Educational Pacifism and Montessori Education

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Abstract: Educational theory and practice is dominated by mass formal schooling systems, which routinely and unjustly harm many students. I call this stance "educational pacifism," and in this paper argue that Montessorians ought to be educational pacifists. That is, they ought to recognize, understand, and reject systemic educational harm and ensure that it does not occur in their own practice, so that Montessori students are not harmed during their education and so that Montessori education might provide a nonharmful educational alternative to mass formal schooling. I suggest that Maria Montessori was, broadly speaking, herself an educational pacifist, and that not only is educational pacifism the morally right position for a Montessorian, but also that it is naturally a Montessorian position.

Education represents a great range of different ideas, approaches, and actions. Today, however, education across the world for children over the age of five or six is dominated by mass formal schooling systems. Developed in Europe during the industrial revolution and now spread across the globe (Anderson-Levitt, 2003; Ramirez & Boli, 1987), these systems are characterized by discipline, testing, hierarchy, controlling and suppressing pedagogies, divisions of age, timetabling, and results-based and content-focused curricula. Most importantly, they unjustly harm many students by negatively affecting their important interests and treating them as mere means to ends. This matters for Montessorians not only because Montessori education is a peace education but also because it can—and ought to—provide a functional

and morally just alternative to the harm caused by mass formal schooling systems.

In this paper, I forward *educational pacifism*, a particular moral analysis of mass formal schooling and educational harm, which holds educational harm to be both widespread in mass formal schooling ideology and practice and morally unjust. I use this term to highlight the position's function as a pacifist analysis of harmful educational practice and its ideological connection to antiwar pacifism (see Parkin, 2023; Parkin, in press).

I argue that Maria Montessori was, broadly speaking, herself an educational pacifist. And I argue that Montessorians ought to be educational pacifists; they ought to reject educational harm and ensure that it does not occur in their practice, so that Montessori students are not harmed

during their education, and so that Montessori education might provide a nonharmful alternative to mass formal schooling—a viable, effective, and morally acceptable shelter from the storm.

Educational pacifism makes two main claims. The first is that mass formal schooling systems harm students in ways often unrecognized or misunderstood by educators, leaders, and bureaucrats, especially in terms of systemic harm, and so mass formal schooling systems cause much more harm than is commonly recognized or understood. Systemic harm includes structural harm, which is caused by patterned relationships that exist among components of social systems, and objective harm, which is caused by hierarchical structures and systems, inequality, and the current economic order. While most scholarship on mass schooling has focused on the spread and effects of compulsory schooling (e.g., Anderson-Levitt, 2003; Ramirez & Boli, 1987; Westberg et al., 2019), critiques of the ideologies, operations, and effects of mass schooling, including discussion of the "factory schooling" and various "compulsory schooling" models, can be found in the influential work of Michel Foucault (e.g., 1979), Pierre Bourdieu (e.g., 2012), and Paulo Freire (e.g., 1972), among others. Some commentators (e.g., Gatto, 2005; Harber, 2004) have explored the failings of mass schooling, while others (e.g., Bowles & Gintis, 2002; Klees, 2020; Robinson, 2016) have focused on the relationship between mass schooling and the international capitalist economy. In the first section, I outline how mass formal schooling systems harm students.

Educational pacifism's second claim is that systemic educational harm is unjust or wrongful because it treats students as mere means and negatively affects their important interests. In the second section, I make this argument, and I consider the claim that educational harm might be justifiable as a means to some important end. Note that educational pacifism is a negative position; it criticizes mass formal schooling systems in particular ways but does not necessarily propose alternative ways of educating children. Montessori education can be that alternative. Just as nonviolent resistance compliments antiwar pacifism's negative arguments against war by providing a nonharmful alternative (Chenoweth, 2021), so too might Montessori education complement educational pacifism's negative arguments against mass formal schooling by providing its own nonharmful alternative.

In the third section, I propose that Montessori was, broadly speaking, an educational pacifist. She thought that mass formal schooling systems caused harm to students by suppressing their abilities to realize their own potential. Although she did not attempt a comprehensive critique of mass formal schooling systems in any one work, a pacifist thread runs through her writings on education. Her analysis of formal schooling systems is educationally pacifist.

In the final section, I ask contemporary Montessorians to seriously consider the educational pacifist view for two reasons. First, educational pacifism provides a compelling analysis and rejection of educational harm, which applies not only to mass formal schooling systems but to any education system, including Montessori's. Second, it is generally taken that contemporary Montessori theory and practice should align with the theoretical dictates of Montessori herself. Therefore, if Montessori herself is an educational pacifist, then contemporary Montessorians also ought to be educational pacifists. I suggest that some Montessori practice problematically strays from educational pacifist principles and, consequently, Montessori principles.

