as noted previously, involves “a mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when the members’ strivings for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action” (Janis, 1982, 9). This mode of negative group-level thinking is earmarked by the pressure to conform, illusions of invulnerability, self-censorship, and deference in decision making (Janis, 1982). Lin (2021), maintained that groupthink can perpetuate violence/injustice due its propensity to encourage bias-based judgement which can impair rational judgement, lead to poor decisions, and prevent individuals from arriving at and/or accepting obvious conclusions. Individuals who engage in groupthink may make ill-guided decisions based upon inadequate balancing of facts and lack of rational judgement (Lin, 2021). Such decision-making defies clear logic in favor of biases which impact others. Sometimes the impact is felt only by a small number of individuals; however, when considering the implication of groupthink on a larger scale, such as experiencing a world-wide pandemic like COVID 19, “millions of people may suffer unjust and needless consequences” (Lin, 2021, 26). Groupthink can and has manifested as a vehicle for the perpetuation of violence/injustice, not only through the denial of science, but (obviously) through genocide, slavery, and numerous other human rights violations. It is a dangerous tendency that remains rampant.

Groupthink, however, is not exclusive to any one group, political affiliation, or institution. It is a tendency driven by tribalism and ingroup preferences, thereby making all people susceptible to bias-based thinking in the pursuit of isothymia. Groupthink is not only responsible for science-denial and white-supremacy, but it also drives the intolerance, hypocrisy, and censorship of extreme political correctness which leaves little room for growth, dialogue, and incentive for change. Groupthink is evident in the suppression of critical race theory as well as in the problematic rise of cancel culture. It is espoused not only by those who exhibit racists tendencies, but also by individuals seeking justice for marginalized groups (their own or others) while harboring resentment and hatred (either consciously or unconsciously) toward other groups. It is further evidenced by those who believe they

ascribe to the concept “wokeness” but instead function from the need to experience personal catharsis to validate privilege through the exploitation of marginalized communities — white saviorism being an example.

White saviorism or WSI (white savior industrial complex), coined by Cole, is the pattern of white people of privilege focusing upon the upliftment and liberation of people of color to validate their own privilege and positionality through feelings of heroism while disregarding their implicit role in the causes of the injustices (Anderson, 2013; Aronson, 2017; Cole, 2012). WSI is experienced as a proclivity toward deficit thinking which (unconsciously) reinforces hegemony and white supremacy; within the United States specifically, “these ideologies are passed down into our everyday practices—most notably in education” (Aronson, 2017, 37). White saviorism, like many other forms of biases, is often unconscious.

Identifying a bias as unconscious does not excuse the individual or the harm they do. A direct and concentrated effort must be made to make unconscious biases known so individuals can critically reflect upon their thoughts, assumptions, behaviors, and actions. The process of making unconscious biases conscious involves accepting one’s own implication in the creation and perpetuation of injustice; it involves making authentic changes in the way one views, understands, and behaves in the world. Efforts to make individuals aware of how they are complicit in acts of violence and injustice are necessary to break groupthink birthed by the ingroup dynamics. However, success or failure in these endeavors (endeavors that underscore the tenets of CPE) rely heavily on our collective approach to this process, a process that is underscored by humility.

Recalling that we are all susceptible to and most likely ascribing to some form of ingroup bias (consciously or unconsciously), we must remain humble in our pursuit of isothymia and justice/peace. Encouraging (or demanding) individuals to come out of the Platonic proverbial cave of ignorance only to meet them with them with shame, aggression, indifference, smugness, or hatred (at the first sign of their willingness to emerge) is not the path to success. Such admonishments will send individuals back into the shadowy den of the familiar to seek comfort in the company of fellow cave dwellers. As humans, we must remember that we have all been and are sure to find ourselves again (as new knowledge emerges) Platonian *cave dwellers*. Those who refute this and aren’t willing to look at their own positionality from a myriad of intersecting circumstances most likely subscribe to egocentric and/or anthropocentric worldviews.

It also bears mentioning that the shackles of ignorance binding the proverbial cave dwellers have, in many instances, been in place since childhood. This indoctrination and cultural hegemony renders them unaware and/or fearful of the larger reality that exists beyond the constraints of the chains and the darkness of the cave. As limiting as these conditions may be, they are familiar, shared by the group, and the initial basis of functioning for these humans—they do not even know they are prisoners. This reference to Plato's *Allegory of the Cave* exemplifies the conditions of many individuals bound by certain ingroup biases. Emerging from this cave (ingroup) represents a metaphorical death for those brave enough to step forward, as they realize and accept that their perception of the world was wrong. They must surrender their identity and foundation as they leave behind the safety of the known (and the support of their cavern-kin/ingroup) to be born anew in an unfamiliar world. This emergence, or *birthing*, requires the presence of a midwife, not a warden.

