

IN DEPTH

Illusion and vision: the scientific pacifism of Alfred H. Fried

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“Alfred Hermann Fried had the invaluable gift of ‘common sense’ and straightforward, analytical thinking, the gift of clear conception and a comprehensive, profound vision based on objective information. He was sober without being dry, passionate without exaggerating; his ideas were complex but always directed towards a single center and, thus, mutually reinforced each other. This center, on which he focused all his intellectual and ethical passion, was the idea of world peace. (...) The organization of the international community: that was his achievement before the war. It is his intellectual endeavor – but his human achievement, which makes him so admirable for us as a figure, as a person, only began during the war. Here Alfred Hermann Fried achieved true greatness, historical significance. (...) And no one reading the ‘diary’ and the texts of Alfred H. Fried today will be more ashamed than those who persecuted him with scorn and hatred.”¹.

In his recollections of Alfred Hermann Fried, Stefan Zweig did not only praise the qualities of his fellow writer, but also mentioned the “war diary” which Fried regularly published between 1914 and 1919 in the journal “Die Friedens-Warte”. Although Fried had been an outspoken pacifist since the early 1890s he only gained recognition at a relatively late stage. In recognition of his untiring efforts as a pacifist editor, journalist and writer he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1911 and the honorary doctorate of the University of Leiden in 1913; the latter was of particular significance for him, as he saw it as proof of the scientific character of his theory and program.

Alfred Fried was one of the leading international theorists of pacifism in the years leading up to World War I. As international networks, relations and cooperation continued to grow and intensify, he was convinced that a European war would become impossible in the near future. The 25th World Peace Congress in Vienna, which he had prepared together with his closest collaborator Bertha von Suttner and which was to take place in September 1914, was also designed to promote this goal. Therefore, Fried was all the more shocked and saddened when war was declared in the summer of 1914.² In July he still had hopes that the catastrophe could be avoided, but sharing the insights of Jan Gotlib Bloch concerning modern industrial warfare he soon came to fear that the war could turn into a “terrible object-lesson” and go on for a long, indefinite time.³

“ Distancing himself from a purely ethical pacifism, Fried was convinced that the peace movement required a scientific basis ”

In order to continue to publish “Die Friedens-Warte” and to gather information from the Central Powers as well as from the Entente Powers Alfred Fried decided to emigrate and stay in Switzerland while the war lasted. Remarkably, he only began to keep a diary and to publish his notes after the war had broken out. By writing down his thoughts he could get melancholy and depressed feelings off his chest but, even more importantly, he hoped to influence his contemporaries in a pacifist way and to promote his concept of scientific pacifism; for him, the ongoing war was constant proof of its validity. In the preface to the 4-volume edition of his diary (1918) he wrote:

“I wanted to give expression to my feelings, my insights, my fears and my hopes. I wanted to record the events, to discuss them from a pacifist point of view. By tracing the progress of Europe’s fever I wanted to identify the faults of the past and show the path to recovery.”⁴.

In a letter written to David Starr Jordan, peace activist and first President of Stanford University, Alfred Fried made it clear that World War I was merely a demonstration object to explain his pacifist theory:

“This [the war diary] is the work into which I channeled all my efforts in the struggle against the insanity of war. The Great War has little to do with it. It was only a demonstration object, the corpse I used to teach anatomy.”⁵.

“ According to Alfred Fried wars are fundamentally risky, arbitrary acts that can never be humanitarian but can always be avoided ”

Alfred Fried's diary reflects the scientific approach towards pacifism and international relations which he developed at the beginning of the 20th century. Distancing himself from a purely ethical pacifism, he was more and more convinced that the peace movement required a scientific basis to make it impervious to nationalist criticism, to exert a wider influence on the public, and to encourage many more people to support pacifist activities. He presented his theory and program in numerous speeches and articles and summed it up in the monograph “Die Grundlagen des revolutionären Pacifismus”⁶. It became the basis for his perception and interpretation of World War I: in his diary he consistently spoke of scientific pacifism and made an effort to argue for peace from an analytical perspective.

According to Alfred Fried wars are fundamentally risky, arbitrary acts that can never be humanitarian but can always be avoided. They are not worthwhile under any circumstances because their progress and eventual end can never be foreseen, and compared to the alleged success they cause far too much suffering, disease, injury and death.⁷ Hence, he did not only seek to erase the unpleasant consequences but to eliminate the causes of war altogether and to preclude warlike operations by fostering international understanding and by forming an intergovernmental organization: two

crucial elements of his concept that are still relevant for peaceful policies today.