Antiwar pacifists worry about the moral exceptionalism used to justify war: Why is large-scale political harm generally accepted as a means to peace? Similarly, educational pacifism questions the moral exceptionalism used to justify harm in education: Why is harmful schooling generally tolerated as a means to educate? I hope that a pacifist analysis of educational harm might precipitate a shift in educational thinking, policy, and practice, and that Montessori education, as a peace education, might play an important role in that shift. Good Montessori ideology, pedagogy, and practice ought to include a pacifistic component; it should be aware of, understand, and reject educational harm. Montessorians ought to both avoid unjustly harming their own students and provide a nonharmful alternative to the harms of mass formal schooling.

Mass Formal Schooling Systems and Educational Harm

The motivation for developing and defending the educational pacifist position comes from the ubiquity of mass formal schooling systems (Ramirez & Boli, 1987), the harm that they cause, and the generally unnoticed or accepted nature of that harm. The systemic harm caused by mass formal schooling systems is rarely critiqued, in part because education is generally assumed to be good. We tend to overlook the pervasive and significant harm caused by the hierarchical and authoritarian nature of

those systems (Harber, 2004). And many would argue that the ends of education—learning, critical and creative thinking, self-expression and self-realization, empowerment, social meritocracy, well-being, and so on—justify the means.

It is widely accepted that "schooling is good for society, that literacy and numeracy are needed for professional and social integration, that an educated person is empowered and thus disenfranchised groups need to access education . . . and that formal learning is essential for individual and group well-being" (Hughes, 2020, p. 24). Perhaps schools rightly constrain students' behavior so that they may receive the benefits of education because children lack—and therefore require assistance with—motivation, awareness of what they need, decision-making, and so on. Perhaps students are harmed for their own good. But educational pacifism rejects educational harm as a means to those educational goods. So, the argument here centers on two contentions: what can and cannot be defined as *harm* in educational practice (the broader and more serious the harm, the stronger the moral argument against it); and whether that harm is morally wrongful or unjust, as I explore in the second section.

Following Feinberg (1985), to harm someone is to adversely affect her important interests, the distinguishable components of her good or well-being. Similarly, John Stuart Mill defined harm as roughly injurious to someone's important interests, particularly those of autonomy and security (see, e.g., Turner, 2014). That which is in someone's interests is beneficial to her, and that which goes against her interests is harmful to her. Acts that harm are those that cause someone's important interests to be in a worse condition than they would have been had those acts been different.

This section provides a brief taxonomy of the ways that mass formal schooling systems harm students by negatively affecting their important interests. This harm manifests in personal and systemic forms. Personal harm is noticeable because it disturbs normality. It can be physical or psychological and mostly comes in the form of student-on-student bullying, including physical violence, threats, name-calling, theft, gossip, teasing, humiliation, and exclusion. Educator-on-student physical harm is rare these days in many countries, but plenty of verbal harm remains (Hughes, 2020). Student-on-educator physical and verbal harm is still common (Hughes, 2020). Some personal violence seems normal, inevitable, and even tolerable to schools, who are ill-equipped or underequipped to deal with difficult emotions and relationships. Many

schools explicitly or tacitly condone student hierarchical violence, initiation rituals, and normalized bullying. Nevertheless, most liberal education systems have addressed personal harm with broadly positive results.

While most personal harm is noticeable because it disturbs normality, systemic harm goes relatively unnoticed because it is, in fact, normality. But compared to personal educational harm, systemic educational harm is more common, wide-ranging, and harmful. Systemic harm is present when someone's interests are in worse condition than they would have been had that harm not been present. While we all agree that students ought not to be hit, most educational harm is systemic and unnoticed or ignored by educators, educational bureaucrats, and leaders. In what follows, I divide systemic educational harm into three main categories: structural, objective, and symbolic.

Structural harm is caused by patterned relationships that exist among components of social systems, including unorganized subjective attitudes or practices (sexism, racism, ageism, etc.) and organized subjective practices (official restrictions of civil liberties, oppressive regimes, institutional policies or practices that support discrimination, etc.). Education has historically been defined by the struggle between critical consciousness, liberalism, and participation on one side, and control, conformation, and docility on the other (Harber, 2004). Mass formal schooling systems prioritize the latter and now play a key role in creating and maintaining systemic political and social control.

The history of schooling explains its approach and effect today. During the industrial revolution, education became schooling, which mimicked the factories for which students were being prepared. Schooling "became an anticipatory mirror, a perfect introduction to industrial society [through] the regimentation, lack of individualization, the rigid systems of seating, grouping, grading and marking, the authoritarian role of the teacher" (Toffler, 2022, p. 399). Since then, mass formal schooling systems have used authoritarianism to foster obedience and conformity. Schools have become institutions of imbalanced power, producing students with "the subordinate values and behaviours necessary for the modern bureaucratic, mass production workplace and the existing social order—regularity, routine, monotonous work and strict discipline" (Harber, 2004, 60).

Mass formal schooling places the teacher as the omnipotent controller of knowledge transfer, content, pedagogy, delivery, and discipline. The student is pow-

erless, empty, and unconscious, a depository for static knowledge (Freire, 1972). While schooling is typically seen as a liberating and mobilizing good, these practices have caused it to be "one of the most effective means of perpetuating the existing social pattern, as it both provides an apparent justification for social inequalities and gives recognition to the cultural heritage, that is, to a *social* gift treated as a *natural* one" (Bourdieu, 2012, p. 46). This subordinates students' intellectual, creative, and economic expression, which harms them by negatively affecting their important interests.