Unfortunately, it is seldom the case that newcomers (who were one considered the other/opposition/enemy) are invited, encouraged, and incentivized to break free of their biases, much less celebrated for their *awakening*. This understanding foregrounds the importance of the development of inner peace as the foundational component to the philosophy of nonviolence. The development of an integrated state of nonviolence (inner peace) creates impartial, compassionate, humble individuals who seek and promote transformative peace. Such individuals are not afraid to set strong boundaries in the pursuit of peace; however, they are the first to meet others at the border of these boundaries and joyfully lend an open hand and welcoming attitude to those who may be contemplating the crossover.

Addressing injustices related to tribalism and groupthink, from within a CPE perspective, necessitates nonviolent strategies that are supportive of and reassuring to the opponent, where the outcome of the struggle is educative to both sides, and relationships are constructively transformed, leaving behind no legacy of bitterness (Ostergaard, 2015). However, this focus does not minimize the reality that intersectionality informs the level of marginalization and injustice experienced by individuals and groups, nor does it insinuate that everyone suffers from the same levels of injustice, inequalities, and inequities. It must be acknowledged and made clear that BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) experience marginalization (at far greater portions than many of their White counterparts) in the forms of multidimensional poverty (Reeves, Rodrigue, & Kneebone, 2016), disproportionate levels of unemployment and wage gaps (Rodgers, 2008), educational disparities (Azzam, 2008; Jones & Schmitt, 2014), and barriers

to health care with increased mortality rates (Bahls, 2011; Williams & Mohammed, 2013). Further, BIPOC populations are far more likely to experience voter suppression (Hajnal et al., 2017), unfair policing and prosecution (Fernandes and Crutchfield, 2018; Kochel et al., 2014; Skogan 2018), and numerous other disproportionate injustices. However, it is a dangerous and divisive practice to assume that all White individuals are more empowered than those recognized as historically marginalized populations. Intersectionality plays a role in the loss of opportunity for all humans, and lack of focus on class, socio-demographics, poverty, insufficient educational experiences, domestic violence and childhood trauma can create a blind spot regarding the need for empowerment for those deemed empowered by societal standards that are based on identity alone. This work seeks to empower individuals (all individuals) to help remedy these injustices through developing and adopting new nondominating patterns of organization that promote positive peace.

In pursuit of positive peace/justice, this research endeavors to highlight the need for greater focus upon the empowerment elements of nonviolence, normative justification, and self-responsibility (through reimagining existentialism) for greater focus on sustainable/environmental justice/peace. It posits a three-angle approach to empowerment that begins with nonviolence and a focus on inner peace (entailing the *development of an integrated state of nonviolence - DISN*). The focus upon this empowerment, as an adaptation of pedagogy, can properly address injustices experienced by historically marginalized groups and peoples, as well as establish the understanding that all individuals, regardless of identity, are subject to disempowerment. Further, it can contribute to authentic and lasting positive peace at all levels of concern, including those of the environmental nature. Empowerment for positive peace requires offering tools and approaches to help individuals transcend reactive tendencies that create and reinforce dichotomized social structures driven by ingroup bias.

When problematizing the perpetuation of violence stemming from ingroup bias and groupthink, a secondary contributor (following lack of inner peace or an integrated state of nonviolence) is insufficient normative justifications and *ineffective* dialogue. Dialogue is considered a key element in critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2011; Kincheloe, 2004), critical peace education (Baja, 2008; Brantmeier, 2010; Reardon, 1999; Reardon and Snauwaert, 2011; Snauwaert, 2011, 2020, 2023), and normative moral constructivism (Forst, 2012, 2014; Habermas, 1984, 1996, 2011; Rawls, 1971; Rawls & Kelly, 2001; Snauwaert, 2019, 2023; Walzer, 1983, 1987, 2007). The emphasis on dialogue is not overstated; without it, the possibility

for connection, reflection, understanding, deliberation, discourse, and change would not be possible. Further, dialogue can be regarded as successful (even if it doesn't result in agreement) if it contributes to greater articulation, sympathy, and the possibility of understanding another's point of view (Al-Daraweesh & Snauwaert, 2013; Vessey, 2009). In other words, dialogue provides hope for the potential of greater peace and understanding. However, there are instances when dialogue does not garner sympathy and understanding; such instances are indicative of how strong ingroup bias often overrides reason (and all approaches to reason such as dialogue).

The centrality of dialogue to justice, peace, and moral constructivism is essential; however, research indicates that dialogue and discussion also lead to greater group-polarization (Myers & Lamm, 1976), amplified divisions among social groups with different views (Lee, 2007; Yardi & Boyd, 2010), strengthened nationalist ideologies (Moscovici & Zavalloni, 1969), and increased divide between high and low-prejudice groups (Myers & Bishop, 1970). Research further reveals that communication between different-minded individuals leads to ingroup and outgroup affiliations (Yardi & Boyd, 2010). These findings suggest that current approaches to communication and dialogue can reinforce groupthink, polarization, and ingroup/outgroup dynamics. Therefore, they indicate the reliance upon insufficient forms of normative justification to validate claims of justice and fairness (entailing peace).

