

## BIOPOLITICS AND THE PEACE STUDIES CURRICULUM

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"Bios has evolved in hundreds of millions of years. If we consider the evolution of bios as a twenty-four hour day, the appearance of humans is realised only during the last few minutes. Let us hope that our presence will not lead to midnight, but to the dawn of hope, since technology offers the expansion of human potential. A new vision is required for the next millennium, which presents only a few seconds in terms of bios evolution. We possess the knowledge to provide abundant nourishment to all the children of the world and heal our planet from the wounds to the bio-environment ... man possesses the option for alternative futures ... Biopolitics may serve as an ideal pathway leading to the fulfilment of peace and the revelation of harmony."

This quotation from the concluding address of Dr. Vlavianos-Arvanitis, esteemed President and Founder of the Biopolitics International Organisation (B.I.O.), reveals much about the importance of what we might call bios thinking in our lives. In endeavouring to overcome the gulf between technological developments and societal values, the Biopolitics International Organisation proposes the Bios Theory by promoting the implementation of international cooperation for the better understanding of bios. B.I.O. advocates the formulation of international legislation on Bios Rights and the bio-assessment of technology in an effort to improve the quality of life. This will involve the sensitisation of public opinion towards the impact of the biological sciences and their affect on other disciplines. Integral to this will be the development of curriculum materials at school and university levels to include Biopolitics in a range of disciplines. It is with the impact of Biopolitics upon Peace Studies that this paper will principally be concerned. Though perhaps the implications for Peace Studies (itself a new and interdisciplinary field) may seem ostensibly less immediate than in the case of theology, economics or indeed, law. Biopolitics poses critical questions for Peace Studies which Peace Studies curriculums might usefully address.

### **The Peace Studies curriculum**

In recent years, especially in the United Kingdom and the United States of America, the Peace Studies curriculum has begun to reflect a growing concern with what might be called bios issues. These, of course, are taken to include matters of environmental hazards and global habitability and the host of considerations germane to them. One must, from the outset, concede that the results have not as yet been spectacular, but offer some hope of fostering greater interest in the immediate future. At this stage and, for the most part, the related concerns of Peace Studies have been directed to natural resource and environmental issues. Of course, this takes us into questions of global and regional inequality and of structural violence which mould the human habitat. It also includes the analysis of the environmental and human impact of manmade disasters.

A typical Peace Studies curriculum would include modules in international relations such as "superpower" rivalry, world and global studies, including development education and Third World affairs, citizen diplomacy, the concept of world citizenship and World Order Studies, nuclear weapons, the North-South divide, environmental degradation and Green politics, studies of the global habitat (for instance, the notion of Planet Management). It is no coincidence that the Gaia Atlas of Planet Management, first published in 1985, was expressly written, in the words of its editor, Norman Myers, 'for today's caretakers of tomorrow's world'. An onerous task indeed. Echoing this concern, the Gaia Peace Atlas, published in 1988 (and edited by Frank Barnaby), contains the subtitle 'Survival into the Third Millennium' which makes us chillingly aware that such a survival is dependent upon our strenuous efforts of resource and conflict management.

Peace Studies, armed conflict and environmental concerns go very much together. The strongest focus to date in Peace Studies which might bear directly on biopolitics has almost singularly been upon man's responsibility to the environment. This is one of several related strands of thought which one assumes Bios Theory should reflect. Moreover, the recent concerns of some in Peace Studies have moved quite close to Bios Theory. For instance, Peace Studies too has its lobby of those dedicated to something like bio-environment in the general areas of human ecology, social studies, the environment and aesthetics. Much of this interest relates to the notion of peace culture and the association of balance which it engenders. Given this common preoccupation, it is evident that Peace Studies has a great deal to contribute to the ongoing evaluation of how bios issues should be discussed in the classroom. The potential for development is hinted at in certain Peace Studies syllabus guides such as the one recently produced in association with the World Policy Institute, Peace and World Order Studies. This manual discusses a number of potential core curriculums for Peace Studies which could be adapted to treat bios directly. We are confident that the research and teaching frontier for Peace Studies (already much concerned with environmental balance) will eventually include attention to what has come to be known as Bios Theory. That could include an increasing attention both to the philosophical and technological dimensions of bios thinking. Of necessity it will involve a special focus upon international cooperation and upon the political, economic, educational and