Coercive practices in schooling also cause structural harm. Coercion is expressed via educational structures, curricula, assessments, inspections, qualifications, school organization, teaching, and exclusionary practices (Alexander, 2000). Students experience threats of punishment for bad behavior or work (negative coercion) and rewards and admiration for good behavior or work (positive coercion). Positive coercion is coercive because, like negative coercion, it creates incentives toward unnatural or forced effort on the part of the student (e.g., Montessori, 2004); it provides external, rather than internal, motivation. Coercive practices cause many students to feel excluded from the educational process, especially those experiencing academic or social failure, behavioral problems, alienation, absence, and home issues. Coercion harms students by negatively affecting their interests in terms of educational confidence, motivation, engagement, and critical and creative thinking.

Objective harm is caused by hierarchical structures and systems, inequality, and the current economic order. Education systems have been greatly affected by recent global economic developments—over the last 50 years or so, dominant capitalist states, corporations, and groups have progressively reduced or dismantled redistributive and social welfare systems; resubordinated labor through deregulation, deunionization, and flexibilization; increased neoliberal policies and trade; and commodified public goods (Robinson, 2016). The structures, norms, and values of mass formal schooling systems prepare students for life in the capitalist economy using disciplinary processes, hierarchies, and hidden curricula. They make "the promise of petty (and generally banal) consumption and entertainment, backed by the threat of coercion and repression should dissatisfaction lead to rebellion" (Robinson, 2016, p. 4). Many students are harmed by schooling systems that support and entrench an economic system that requires scarcity, inequality, and subjuga-

tion to survive. The ones that are harmed the most are those who are prepared for a subordinate existence within that system. While education can and should liberate and mobilize, mass formal schooling does not.

Symbolic harm is a type of nonphysical harm manifested in power differentials between social groups. It exists in thought, language, and ideology. It is normalized subordination—the harmful status quo. Mass formal schooling systems produce symbolic harm via content and pedagogy. Curricula transmit ideologies of control and acquiescence, capitalist work and productivity, preparation for the working life, and particular viewpoints, communication styles, and aesthetic and moral tastes (Bourdieu, 2012). Note that transmission of culture is not necessarily harmful—Montessori (e.g., 2004), for example, was largely in favor of this sort of practice; it depends on what is being transmitted. Neoliberal ideologies are "tacitly embedded messages in educational design, discourse, and syllabus choice" (Hughes, 2020, p. 28). Pedagogical choices such as certification, testing, and ranking, especially of adolescents, impose "a dull uniformity on curricula, reducing learning to rote memorization, routine, punctuality, and obedience" (Robinson, 2016, p. 15). Enclosure, surveillance, rewards and punishments, hierarchy, and judgements on student achievement create oppressive power processes and imbalances, and institutional communication—lessons, questions, orders, differentiation of student "value" and knowledge, and obedience—develops both oppressive and subservient mindsets and behaviors (Foucault, 1979). Content transfer and testing are prioritized over critical and creative thinking, intellectual freedom, self-realization, and well-being. Violent attitudes, pedagogies, and curricula in mass formal schooling systems curb and restrain what they perceive to be human nature (Parkin, 2023). Mass formal schooling systems fail to provide neutral educational environments in which students can freely learn, think, and act in favor of ones that judge, punish, and abandon.

This brief taxonomy shows the ways by which students' important interests are negatively affected by the policies, practices, and attitudes of mass formal schooling systems. Those systems confuse by providing information that is excessive, out of context, disconnected, and lacking meaning. They entrench the hierarchy of intelligence and ability and teach students that their place in the hierarchy is determined. They create emotional dependency via strict chains of command and suppression of individuali-

ty. They create intellectual dependency because educators hold all knowledge and power, and critical and creative thinking are either deprioritized or discouraged. They teach that self-esteem ought to depend on expert opinion, that a student's worth depends on how they are perceived by the power holders. And they constantly survey students and erase their privacy (Gatto, 2005). Granted, an argument might be made that some of those negative effects amount to offense rather than harm. But it seems clear that many students' important interests are negatively affected by mass formal schooling systems, and that a good proportion are more serious than mere offense.

The Morality of Educational Harm

Conditional antiwar pacifists argue that even if war is sometimes the only means of preventing great evil, the nature of modern war is such that it cannot be justified even as a lesser evil (e.g., Holmes, 1989, 2017). They do so by employing the Kantian "formula of humanity" formulation of the categorial imperative (the supreme principle of morality): "So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in that of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means" (Kant, 1996, p. xxiii). Modern war harms too many people who, morally speaking, may not be harmed because harming them treats them merely as a means to an end. Those people are innocent in the relevant sense. Essentially, and in contrast to the just war tradition, conditional antiwar pacifists argue that modern war may only be waged if and only if the condition that it does not harm innocents is satisfied, and that the nature of modern war means that it never satisfies that condition. Compare the related but distinct contingent pacifism (e.g., May, 2015), which holds that the presumption against killing innocents may be overridden when doing so is the only means of preventing some sufficiently great evil, but that the threshold at which this presumption could be overridden is very high and unlikely to be met by modern war. Educational pacifism holds educational practices such as schooling to be just if and only if the condition that they do not harm innocents is satisfied (due to the Kantian formula of humanity), and that the nature of mass formal schooling systems means that they do not satisfy that condition, due to the extensive harms discussed here.

