

The world's best peacemaker

In your opinion, is world peace possible?

Gradually, world peace seemed like an impossible feat to achieve. Technological developments have allowed us to witness firsthand the enmity and injustice happening thousands of miles away from where we sit. With countless of those informations being fed into our eyes every day through social media, it feels like world peace is as if it were just another pipe dream.

Speaking rationally, world peace is just wishful thinking if it's interpreted as a world without any conflict. Let alone expect nearly 8 billion people with different cultural dichotomies, traits, and perspectives to coexist on earth harmoniously; even married couples and blood relatives have disputes! Furthermore, world peace seemed implausible due to the increasingly diversified and contentious global power worldwide. There would be a gory war competing for the crown.

Therefore, I believe world peace is more plausible if we interpret it as a world with less suffering, especially for those caused by injustice. For example, despite hundred years of effort and discrimination, there has been a transformation in the treatment and perception of disability since the 1900s.¹ Disability has been recognized in numerous legislation of multiple countries, such as in several section of the 1973 American Rehabilitation Act, which specifically address disability discrimination and promote the idea of equal accessibility to public places by including the removal of architectural and employment barriers faced by individuals with disabilities.² World peace is more likely to occur if conducted by forging future generations into a generation that is more empathetic to fellow living beings.

But how?

Have you ever sat still and wondered about how life is developing so fast and how things have become so fast-paced? For instance, how a machine has replaced your favorite

¹ (Meldon n.d.)

² (Wilcher 2018)

baker to fulfill the bakery's recent agenda of producing several thousand bread loaves daily. Or how a worker juggling multiple duties already has their schedule filled with appointments for the next six months.

The growth of urbanization in urban areas makes modern life tends to be synonymous with progress and fast-paced population movements. To support the continuing population growth, innovation is required to persist, especially in a developing city. In modern concepts, the road to success is comparable to a treadmill, where if you stop and stay still, you will "fall" to the brink of failure.

Even so, a study argues that living in a fast-paced city is actually the key to happiness, with the conclusion that "busyness" or "feeling busy" seems to be an important factor in a person's well-being.³ Another study also found a positive correlation between work stress with eustress, type of pleasurable feeling that comes from tackling and mastering complex tasks.⁴ As a student, I feel this resonates with my everyday experiences. I tend to feel satisfied only when a day is spent by tackling activities that I consider more complex such as doing science or coding lessons, and often felt guilty when a day passes without any significant learning innovations, even though the day was spent by meaningful affairs such as family time, cooking, and cleaning the house. Even so, in my opinion, the happiness that comes from such activities is arguably an example of addiction disguises as pseudo happiness.

The surging technology and population growth certainly also affects the way people relate to nature, particularly in exploiting and managing natural resources. This is referred to as the anthropocene concept, which refers not only to the environmental impacts or changes of human activities in almost all terrestrial environments but also to the new ways in which humans interact with nature.⁵ Urban environment to support population growth has rapidly pushed natural areas to the limits of human-occupied areas, often to the point of green space extinction.

This green space extinction subsequently yields a new problem: exclusive access to nature. With green spaces running low, interacting with nature is not as easy as it used to be in a good deal of country. In fact, studies found found that the convenience level of

³ (Barr 2018)

⁴ (Colvile n.d.)

⁵ (Malhi 2017)

someone accessing natural resources corresponds to a higher level of education and income, and how an article mentioned that “having room to breathe” is the latest luxury.⁶⁷

Given that accessing proper green space should be a basic right of every living being, it is ironic to imagine how these rights are blocked by paywalls and land evictions. Frederick Law Olmsted, the pioneer of landscape architecture in America, once spoke of the inequalities in society he saw represented by about how the enjoyment of the best natural landscapes in America is a monopoly in a peculiar way of a very few wealthy people, and how “the great mass of society, including those to whom it would be of the greatest benefit, is excluded from it”. He emphasizes that this monopoly has existed since the earliest known period in world history, such as how the great men of the Babylonians, Persians, and Hebrews had the luxuriousness of their rural retreats comparable to the current European aristocracy and how there are a thousand famous private parks and lands devoted to luxury and recreation on the islands of Great Britain and Ireland. Although the value of these lands amounts to millions of dollars, less than one in six thousand of the entire population can enjoy these lands.⁸⁹

While accessing natural resources is a basic right, nature and green spaces also play an important role in the well-being and development of every living being. Olmsted once wrote about how he realized how much influence the environment has on a person the longer they get used to living in a place.¹⁰ He also argues that scenery is actually enjoyed not because of its beauty, but because it brings our thoughts into an atmosphere of contemplation, which he describes as a “poetic atmosphere”. This poetic and calming influence on society is the reason behind his notion about that a big city needs natural landscapes just as much as a city needs other general purposes such as parades, athletic sports, and museums.¹¹ Since centuries, plenty of cultures have also been appreciating this discovery about healing effect of human interaction with plants and nature.¹² Some

⁶ (Byerly Flint, Hammond Wagner, and Watson 2022)

⁷ (Qubein 2021)

⁸ “Preliminary Report upon the Yosemite and Big Tree Grove.” (Olmsted 2015)

⁹ Author’s note: These figures are based on life at the time Olmsted’s writing and is not the correct figures for the present.