legal aspects of these fields. With a growing input from Peace Studies to journals in such fields as ecology, law, pollution studies and the interaction of technology and society, it is clear that such programmes have something of value to contribute to a better appreciation of bios.

### **Bios theory and international cooperation**

At the moment several Peace Studies courses tackle issues relevant to Bios Theory. This is underlined by the efforts implicit in what is taught in Peace Studies to encourage international cooperation over world order problems. If international action is possible over arms limitation and environmental threats, it might equally be fostered to promote understanding and appreciation of bios. Much is already being done in the field but these efforts need to be more coherent and more explicit. In this task schools and universities have an important role since the development of curriculum materials which discuss bios issues will make an important contribution to greater public and academic understanding. The place of the university is critical since in the educational histories of both Western Europe and the USA universities have been centres of innovation, often proving themselves capable of moulding opinion and promoting change, against severe odds.

At the University of Ulster, the Peace Studies Programme at both undergraduate and Masters level has emphasised the multidimensionality of conflict in all societies and at all levels within societies. Of course, conflict in itself is not a cause for serious concern as long as just and peacefully effective methods of conflict resolution exist. In this context, Peace Studies is an inter-disciplinary programme of applied academic study which addresses itself to such conflicts. In this task one is anxious to probe the possibility of mutual help and cooperation in the interests of global good. Drawing on strands from such ostensibly diverse fields as politics, international relations, sociology, environmental studies, history, psychology and philosophy, Peace Studies seeks to explore the complex nature of conflict and cooperation. Equally importantly, a concentration upon world order problems provides examples of a range of difficulties which should, and all too occasionally do, provide foci for international action.

### **Global habitability and world order problems**

Alongside courses in international and regional conflict the Ulster Programme tackles global issues and pressing matters of world concern. These problems are approached in terms of the structure of our world order and the causes and outcomes of action in world society. In this former category the politics of the environment are discussed and this is related to an analysis of the context of debate in world societies.

While the international political system is composed of independent sovereign states there are many international issues which, in their nature, cannot be resolved by individual states acting independently. The result must, of necessity, be cooperation between states if the problems are to be resolved. There is a need for university curriculums (especially in Peace Studies) to offer an understanding of the dynamics and etiology of the key 'planetary problems' which confront us. Such matters for discussion involve a range of issues associated with nuclear weapons, technology and the arms race. They might include an analysis of the North-South divide and the possibility of a new and more socially equitable international order. Environmental degradation and resource depletion should also be examined, as might the management of technological change which takes us into the bio-assessment of technology.

Having investigated aspects of the structure of world society from the perspective of these 'world order problems', we are anxious to explore the causes or outcomes of such 'planetary crises'. These matters are obviously of critical importance for what is a threatened 'common future'. We are interested in efforts to cope with such worrying global phenomena as acid rain, the controversies concerning global warming and the deterioration of the ozone layer. Equally, we discuss more isolated, but potentially devastating, incidents such as chemical pollution, nuclear accidents and the ubiquitous theme of manmade disaster. The promotion of international cooperation in response to incidents of this kind is essential as is a genuine and open-minded discussion of the causes or outcomes. In the wake of perestroika, East-West cooperation in this regard would seem to be improving (as witnessed by the handling of the Chernobyl incident). In the latter episode, a concern with secrecy one might have expected in the past was distinctly absent and specialists from the West were involved in the clean-up operation. Integral to our concern for causes or outcomes, is a concentration upon the areas of bios thinking and the respect for life that underpins it. Increased public awareness of Bios Theory will undoubtedly have a broader impact upon international cooperation and action in response to critical world problems and to our changing society.