Innocence—from the Latin *innocere*, or not harming—applies to those not unjustly harming or threatening to harm (McMahan, 1994). A patient-centered (as opposed to agent-centered) deontological educational pacifism rests on the impermissibility of harming innocents. Innocents are prima facie illegitimate targets for harm because to harm them would be to fail to treat them as an end. They can only lose their innocence by unjustly harming or threatening to harm others; note that general moral character does not affect situational innocence. This is sometimes called "material" innocence (as opposed to "moral" innocence, the opposite of guilt).

Most students at most times are innocent in the relevant sense because they are not engaged in harming or threatening to harm others and are thus illegitimate targets for harm. They may not always be considered persons (John Locke's account [e.g., 2004] of personhood dictates that persons are those who possess moral agency and the capacity to be held responsible for their actions), though adolescents, perhaps, ought mostly to be considered as such. Whether or not students are persons, however, affects neither their innocence nor their illegitimacy as targets for harm. Personhood is not a prerequisite for innocence in this context. Children have legitimate negative claims against harm and oppression, and positive claims to protection (Ezer, 2004). Although younger children require guidance, meaning their choices may sometimes be legitimately overruled by parents or educators (Brennan & Noggle, 1997), the harms discussed here go beyond guidance. Guidance does not negatively affect their interests, but rather works in favor of them. The same cannot be said for many of the harms suffered by students in mass formal schooling systems (I discuss paternalism in the last section).

The harm present in mass formal schooling systems could be accidental or intentional. Educational choices are necessarily political; they serve some interests and hinder others (Freire, 1985). Education can be liberatory, but also oppressive. Education is subservient to and manipulated by states and other powerful actors who shape class structure and limit economic and social mobility. It is not surprising that mass formal schooling systems, designed during the industrial revolution and shaped by capitalist and colonial attitudes and practices, reflect those attitudes and practices.

It is worth noting that while the greatest challenge to the deontological claims of antiwar pacifism is the argument that sometimes war ought to be waged when it is the only means of preventing some great evil, which forces the pacifist to weigh her absolute stance against treating people as mere means to ends against the moral obligation to prevent great harm (Parkin, 2019), educational harm does not itself prevent any great harm. More-

over, viable and peaceful alternatives exist; mass formal schooling cannot be considered a last resort. Montessori education is one such alternative, of course, but there are others. Peace educationalists have proposed and developed a range of approaches that elicit desire for peace, nonviolent conflict management, and critical analysis of unjust and unequal structural arrangements (Harris & Synott, 2002). Much has been written on how to educate peacefully and toward peace (e.g., Bajaj, 2008; Harris & Morrison, 2013; Noddings, 2012; Salomon & Cairns, 2011), and on the moral foundations of peace education (Page, 2008).

This, then, is the educational pacifist position: the harm to students in mass formal schooling systems is systemic and more pervasive and serious than often assumed, and it is morally unjust because it treats innocents as means to ends. If one thinks that some or all of the "harms" I identify are not harms at all (but rather, say, offenses, to follow Mill's distinction), or that these harms are simply less important than their associated outcomes—according to some consequentialist calculation—then one will likely disagree with the educational pacifist view. I have not argued that schooling is inherently harmful, nor that mass formal schooling ought to be jettisoned entirely—it does many things well. Nor have I suggested that all mass formal schoolings systems harm students all of the time, but rather that they cause significant harm to many students a lot of the time.

Montessori, Peace, and Educational Harm

Much attention has been given to Montessori's thoughts on peace, but very little to her interpretation of the educational harm she aimed to avoid. This section shows that Montessori's views on mass formal schooling systems broadly aligned with the educational pacifist view, although her terminology is different, and she was unlikely to have considered herself a pacifist in the modern sense. While Montessori's primary objective in this context was to forward positive arguments (and a pedagogy) toward peace (see Moretti, 2021), she also argued against educational harm, and in particular against positive and negative coercion (Montessori, 2004). It is one thing to educate for peace, another to educate to eliminate educational harm; I hope to show that Montessori did both. To do so I first discuss Montessori's peace goals, then I examine her comments on the mass formal schooling systems of her time and her arguments toward a peaceful alternative.

It is common knowledge that Montessori believed education to be the optimal and perhaps only means of achieving peace: "education is the best weapon for peace" (Montessori, 2002, p. 28). By peace she meant positive peace; an enduring and expansive peace rather than a mere absence of violence: "Preventing conflicts is the work of politics; establishing peace is the work of education. We must convince the world of the need for a universal, collective effort to build the foundation for peace" (Montessori, 2002, p. 24). For Montessori, education was a necessary means to peace, and peace was the primary objective (Montessori, 2002; Moretti, 2021).

