

The Failure of Pacifism and the Success of Nonviolence

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Although pacifism and nonviolence bear a close relationship to one another historically, pacifism is the ideological assertion that war and violence should be rejected in political and personal life, whereas nonviolence refers to a distinct set of political practices. Unlike other modern ideologies such as liberalism and socialism, pacifism has never gained widespread acceptance among a significant portion of humanity and seems to remain a minority position among most of the peoples of the world. Even among those who use nonviolent techniques, the conventional wisdom that physical violence is necessary under certain circumstances often prevails. However, a growing body of empirical evidence shows that the methods of nonviolence are more likely to succeed than methods of violence across a wide variety of circumstances and that more people are using nonviolence around the world. At the same time, both the effectiveness of military and material superiority in achieving political ends and the incidence of warfare and violence appear to be waning. In a remarkable example of convergence between empirical social science and political theory, explanations for the effectiveness of nonviolence relative to violence point to a people-centered understanding of power. This research can provide a basis for a reinvigorated and pragmatic brand of pacifism that refocuses the attention of political scientists on the organization, actions, and loyalties of people as opposed to technologies of domination and destruction.

Creon: Must I rule the land by someone else's judgment rather than my own?

Haemon: There is no city possessed by one man only.

Creon: Is not the city thought to be the ruler's?

Haemon: You would be a fine dictator of a desert.

—Sophocles, *Antigone*

Before an audience of liberal German students, in the midst of the German Revolution and in the wake of Germany's defeat in World War I, Max Weber gave his influential lecture "Politics as a Vocation." Drawing upon Machiavelli, his by-now widely recognized work on modern bureaucratic states, and his extensive knowledge of Hindu, Muslim, and Christian religious traditions, Weber argued that the "decisive means for politics is violence."¹ Against the prominent German pacifist and Great

War opponent F. W. Förster, he claimed: "[It] is not true that good can follow only from good and evil only from evil, but that often the opposite is true. Anyone who fails to see this is, indeed, a political infant."² Politics, said Weber, is a field apart, where taking responsibility for the results of one's actions means using methods that would not be legitimate in other realms of life. Moreover, anyone interested in saving their soul "should not seek it along the avenue of politics, for the quite different tasks of politics can only be solved by violence."³ According to Weber, all of the major religious traditions made room for a separate ethic for politics. For instance, Christ's "absolute ethic" of turning the other cheek was not applicable to politics, because "for the politician the reverse proposition holds, 'thou shalt resist evil by force.'⁴

Weber's lecture brings to the fore a *leitmotif* that is ubiquitous in modern political thought. Theorists from John Locke to Karl Marx and Friedrich Hayek to Jean-Paul Sartre all affirm the basic proposition that bad means sometimes lead to good ends and that physical violence

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is therefore a necessary means for politics. For the most part, disputes about violence in modern political theory center around *when* violence is necessary, but most agree that physical violence is necessary and good on some occasions.⁵ Pacifism has a long and distinguished intellectual heritage but I argue that, in broad strokes, Weber's view has prevailed. As I will show below, pacifist arguments have failed to persuade most of the publics of the world. Most people believe physical violence is part and parcel of legitimate political orders.

However, pacifist thinkers have played a critical role in developing a set of political practices that have spread widely, become greater in frequency, and are increasingly more effective than the violent alternatives. Nonviolence, while springing from pacifist thought, refers to a distinctive set of political practices that do not require actors to adopt pacifism. A growing body of empirical literature demonstrates that nonviolence is more effective than violence in a wide variety of circumstances. At the same time, research on violence and war shows that even as horrors of human conflict continue, our propensity for self-inflicted destruction is generally in decline. In addition, the traditional material factors thought to determine military success do not hold up under scrutiny. Bolstering recent empirical work on civil resistance and violence, epochal and unprecedented political achievements have also been won largely through nonviolence, including the legal abolition of slavery and the entry of women into politics. Even as pacifism as an ideology has failed to convince the publics of the world, a wide range of evidence points to the increasing success of nonviolence and the decreasing success and frequency of physical violence. These findings have led to a striking convergence in recent research among political scientists, sociologists, and political theorists, who explain both the limits of violence and the power of nonviolence.