Programmes of this kind suggest that much can be achieved in promoting a broader understanding of global problems and the way in which they relate to bios theory. As an integral part of the B.A. Honours Peace Studies course at the University of Ulster, students in their penultimate year spend approximately twenty weeks as unpaid volunteers attached to various public and private organisations in their chosen fields. It is hoped that this experience will generate new perspectives which will enhance their final year of study and assist in the selection or preparation of their honours dissertations. In the past few years placements in university departments and in government or public offices and non-governmental organisations have proven particularly valuable, as well as related assistance in various sections of the European Parliament and the House of Commons and a range of university and N.G.O. placements (in UK, Europe and the USA) mainly in the Peace and Political Studies fields. The tasks therein have included research on animal rights, acid rain, environmental pollution and global warming. During the placement period students are engaged under the direction of the host organisation on a range of specific tasks agreed by his or her supervisors. This may include a general contribution to the running of a particular organisation and/or attachment to a specific research project. Prior to going on placement all students are given introductory seminars on the placement element in the course, including individual advice and guidance. The Placements Director liaises with the host organisation to arrange an appropriate programme of preparation for the student's

placement. During the placement period the student is expected to keep records of his or her work and on completion submit a short report. Likewise, the host organisation submits a written report outlining the work set and offering an opinion as to the student's performance.

The placement scheme provides an opportunity for students to confront, at first hand, some of the difficulties facing organisations and universities working in fields related to Peace Studies. Plans are underway for two students (one with a background in journalism, and the other with a background in environmental studies) to undertake their placement in 1990 with the Biopolitics International Organisation in Athens. It is hoped that they could undertake work which would contribute to a worldwide curriculum revision which will locate bios issues more firmly in the educational programmes both of schools and universities. There is, without question, a pressing need to place Bios Theory and the progress of the biological sciences, more resolutely in such fields as philosophy, theology, the media, peace and social studies, and so on. We hope that this placement experience might be the starting point for other student placements from the University of Ulster in the future. It may also be that a link could be developed between the Biopolitics International Organisation and Peace Studies staff in the University of Ulster. The European Community supports the 'Erasmus' scheme to facilitate educational links of this kind between member states and it may be that some funding might be obtained from this source to support joint work between the two organisations.

## Conclusion

The development of syllabi and curriculum materials which will reflect bios thinking is a key objective and plans such as those for the placement scheme may well make an important contribution to this work. Bios constitutes a force for global unity in the interests of the totality of our planet. As technological expansion continues in the words of the B.I.O.:

"Bios ... may act as a lever to lift the spirit of people throughout the world. The respect for bios may serve as a catalyst and allow the incorporation of new values so that man feels that technology is being harnessed for his wellbeing. The role of man may be placed on a perspective or optimism leading to the desired dimensions and expanding strategies for future societies."

It is hoped that peace studies curricula in the UK and elsewhere may make an important and growing contribution to a more informed grasp of the global problems of our planet. This paper has attempted to show that Peace Studies constitutes a subject which offers much potential for such understanding. If we look carefully at what is happening in the development of world order curriculum of several Peace Studies programmes, it becomes increasingly clear that considerable progress has already been made to promote thinking which will enhance our appreciation of bios. Several Peace Studies programmes already offer options or core units of study which (with some amendments) could focus on biopolitics or bio-habitability. What is required to accelerate this process is the delineation of the integrity of bios thinking within the curriculum. If Peace Studies is to contribute to the development of a more bios-relevant syllabus a truly comprehensive consideration to the nature of bios is necessary. Unfortunately any major evaluation to place bios in the centre of such programmes is probably quite some way off. However, much can be done even within existing courses to enhance our respect for bios and to emphasise the gravity of this task in our concern for world progress.

## References

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