Montessori (2002) held education to be singularly important because she believed that interpersonal peace, including national and international peace, could only be achieved via intrapersonal peace: "We must develop the spiritual life of man and then organize humanity for peace" (p. xii). That is, only the peaceful person can construct a peaceful planet, otherwise peace will only ever be negative peace, a stopgap between feuds and fights and wars, a temporary cessation of violence. And only the child can become the peaceful person, for it is only she who remains free from the influence of cyclical violence in the world. Only the child can form a new world free from violence. Thus, education of the child is the only way to positive and lasting peace. Peace is literally the work of education, and education only.

During the Sixth International Montessori Congress in 1937, the theme of which was *educate for peace*, Montessori (2002) outlined her conception of peace as positive peace: "When we speak of peace, we do not mean a partial truce between separate nations, but a permanent way of life for all mankind" (p. 60). The purpose of the congress, she stated, was "to defend the child" (p. 37). This means a systemic defense of the child, meaning defense from the systemic harms (structural, objective, and symbolic) outlined here. Temporary or personal peace is not true peace. Montessori's conception of peace was both positive and systemic, and broadly aligns with the cessation of systemic harm as defined here.

Montessori's recorded thoughts on peace date back to 1917, when she delivered a series of lectures in which she argued that her educational method could form peaceful people who establish meaningful and respectful relations with those around them, thereby transforming humanity and creating peace (Montessori, 2013; Moretti, 2013). The thread of systemic peace runs through Montessori's entire taxonomy of education and life itself: "The history of Montessori's thought follows an inexorable logic lead-

ing definitively to social reform first and peace second; that is, social reform pointing towards a new definition of peace" (Kahn, 2013, p. 5). Montessori education focuses on the child, but "Montessori pedagogy . . . was never about an individual child—or even about the children of a single nation—but instead about the mission for global peace" (Moretti, 2021, p. 4). Understanding the development of Montessori's educational philosophy via her experiences in medicine and psychology bears this out—she viewed education as the solution to a particular set of problems, including global peace (e.g., Gutek, 2004; Kramer, 2017). Montessori education leads to peaceful people, who in turn form peaceful communities, who work toward systemic and lasting peace. Montessori was a peace educator and a peace theoretician. Let us now see if she was an educational pacifist, in my technical sense of the term.

Montessori's moral philosophy provides the foundation for her critique of the mass formal schooling systems of her time. Her view centered on respect, and shared elements of the Kantian formula of humanity categorial imperative discussed here (only treat people as ends and never as mere means) to ground an ethics of action. Instead of preference-satisfaction, liberty rights, or interests, however, the fundamental societal—and therefore educational—good on which Montessori education focuses is harmony of activity (Frierson, 2021). Consequently, the respect owed to others creates duties to not interfere or interrupt harmonious activity. And because Montessori education focuses on encouraging, facilitating, and protecting free harmonious activity (Montessori, 2004), educators have (perfect) duties to respect that activity by not intervening and (imperfect) duties to create the conditions for it to continue: "He who interrupts children in their occupations in order to make them learn some predetermined thing . . . confuses the means with the end and destroys the man for a vanity" (Montessori, 2007a, p. 134). In both senses, students must be treated as ends in themselves, otherwise an important moral imperative is violated. This paper does not critique mass formal schooling systems' abilities (or lack thereof) to assist with students' interests (following Kant) or activity (following Montessori), but rather their failure to not unjustly harm by intervention. Since the modus operandi of mass formal schooling systems is to control and dictate, and thus interrupt, we can infer some educational pacifist tendencies from this foundational moral position of Montessori's.

At times, Montessori explicitly challenged the schooling practices of her day. Her critique of mass formal schooling systems centered on the student and the moral impermissibility of suppressing a child's natural drive to learn and work. The student is harmed because she is separated from her potential—she is worse off than she would have been without it:

> *Education today causes the individual to dry up and his spiritual values to wither away. He becomes a cipher, a cog in the blind machine that his environment represents. Such preparation for life . . . is a crime, a sin. And education that represses and rejects the promptings of the moral self, that erects obstacles and barriers in the way of the development of intelligence, that condemns huge sectors of the population to ignorance is a crime.* (Montessori 2002, xiii)

Montessori's (2002) assessment of the mass formal schooling systems of her time was that they failed in their duties to students, to whom they owed freedom and assistance. She argued that their methods "dominate the child," that they "bring him into subjection" and "make him obedient . . . by any means whatever" (p. 31), and "suffocate and deform him under the error of common prejudices" (Montessori, 2007b, p. 66). Montessori highlighted the coercive harm caused by those systems, which were guided by arbitrary principles that serve only to oppress: "There is good reason to regard education as a tyrannical and dictatorial coercion exercised over every aspect of children's lives . . . . The simple truth, as our experience has amply demonstrated, is that the laws the child is forced to obey are arbitrary and that he must no longer be subject to them" (Montessori, 2002, p. 105).