In his peace program, which he considered an open road map, a work in progress, Alfred Fried mainly focused on peace between countries. He called for developing international traffic and facilitating international interaction at all levels: by bringing international law in line with the development of international traffic, and by adopting policies that reflected the changes in international law. In short, he appealed for improved political, humanitarian and legal instruments and for a speedy process of demilitarizing and ‘civilizing’ all internal and external affairs in order to overcome and stop war.⁸

“ Fried appealed for improved political, humanitarian and legal instruments and for a speedy process of demilitarizing ”

Fried’s scientific pacifism met with mixed reactions by his contemporaries: many agreed with him, many didn’t. The most positive reaction was the fact that many people who had not been concerned with pacifism before now became interested in the peace movement. Among them were members of the Social Democratic Party as well as experts on international law. The most prominent experts influenced by Alfred Fried in Germany were Hans Wehberg and Walther Schücking, who used Fried’s publications in his lectures on international law.⁹

In the short term, though, Alfred Fried’s pacifist ambitions remained rather illusory, as the Treaty of Versailles did not implement the program he had advocated for so many years. However, after World War II many of his visions concerning peaceful conflict resolution – primarily in Europe – and intergovernmental organizations became reality with the establishment of the United Nations Organization and the unification process of the European Union, even though under circumstances he could not have foreseen.

1. “Alfred H. Fried hatte die unschätzbare Gabe des ‘Common sense’, des geradeaus und nicht in Winkelzügen Denkens, die Gabe der klaren Konzeption, der weiten, durch sachliche Bildung immer vertieften Übersicht. Er war nüchtern ohne Trockenheit,

leidenschaftlich ohne jede Übertreibung, seine Ideen komplex, aber immer auf ein einheitliches Zentrum gerichtet und darum sich wechselseitig verstärkend. Dieses Zentrum, dem seine ganze geistige und moralische Leidenschaft sich zuwandte, war die Idee des Weltfriedens. (...) Die Organisation der Völkergemeinschaft, das war seine Tat vor dem Kriege. Sie stellt sein geistiges Werk dar – seine menschliche Tat aber, sie, die ihn uns als Gestalt, als Erscheinung so bewundernswert macht, begann erst mit dem Kriege. Hier hat Alfred H. Fried wirkliche Größe, historische Bedeutsamkeit erreicht. (...) Und niemand wird heute das ‚Tagebuch‘ und die Schriften Alfred H. Frieds mit größerer Beschämung lesen, als eben jene, die damals mit Hohn und Haß hinter ihm hergehetzt haben.“ Stefan Zweig: Alfred Hermann Fried. In: Rudolf Goldscheid (ed.): Alfred H. Fried. Geb. 11 Nov. 1864, gest. 4. Mai 1921. Eine Sammlung von Gedenkblättern. Leipzig 1922, 76-78.

2. Alfred Hermann Fried: Aus meinem Kriegstagebuch (Bruchstücke). In: Die Friedens-Warte 1914, Jg. 16, Nr. 8/9, 282-283.

3. Fried: Aus meinem Kriegstagebuch (Bruchstücke). In: Die Friedens-Warte 1914, Jg. 16, Nr. 8/9, 282-283.

4. “Ausdruck verleihen wollte ich meinen Empfindungen, meiner Erkenntnis, meinen Befürchtungen und Hoffnungen. Die Ereignisse wollte ich festhalten, sie vom pazifistischen Gesichtspunkt aus erörtern, am Krankheitsverlauf des fiebernden Europas die Fehler der Vergangenheit klarlegen und den Weg zur Genesung weisen.” Alfred Hermann Fried: Mein Kriegs-Tagebuch. Das erste Kriegsjahr (7. August 1914 bis 28. Juli 1915) (= Sammlung Europäische Bücher). Zürich 1918, VIII.

5. Letter: Alfred H. Fried to David Starr Jordan, 30.10.1920. League of Nations Archives, International Peace Movements, Fried Papers Box 88. “Es ist dies [das Kriegs-Tagebuch] das Werk, in das ich meinen ganzen Kampf gegen den Wahnsinn des Krieges konzentriert habe. Der Weltkrieg hat eigentlich damit wenig zu tun. Er war nur Demonstrationsobjekt, die Leiche an der ich Anatomie docierte.”

6. Alfred Hermann Fried: Die Grundlagen des revolutionären Pacifismus, Tübingen 1908. Besides “revolutionärer Pazifismus” the theory and program was also named “ursächlicher Pazifismus”, “organisatorischer Pazifismus” and “wissenschaftlicher

Pazifismus”.

7. Fried: Mein Kriegs-Tagebuch. Das erste Kriegsjahr, 25.8.1914. Alfred Hermann Fried:
Mein Kriegs-Tagebuch. Das vierte Kriegsjahr und der Friede von Versailles (1. August 1917
bis 30. Juni 1919) (= Sammlung Europäische Bücher). Zürich 1920, 28.6.1918.

8. Alfred Hermann Fried: Die Grundlagen des ursächlichen Pazifismus. Zürich 1916, 61-62.

9. Bernhard Tuider: Alfred Hermann Fried. Pazifist im Ersten Weltkrieg. Illusion und
Vision. Saarbrücken 2010, 60-61.

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- *Portrait of Alfred Hermann Fried* -

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