¹⁰ “To Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer.” (Olmsted 2015)

¹¹ “To Henry Van Brunt.” (Olmsted 2015)

¹² (Olmsted 2015)

modern research even attribute the high prevalence of poorer mental health in adolescent with good quality green spaces.¹³

In addition, various studies have explored the positive relationship between hands-on experiences in nature and mental health, as well as how it can play a role in children's creativity, imagination, intellectual and cognitive development.¹⁴ Technology have developed so rapidly that we can now watch geysers in the Iceland ejected in real time from another hemispheres; still, nothing can replace the positive impact of direct experience in nature has on our mental health and cognitive development.¹⁵

Do you remember how it was mentioned before that forging empathy helps world peace to be more likely?

In fact, nature is the biggest contributor to the development of empathy. A study conducted in an elementary school tried to find out the effect of interaction with nature on a child's social and emotional development, especially in the development of empathy. After observing how several children work hand in hand in gardening, the findings are that gardening activities have a major influence on a child's social and emotional development. From gardening, they learn about the significance of community, engagement, influencing nature, how to value life, regulate emotions, and the capacity for empathy.¹⁶

However, humans tend to do a lot of overexploitation of natural resources. In addition to natural resources that are used as a source of food from animals to vegetables, we also exploit forest land to be used as a place to live, excavate the ocean floor for coal energy, to mountains to look for gold nuggets of gems. If done excessively, this will not only threaten biodiversity but also disrupt the balance of the ecosystem itself.

The natural resources crisis is a vicious circle. Not long ago in my country, residents of a village blocked a mine site review plan for a national strategic project of a dam. The refusal was made because the location to be mined was rice fields belonging to the residents, and the land of the mining location contained springs which had been the

¹³ (Feng et al. 2022)

¹⁴ (Kevin Summers, Nicole Vivian, and Tobias Summers 2019)

¹⁵ (Capaldi, Dopko, and Zelenski 2014)

¹⁶ (McMane 2013)

source of livelihood for the residents so far, and it was feared that mining would also cause environmental damage.¹⁷

This sort of thing doesn't happen just once or twice. Mining, logging, and illegal evictions for the sake of the profitability of certain groups and economic interests are often carried out at the expense of nature and ignoring aspects of full justice within the community. When nature is sacrificed for unilateral interests, people lose many things, from main production sites of natural resources for consumption, sources of livelihood, fresh air, even the most affordable remedy to overcome with mental health problems and emotional development.

I think the problem boils down to a lack of conversation between important policymakers or those in control of the economy on a large scale and civilians. It shouldn't be a labeled discussion promoted with grand posters and several media broadcast, but an intimate discussion held in a humble village under the stars without any recording devices, only two people or more without any underlying motives exchanging knowledge hoping to resolve divergence of ideas into progress for the good of mankind.

"If people sat outside and looked up at the stars every night, I bet they would live a much different life."

I believe this quote by Bill Watterson can be interpreted as that people's lives will be much more different and meaningful if we also learn how to slow down and enjoy how the time goes. In fact, many influential persons are so busy moving from one place to another for different business conversations that they are oblivious to real events happening around them. Even a sprint athlete also has to stop running!

So, is world peace actually possible?

Yes, it's possible, with the smallest task to make it happen is preserving nature. Nature is the adhesive that holds all of these aspects supporting world peace together. When green spaces are continuously being evicted, it results in the exclusivity of nature, which leads to less interaction with nature, resulting in less absorption of substances that are beneficial to our physical, mental and emotional development.

¹⁷ (Arief 2022)

In my opinion, the state and policymakers should improve the government systems that doesn't put civilians' well-being as a top priority, including civil rights access to natural resources. Back in 1858, Olmsted's purpose to built Central Park was to supply to the hundreds of thousands of tired workers who have no opportunity to spend their summers in the country. There were lots of opposition from individual landowners to investors regarding the maintenance of the park, but Olmsted held to his principle and argued that every family is allowed to enjoy the same pleasures of nature. As included in his message to an investor in 1890, he wrote, "We consider that, with this object, you cannot, at any price, afford to allow any single family to monopolize a large extent of ground as private property."¹⁸

His painstaking effort is now bearing fruits. As well as helping to neutralize the unequal bridge between rich and poor access to nature, it also contributes to the country's economic development as a study found that Central Park contributed more than \$1 billion to the city's economy in 2014, while also helped contribute removing roughly one million pounds of carbon dioxide from the city's air each year.¹⁹²⁰ This is proof that we don't have to make nature a victim of economic development demands, and that we always have better options to choose from.

It's not wrong to have discipline, targets, and productivity. It's just that some of us need to learn to slow down. Some of us may be too impatient. Modern society needs to learn how to slow down and start focusing at plans with long-term benefits for society as a whole. Start asking ourselves questions such as, "What kind of an impact does our business empire plan could potentially generate on nature and the people?", "How much I've interacted with nature today, and is it enough?", "How can I participate in nature preservation?" and begin to appreciate the little, basic things in our life. Every aspect of our life has its significance to others.

Most importantly, before hoping for an increase in the quality of human relations, we first need to improve the relationship between nature and humans. Just like how Albert Einstein said, "*Look deep into nature, and you will understand everything better.*" []

¹⁸ "To Charles A. Roberts." (Olmsted 2015)

¹⁹ ("THE CENTRAL PARK EFFECT: Assessing the Value of Central Park's Contribution to New York City's Economy" 2015)

²⁰ ("How Central Park Keeps New York City... | Central Park Conservancy" n.d.)

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