It would follow, then, that any signs of peace within mass formal schooling systems are either illusory or mere flashes of negative peace. Illusory or fleeting peace is the best that can be hoped for because "peace" in these contexts is achieved not via liberation, but rather domination: "The adult defeats the child; and once the child reaches adulthood the characteristic signs of the peace that is only an aftermath of war—destruction on one hand and painful adjustment on the other—remain with him for the rest of his life" (Montessori, 2002, p. 15). Many educators in mass formal schooling systems would surely agree that peace in their schools and classrooms, at least as it is defined here, is fleeting at best.

Montessori (2002) argued that the competition present in mass formal schooling systems harmed students, who were taught "to regard themselves as isolated individuals who must satisfy their immediate needs by competing with other individuals" (p. xi). She recognized the political nature of these educational choices and their

outcomes, where collections of individuals were prepared for participation and likely subordination in the capitalist economy: "Each person is set apart from every other by his own private interests; everyone wants only some sort of work that will satisfy his material needs; everyone is attracted by and trapped in the interlocking gears of a mechanized and bureaucratic world" (p. xii). She also argued that students were prepared to accept that participation and subordination:

> *The obedience forced upon a child . . . prepares the adult to resign himself to anything and everything . . . . [This creates a] spirit of unthinking respect, an indeed almost mindless idolatry, in the minds of paralysed adults toward public leaders, who come to represent surrogate teachers and fathers, figures upon whom the child was forced to look as perfect and infallible. And discipline thus becomes almost synonymous with slavery.* (p. 19)

The child who does not learn to work by herself, set her own goals, and find her own motivation becomes the adult who needs the approval of others, cannot motivate herself, and will do what she is told. And although Montessori focused on activity, not interests, her comments reflect a sense that the child's interests are also negatively affected; she is harmed according to Feinberg's (1985)—and Mill's (Turner, 2014)—definition. Montessori's analysis here resembles my own analysis of formal schooling, as well as the critical analyses of education provided by Bourdieu (e.g., 2012), Foucault (e.g., 1979), and Freire (e.g., 1972), among others.

Montessori also rejected coercion as a means of educating. Positive and negative coercive practices such as rewards and punishments "are every-ready and efficient aids to the master who must force into a given attitude of mind and body those who are condemned to be his listeners" (Montessori, 2004, p. 77). Like her predecessors Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Friedrich Fröbel, she argued against the prevalent notion that children are innately disorderly and need to be disciplined via rewards and punishments so that they may learn (Gutek, 2004). Montessori viewed coercion as an unjust limitation of liberty: "the soul of the normal man grows perfect through expanding, and punishment as commonly understood is always a form of *repression*" (Montessori, 2004, p. 78).

Like educational pacifism, Montessori (2002) considered both individual (micro) and political (macro) levels of educational harm. Montessori education aims first for the liberation of students and second for reform toward a general improvement of humanity and peace. The individual student should first be considered "a citizen, as a dignified human being with a right to live and be protected" (p. 73). Students should be free from interference, interruption, and control, for "Freedom is the key to the entire process . . . . Individual personality could not develop without individual freedom" (p. 102). Montessori appeared to value freedom so highly for two reasons, the first deontological and the second consequentialist: first, we ought to protect students' freedom so that they can become the person they have the right to become (and so they do not become separated from their potential or have their interests negatively affected); and second, only free students can become free and peaceful adults, and a truly peaceful world is not possible without free and peaceful adults.

Harmonious activity provides the link between peaceful individuals and peaceful society. The Montessori environment is designed to allow freedom of activity and to help that activity be internally and externally harmonious. In the Montessori classroom, harmonious individuals create a harmonious microsociety:

> *Harmonious interaction—when it exists, as in the child—represents the normal relationship that should exist between the individual and his surroundings. And this relationship is one of love. Love impels the child not toward the possession of an object, but toward the work he can do with it. And when work begins in a certain environment, association with one's fellows also begins, for no one can work alone.* (Montessori, 2002, p. 57)

The prepared environment, Montessori (2002) asserted, naturally impels the student toward freedom, strength of will, and communal enterprise. These are precisely the values devalued and suppressed by mass formal schooling systems. Good education allows children the freedom to follow their own developmental impulses and matches the environment to their "boundless aspirations" (p. 21). Conscious and free, the student chooses her own tendencies and values, and reveals herself (Montessori, 2004; Moretti, 2021).