In what follows, I expand upon and develop the distinction between pacifism and nonviolence to outline and offer a preliminary defense of a new form of pacifism that I call *pragmatic pacifism*.⁶ I begin with a brief intellectual history of pacifism and discuss how the methods of nonviolence were developed as part of it. I show that the ideological position of pacifism, usually articulated as a rejection of all violence on moral grounds, has failed even among many of those who use nonviolence successfully. While pacifists are usually the vanguard of nonviolent movements, the available evidence suggests that many of those who participate in nonviolence are not pacifists. Moreover, public opinion surveys from a wide variety of countries show that broad majorities of people believe that physical violence is justified in certain circumstances. Next, drawing on recent empirical work on nonviolence, the incidence of war, factors influencing the outcomes of wars and the use of violence by states to control their populations as well as an historical narrative highlighting

epochal political changes achieved through nonviolence, I show that the political reliability of violence has been decisively called into question while the political fortunes of nonviolence are on the rise.

The second half of this article examines how the success of nonviolence and the research that examines nonviolence can form a feedback loop that informs a new brand of pacifism. Pragmatic pacifism reformulates pacifism as a principled commitment to non-violence grounded in a realistic understanding of the historical record and the inherent political liabilities of violence. Through the study of cases from five continents, large-n statistical analyses, and reconsiderations of the writings of Mahatma Gandhi, scholars have constructed the elements of a people-centered theory of power. The use of nonviolence draws our attention to how people organize themselves, which studies of nonviolence and recent studies of military power suggest play a decisive role in achieving political success and military victory. These studies give us a rich understanding of what makes political action—including violence—effective and ineffective. They also show that nonviolent methods show distinct advantages over violent methods because nonviolence is carefully attuned to perennial political realities that those who use violent methods tend to ignore.

Against the conventional wisdom, pragmatic pacifism maintains that the advocates of violence are prone to unrealistic ideological commitments that are often doomed to failure, whereas nonviolence offers a self-limiting, pragmatic, and realistic approach that accounts for the manifold difficulties of politics. In contrast to traditional pacifism, which rejects violence on moral grounds, this brand of pacifism relies upon political as opposed to moral principles to make the case against violence. Violence may be immoral, but recent empirical and theoretical work pushes us toward the perhaps more important insight that violence is *counterproductive* to politics. Since the use of nonviolence in practice is motivated by a wide variety of moral, material, and political aims, a more full complement of reasons and principles for rejecting violence gives this brand of pacifism a better chance of political success.

Pacifism and Nonviolence

Before arguing that pacifism has failed and nonviolence has succeeded, I will first describe the two terms as I use them here and the historical relationship between them. "Pacifism" refers to a distinct ideological position in the history of religious, ethical, and political thought. The core feature of pacifism is the principled rejection of the use of physical violence in personal and political life. This definition in the main follows Theodore Koontz, who argues that pacifism in its common usage today generally refers to the belief that it is morally wrong to participate in killing for any reason. Minimally, this means that killing is wrong "for me" but the view usually extends to the larger claim that participation in war or violence is morally

unacceptable for *everyone*.⁷ Koontz emphasizes that pacifism is the rejection of all uses of violence for *moral* reasons, but my conception is more inclusive. I allow that pacifism may be grounded in either moral or pragmatic reasons, as long as one holds that physical violence can and should be rejected.⁸

For the most part, pacifists have generally grounded their ideas in religious or ethical precepts. In the West, pacifism finds its earliest clear expression in Christian thought.⁹ Early Christian thinkers from North Africa, such as Origen and Tertullian, argued that the ethic Christ described disallowed doing violence to any person for any reason. In particular, they rejected physical self-defense by individuals, communities, or governments as a legitimate reason for violence. Instead, they recommended embracing martyrdom and articulated a view of conscientious objection to military service.¹⁰ With Constantine's conversion to Christianity, these views were rejected by Church officials in favor of the just war theories of Augustine and, later, Thomas Aquinas. However, pacifism was revived in the radical Protestant theologies of the Anabaptist, Quaker, Mennonite, and Brethren communities.