Approaches to normative justification will be explored in *Chapter Four*, but briefly, there are, according to Snauwaert (2023), at least three common forms of insufficient normative justifications which include moral relativism (belief in the validity of one's own principles), social acceptance (belief that social group belonging is justification), and moral authority (rational intuitionism or belief in an independent discoverable moral authority). It can be argued that groupthink and other debilitating manifestations of tribalism/ingroup biases are rooted in a biological fear response and are most often justified through these insufficient normative beliefs based upon solipsistic, relativistic, discriminatory, and/or metaphysical ideas. The basis for claims made based upon these insufficient normative justifications are invalid and unjust from the perspective of universal inclusion.

Valid claims are necessary and foundational to peace because, according to CPE standards, peace is a matter of justice and is, therefore, a normative concept. Normative claims of justice and duties require justification for their validity to be affirmed, and this process of justification requires moral

reasoning grounds upon normative principles that offer content of that reasoning (Snauwaert, 2023). Moral reasoning as a normative approach to justification (which will also be explored in Chapter Four) is a discursive process that establishes demands for reasons that can be accepted by others (Forst, 2012; Habermas, 1990, 1993). It is procedural, dialogical, and negates insufficient justifications through its demand for deliberation grounded in normative conditions based upon fairness (Snauwaert, 2023). Moral reasoning not only champions effective dialogue and communication, but it sets the groundwork for their proper engagement.

As evidenced by the research, dialogue is not only failing to mitigate the problematic nature of ingroup bias (entailing groupthink), but it also appears to be (in certain circumstances) strengthening it. These findings underscore the need for a valid approach to communication and dialogue rooted in the process of moral reasoning. This process requires that the parties are rational and accepting of the presuppositions of fairness; however, research shows that groupthink exists due (in part) to lack of rational judgement (Janis, 1982; Lin, 2021). Therefore, it stands to reason the development of an integrated state of nonviolence (DISN-process of self-purification/refinement that leads to inner unification with peace) is a precursory empowerment (angle one) to moral reasoning (angle two) in this three angle approach to empowerment. If it is not precursory, it is, at the very least, a vital concurrent element to moral reasoning. They can also be understood as being interdependent and reciprocal to one another in the formation of the three angle approach to dynamic empowerment, or the 3A-DE-CPE model.

The third angle (which will be explored in *Chapter Five*) involves the reimagining of existentialism to empower individuals to adapt a more biocentric view in the pursuit of justice. Existentialism emphasizes responsibility and freedom through revealing that we are ultimately responsible for creating the conditions of our lived experiences, affirms that we become who we are through our choices, and reinforces our interconnected and interrelated nature as a species (Beauvoir, 2011[1949]; Camus, 1989 [1942]; Fromm, 1947; Heidegger, 2010 [1927]; Kierkegaard, 2013 [1849]; Sartre, 2007 [1947]). Biocentrism (in short) is a life-centered ethical perspective that asserts value and respect should be extended to all species/all life on the planet, that humans are but one of many species in nature and therefore there exists a moral consideration that extends beyond humans, and such claims beget some normative principles (Schweitzer, 2017 [1971]; Singer, 2011; Taylor, 1986). This work seeks to reveal that there is a direct connection between embracing our existential positionality

and a deeper understanding of the role that biocentric considerations play in the creation of positive peace.

Biocentric considerations are of relevance as evidenced by the problematic nature of our collective destructive tendencies reinforced by an anthropocentric worldview and the politization of science-based evidence (which drive the denial of the existence of human-induced climate change). Human influence on the climate is an empirical fact, and such changes have immense and widespread impacts on humans and all natural systems (collectively known as the biosphere). Warming of the climate is an unequivocal reality, causing oceanic warming and increased acidity, rapid melting of polar ice, and rising sea levels (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC], 2014, 2022). These changes have been linked to increased carbon dioxide levels driven by human action through a process of strategically and systematically ruling out other potential natural contributors. Anthropogenic emission of greenhouse gases was at its highest this past decade, with atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide rising to their highest level of the past 800,000 years (IPCC, 2014). Climate change amplifies existing risks while creating new risks, risks which are unevenly distributed and tend to have a greater impact on marginalized groups and communities (IPCC, 2014, 2022). Human induced climate change has a complex and interconnected relationship with environmental racism - the racist practice of determining which communities receive health protective infrastructure and which communities are subject to harmful exposure of environmental contaminants (Salas, 2021). Additionally, environmental classism—determining which communities are subject to harmful environmental practices based upon class and income (Bell, 2020) — also affects individuals of all races.