Peaceful, free, and harmonious students create peaceful, free, and harmonious classrooms. Those students become adults, and create peaceful, free, and harmonious societies. We thus shift from the classroom to the idea of social change arising from a new and free child-turned-

adult. As discussed, positive and systemic peace requires social injustice to be significantly reduced or even ceased. Montessori (2002) proclaimed the need for reform: "Inherent in the very meaning of the word peace is the positive notion of constructive social reform" (p. xi); particularly, "A vast educational reform and above all a vast social reform are called for today" (p. 82). Montessori rejected the mass formal schooling model because it subjugates and conditions for further subjugation. Free of it, she argued, people can achieve individual and communal satisfaction, liberated from the yoke for which they have hitherto been prepared:

> An education capable of saving humanity is no small undertaking; it involves the spiritual development of man, the enhancement of his value as an individual . . . . The secret is this: making it possible for man to become the master of the mechanical environment that oppresses him today. Man the producer must become the master of production. (Montessori, 2002, p. 30)

I take Montessori's "mechanical environment" to be meant both literally and figuratively. The mechanical environment is not only the machines and factories of industrialism, but also its spirit—the apparatuses of control in education and the preparation of students for subjugate roles in the economic system. It causes harm to students and Montessori rejected it. Montessori education is aimed at peace, and Montessori critiqued the mass formal schooling systems of her day. Those systems bear many similarities to today's, and Montessori's critique—though it employed different terminology—resembles the educational pacifist position in many ways. She saw injustice and systemic harm in those systems and concluded that if we are to work toward peace, "we must begin by recognizing the greatest injustice of all—our injustice toward the child [who] we must still make a radical effort to set free" (Montessori, 2002, p. 72).

Contemporary Montessori Education

It is my view that contemporary Montessorians ought to share the educational pacifist view. That is, their pedagogy, curricula, and general practice ought to reject educational harm and protect their students from it. Three main arguments support my position. The first argument, a moral one, is that educational pacifism provides a compelling moral analysis of the harm caused by mass formal

schooling systems, and thus a normative argument against educational harm. If systemic peace, including the cessation of systemic harm in all its contexts and incarnations, is not found at the forefront of an educational approach's pedagogy and curriculum, then that approach is unlikely to support the educational pacifist view.

The second argument, both moral and from the authority of Montessori herself, is that she advanced compelling arguments that lead toward educational pacifist principles. She critiqued mass formal schooling systems in ways that align with the broad principles of educational pacifism; it makes enough sense to say that she was an educational pacifist even if she did not use that term herself. Montessori education solves a range of educational problems (see Lillard, 2017, for a compelling and comprehensive discussion of the benefits of quality Montessori education). But what matters for our purposes here is that Montessori education plays its part in eliminating the educational harm caused by mass schooling systems by rejecting all of the harmful attitudes and practices of those systems, and that it works toward intrapersonal and interpersonal peace: "Montessori reform must be directly linked to . . . real and focused service to improve spiritual, ecological, social, and economic realities for present and future peace on earth" (Kahn, 2013, p. 14).

The third argument builds on Montessori philosophy: if Montessori's views are important to contemporary Montessorians, then her views on educational harm ought to be important too. Contemporary Montessorians ought to share and be encouraged to share (via their own education) Montessori's pacifist take on education and educational harm. Montessori's classrooms aimed to allow children to develop internal peace and harmony with and morality toward others and the environment, thereby eschewing competition and power imbalances (Duckworth, 2006; Moretti, 2021). Good education systems are cohesive and driven by overarching educational and philosophical principles, and educational pacifism aligns well with the fundamentally important peace aims of Montessori education.

One might argue that the Montessori educational experience is one of structured freedom, and educational pacifism seems to point toward a more absolute level of freedom. But while educational pacifism rejects educational harm, it need not reject nonharmful educational guidance and structure, and therefore does not reject the contemporary Montessori view that "children need firm structure and warm love, and to be treated in ways that recognize their need for freedom with guidance" (Lillard,

2017, p. 380). Contemporary Montessori pedagogy aligns with educational pacifism by providing microlevel order and structure in terms of routines and expectations, but macrolevel freedom in terms of activity, learning, and being.

Relatedly, both contemporary Montessori education and educational pacifism reject *paternalism*, which is to act to override or coerce another's agency to promote her own good. In education, paternalism manifests as domination of the student for their own good. The expression "don't treat me like a child" reveals a standard account of the supposed asymmetrical moral statuses of adults and children, which allows adults to be treated one way and children another. As Frierson (2021) argued, however, students have "agency worthy of direct respect" (p. 145). That is, according to the Montessorian moral prioritization of the values of character, agency, respect, and solidarity, students do not require "adult forms of deliberation and reflection . . . to live flourishing ethical lives" (Frierson, 2022, p. 145). Although they are not adults and do not act like adults, students nevertheless have legitimate claims to agency and freedom from oppression. Unwanted interference, therefore, is not justified assistance but rather unjustified paternalism. While children sometimes need guidance and help that capable adults do not need, both Montessori education and educational pacifism reject any difference of treatment that results in harmful practice.