The main pacifist movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were often led by members of these religious communities, but the view gained adherents among other denominations and secular organizations as well. Until they were convinced otherwise by John Brown, many prominent abolitionists, including Frederick Douglass and William Lloyd Garrison, rejected war as a legitimate means for achieving political ends.¹¹ Out of the women's movement grew pacifist organizations such as the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, led by Jane Addams, who along with prominent women's rights advocates such as Sylvia Pankhurst and Aletta Jacobs vehemently opposed World War I as part of the 1915 Women's International Congress at the Hague.¹² World War I also inspired the creation of the Fellowship of Reconciliation (1915) and the secular War Resisters' International (1921). Both organizations are still active in assisting conscientious objectors and both continue to reject participation in war.¹³ They also inspired an ongoing campaign to refuse to pay taxes that go to military purposes.¹⁴

In the East, the roots of pacifism can be found in the intertwined Jain, Hindu, and Buddhist traditions, which predate the Christian tradition by many centuries. The Jain belief in the sacred status of all life influenced Mohandas K. Gandhi as a child and adolescent,¹⁵ but as an adult he attempted to interpret the ancient Hindu tale recounted in the *Bhagavad Gita* as a statement against war. Gandhi's deep and abiding rejection of physical violence even in the face of extreme violence on the part of others, led him to famously (or infamously) oppose the use of war against Hitler¹⁶ and recommend that rape,¹⁷ robbery¹⁸ and other forms of personal violence be met with nonviolence instead of physical resistance.

Gandhi's attempt to create a way of life that "will not, on any account, desire to use brute force" inspired many followers.¹⁹ In his own time, a Pashtun Muslim named Abdul Gaffar Kahn led tens of thousands in resisting the British without violence in the Northwest Frontier (now Pakistan). A generation later in the United States, Martin Luther King, Jr. led the American civil rights movement and eventually opposed the Vietnam War on the grounds that "I could never again raise my voice against the violence of the oppressed in the ghettos without having first spoken clearly to the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today—my own government."²⁰ The Dalai Lama, following in Gandhi's footsteps, interprets the Buddha's teachings as prohibiting violence even in the face of the ongoing Chinese occupation of Tibet.²¹ Although these various thinkers and organizations offer many different reasons for their pacifism and sometimes differ on the application of their ideals in particular circumstances, they have in common a broad-based rejection of war and physical violence in personal and political life on moral grounds. For the most part, this means rejecting the use of physical violence in the most trying and difficult circumstances, including for the purposes of self-defense or the protection of the innocent.

As part and parcel of this ideological position, pacifists have forwarded and developed a distinctive form of political practice, variously called non-resistance, nonviolence, *ahimsa*, soul force, and *satyagraha*. The origins of the practice arguably trace back to the critical spiritual texts and stories that pacifists draw upon. The biblical scholar and theologian Walter Wink posits that Matthew 5:38 describes a "third way" between submission and violent resistance. Jesus intones to "not resist an evildoer" but also that "if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also." Through extensive analysis, Wink argues this is a display of defiance against oppressive authorities.²² Gandhi's interpretation and translation of the *Bhagavad Gita* turns on his claim that the text develops the theme of *ahimsa* (or non-violence).²³ As a practice, nonviolence also has earlier, non-religious roots. In the first century of the Roman republic, the plebs, who were no pacifists, regularly used a brand of civil disobedience to refuse participation in war and gain leverage over the patricians.²⁴ In addition, at the dawn of Western political philosophy, Socrates performed and offered a nascent theory of non-injurious political action.²⁵