Accepting environmental justice as a matter of peace and adapting a more biocentric attitude and approach to sustainability should be a central focus of peace education. There is an underdevelopment of empowerment in this area, and connection to the underdeveloped empowerments of nonviolence/empowerment angle one and moral reasoning/empowerment angle two is evident. The politization of scientific facts (which drives science denial) is evidenced by groupthink. Groupthink is rooted in lack of self-awareness and critical reflection (components of nonviolence) and is perpetuated and exacerbated by ineffective dialogue- which stems from insufficient normative claims to justification.

There is also evidence of lack of political efficacy and participation by those who accept the reality of climate change and consider themselves environmentalists. Research indicates a deficit in the number of

environmental voters driving policy, yet there are millions of non-voting environmentalist. It is estimated that “13 million already-registered voters who care deeply about the environment are currently unlikely to vote in the 2022 midterm elections unless [they are targeted] with robust, evidence-based mobilization efforts” (Environmental Voter Impact Report [EVP], 2021, p. 4). Research related to this third angle of empowerment indicates that there exists an underdevelopment of authentic self-responsibility (which is central to the concept of existentialism in critical pedagogy) among all groups within the human species.

This third angle/empowerment requirement is essential (if we seek to truly abide by CPE tents). However, research and reason support that it is nearly impossible to effectively empower individuals in this area if they are not empowered by the first two angles of empowerment- or if there isn't a conscious and concentrated effort to be engaged in all three angles of empowerment concurrently. These three empowerments create a model for CPE pedagogy that connects inner peace, communication and justification for peace, and external peace in a way that highlights sustainability and greater commitment to positive peace. This understanding emphasizes the importance of critical thinking, inquiry, reflection, dialogue, critical value-assessment, and empowerment, the core tenets of critical peace education. It further underscores the obvious need for greater exposure, focus upon, and access to peace education.

The lack of the mainstreaming of peace education in public school settings, as well as its fringe existence in higher education, makes gaining access to comprehensive peace education difficult. Often, individuals must seek this knowledge on their own, and frequently receive the material, teachings, and texts via online sources (articles, courses, trainings, webinars) and public yoga classes and specialty retreats. Although research indicates that there are benefits to these experiences, and that public access to these resources offer opportunities for individuals to become familiar with (and potentially educated about) approaches to peace practices (Bennetts, 2022; Bonura, 2011; Harvey, 2019), this is not enough. Additionally, research reveals that mainstream practices designed to promote inner-peace and personal development—such as yoga and other mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs)—have, sometimes been misused to spread disinformation, conspiracy theories, and harmful ideologies that perpetuate violence and injustice (Cheetham, 2021; Guerin, 2021; Remski, 2020). The mainstreaming of underregulated, underdeveloped, and unaccredited teachings of inner-peace points to a greater need for their envelopment in CPE.

Modern-day practitioners and teachers of inner peace/yogic philosophy have found themselves in what is now an 80-billion-dollar global industry (Guerin, 2021), where there can be a propensity to adopt a misguided and problematic approach to self-care, self-improvement, individual realization, and freedom of thought that perpetuates harm. This research highlights the prevalence of ineffective teaching and understanding of yogic philosophy and calls attention to a deeply problematic issue. These findings underscore the need for a more comprehensive and accredited approach to incorporating these pedagogies as practices for the development of peace. Further, these findings also substantiate my own concerns as a peace educator and yoga teacher. It was this type of misuse of yogic philosophy (alongside similar issues experienced as a life-long social and environmental justice activist) that inspired this work.

In conducting this research, I identified the three underdeveloped empowerment elements in CPE and connected them to the philosophies of *satyagraha*/nonviolence (entailing inner peace or *development of an integrated state of nonviolence /DISN*), normative moral constructivism (entailing moral reasoning as normative justification/*MRNJ*), and existentialism (entailing *existential biocentrism adaptation /EBA*). These empowerment elements are imperative to meeting the aims of CPE. These findings led to the research question:

What role should the philosophy of *dynamic empowerment* play in the conception of a theory of critical peace education and pedagogy from within the philosophies of *satyagraha*, moral constructivism, and existentialism?

In this research, I endeavored to answer this question and to establish that dynamic empowerment, as a conception of a theory constructed from within these three philosophies, sets forth a pedagogical approach that promotes the embodiment of nonviolence, offers a pathway for valid justification of claims regarding peace/justice, and expands our concept of peace/justice biocentrally to meet the tenets of CPE more fully. As noted in the introduction, violence (specifically structural violence as it relates to CPE) remains an insidious presence in the world, and research points to the need for greater empowerment for personal development and commitment to peace. CPE is an appropriate (if not the most appropriate) arena for this work to take form and flourish.