Frierson (2022), using "broadly Montessorian" (p. 147) arguments based on assertions made by Montessori herself, claims that educational paternalism is flawed for three reasons (p. 147–173). First, both adults and children are generally better than others at promoting their own interests; we have guiding instincts that help us toward activity and flourishing even when we are not aware of them. Second, both adults and children deserve dignity and agency, and paternalism infringes on this unconditional claim by not allowing them to properly develop character. Third, since character develops through free and effortful work, paternalism represses, perverts, and erodes character by inhibiting its expression. Here we have a set of compelling contemporary Montessorian arguments that aligns with one of educational pacifism's main complaints against mass formal schooling—the restriction of students' freedom based on the idea that they mostly do not know what is good for them and could not act to achieve that good even if they did know. While Frierson's (2022) arguments against paternalism posit personhood for children, and in the section The Moral-

ity of Educational Harm, I suggested that children have legitimate moral claims against harm and oppression, and positive claims to protection even if they are not considered persons, I do not view these two positions as incompatible. Rather, I made my assertion because I do not want children's claims against harm to rest on the question of their personhood. Arguments against paternalism function even if children are denied personhood because they have legitimate negative claims against harm and oppression and positive claims to liberty, or at least all others have duties to protect them from such harms. Arguments against unjustified educational paternalism serve to strengthen both the claim against educational oppression and the link between educational pacifism and Montessori.

Some worry that while Montessori school design, pedagogy, and curriculum strongly support freedom and democratic citizenship—and thus nonharmful educational practice—there are many Montessori schools that do not reflect this view or at least do not act accordingly (Thayer-Bacon, 2011). Internal tendencies or external pressures to timetable, test, and coerce cause some Montessorians to move away from Montessori's central peace objectives. Lillard (2019) reports having seen many instances of "weak implementation" amounting to "clear violations of core principles," including "desks in rows with computers and no materials, and timers limiting children's work time, and children filling out worksheets instead of using Montessori materials" (p. 958). As another commentator stated, "it is increasingly difficult to find authentic Montessori education" in terms of respect for student autonomy and coercive practice (L'Ecuyer in Robson & Franco, 2023, "The Montessori Brand" section). In the United States, for example, Montessori education, designed for the poorest and least powerful (who most suffer from systemic harm caused by inequality), has been criticized for mostly catering to the elite (Debs, 2016; Winter, 2022). And although some see the many U.S. public Montessori schools as having "been widely successful in bringing students from all racial and socioeconomic backgrounds together" (Debs, 2016, p. 28), others argued that they mostly follow the same pattern of "becoming whiter and wealthier with time" (Winter, 2022, para. 13). Timetabling, testing, and coercion, as well as racial and economic segregation, all create the conditions for systemic harm to students.

A solution could be to increase homogeneity (of theory, practice, and training) across the Montessori world (as sought by Montessori herself), but this also has

its drawbacks, especially for countries outside of Europe, multicultural countries, and countries wrestling with the effects of colonialism. A problem facing any quality pedagogy, including Montessori pedagogy, is how to ensure quality practice, especially as it relates to a cessation of harm and promotion of peace. It is too easy to revert to control and repression, for that is the history of industrialized education; educators tend to educate as they were educated, leaders lead as they were led, adults think and live as they were taught. If Montessorians revert to standard schooling practices such as testing, timetabling, hierarchy, emotional and intellectual dependence, and so on, then they are doing their students a disservice from the perspective of both educational pacifism and Montessori.

I have previously suggested that educators could (and perhaps should) form a version of Lenin's revolutionary vanguard, to assist in the liberation of harmed students (Parkin, in press). Students often cannot be expected to recognize and understand the systemic harms they endure, both because of their age and because those harms are normalized. Given the goals and methods of Montessori education, Montessori educators ought to be well placed to form such a vanguard. In fact, perhaps Montessorians ought to form such a vanguard given the unique positioning of Montessori education as a nonharmful alternative to mass formal schooling and the peaceful underpinnings of its educational philosophy.

It is said that peace is the natural outcome of Montessori education, but this is only true if it is done well. "Done well" means many things to many people, and to me it means doing something without harming. The students in today's mass formal schooling systems suffer many of the same harms suffered by those of Montessori's day. The historical development of those systems and their influence on current practice is clear, and it is recognized and rejected by both Montessori and educational pacifism. Mass formal schooling systems are outdated and unsurprisingly cause many students to dislike their schooling experience, which they mistakenly conflate with all educational experience. This explains why "so few children really flourish in school, and why so many strongly prefer snow days to school days" (Lillard, 2017, p. 1). Children do not dislike education. They are not harmed by education. They dislike and are harmed by schooling. Montessori education can and should avoid these pitfalls.

Montessorians ought to reject educational harm and ensure that their own practice meets the moral require-ments of nonharmful education, not only because educational harm is morally unjust, but also because Montessori education is uniquely placed to provide a nonharmful alternative to mass formal schooling. That alternative should be provided as effectively and justly as possible, and to as many students as possible. Many Montessorians do, of course, act according to the broad tenets of educational pacifism. They embrace peace and liberty, and they reject harm. But it is not easy. There is constant pressure from leaders, bureaucrats, parents, economists, and society to pressure, suppress, test, schedule, and harm. We do not need more efficiency, or content knowledge, or obedience. We need peace, and we need justice. Educational pacifism rejects harmful educational practices; Montessori education provides a nonharmful solution.

> *Man today lies slumbering on the surface of the earth, which is about to swallow him up. What will he do?* (Montessori, 2002, p. 23)

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