However, the first extensive attempt to identify and theorize the distinctive practices that we now call nonviolence appeared in a work by a Unitarian Minister from Massachusetts named Adin Ballou, entitled *Christian Non-Resistance* (1846). Ballou was keen to refute the adequacy and legitimacy of a brand of pacifism that had been "imperiously preached by *despots* to their *subjects*, as their indispensable duty and highest virtue." Governments tried to instill "necessitous non-resistance" or "*passive obedience*

and non-resistance.”²⁶ Ballou claimed that true Christian non-resistance meant “the right to offer the utmost *moral* resistance” and indeed held it to be a duty to practice what he believed was “the highest kind of *resistance* to evil.”²⁷ Although not a member of Ballou and Garrison’s New England Non-Resistance Society, Henry David Thoreau was present at meetings where Ballou made his case. A few years later, in the work that popularized the term “civil disobedience,”²⁸ Thoreau offered a secular version of Ballou’s non-resistance and further examined how the practice affected an individual’s relationship to government. Thoreau’s version also differed from Ballou’s because he did not claim to offer a replacement for violent resistance to injustice. That is, Thoreau was not a pacifist.²⁹

Gandhi might have never known of Ballou’s writings were it not for Leo Tolstoy taking notice of them. Tolstoy wrote that Ballou’s works offered comprehensive examinations of exceptional cases where he “shows that it is precisely in them that the application of the rule [of non-resistance] is both necessary and reasonable.”³⁰ Gandhi was particularly concerned with how one might confront physical violence in the very moment it was being practiced. He discerned that one might be able to engage in “conscious suffering” (or *tapas*) where certain actions were taken with the expectation of provoking physical punishment from others. This kind of suffering, unlike the suffering of people resigned to their fate, could be used to one’s political advantage. For political campaigns that might involve putting one’s body at risk, he coined the term *satyagraha*, or “holding fast to the truth.” The term avoided the negative, inactive, and “passive” connotations of *nonresistance* and *nonviolence* while acknowledging that refraining from violence in the face of the violence of others is difficult. Gandhi also continued to employ the term *ahimsa* to refer to the broad range of practices (*satyagraha* among them) that he wished to cultivate in himself and encourage in others.³¹

A bewildering variety of movements and causes have taken up Gandhi’s methods and a growing number of political theorists and philosophers have reflected on the significance and character of *satyagraha* and nonviolence. As a matter of terminology I want to emphasize that, as I use the terms, pacifism is the *ideological* and principled rejection of war and violence, whereas nonviolence refers to *methods* of political action that eschew violence, with *satyagraha* placing special emphasis on methods that may put those taking action at physical risk. As a point of reference, Gene Sharp’s volume describing and compiling 198 Methods of Nonviolent Action offers a more or less comprehensive description of the various activities encompassed by the term nonviolence.³² Sharp creates six categories for the 198 Methods: 1) protest and persuasion, 2) social noncooperation, 3) economic noncooperation: boycotts, 4) economic noncooperation: strikes, 5) political noncooperation and 6) nonviolent interven-

tion. While the majority of the techniques described do not *necessarily* entail being subjected to the violence of others, as Sharp notes “nonviolent action is designed to operate against opponents who are able to use violent sanctions.”³³ Any and all of the actions Sharp compiles *might* be met with violence and thus, if the participants are disciplined, become *satyagraha*.³⁴

I mentioned earlier that pacifism as an ideology can be adopted for either moral or pragmatic reasons and I will discuss this further later. For now, it is important to emphasize that the distinction between pacifism and nonviolence I am offering here does not map onto the familiar distinction in peace studies scholarship between “principled nonviolence” and “strategic nonviolence.”³⁵ The distinction in peace studies turns on the character of and motives behind the *practice*, not one’s general ideological orientation to violence. Indeed, advocates of principled nonviolence sometimes abandon pacifism and argue that violence should be used to protect innocents.³⁶ Likewise, advocates of strategic nonviolence are often among the most insistent that there are suitable alternatives to violence even in the most extreme circumstances.

The ideology of pacifism and the practice of nonviolence are closely related historically. Pacifists have been at the forefront of developing nonviolent practices and participating in nonviolence may lead some people to become pacifists. However, the distinction between pacifism and nonviolence is important because practicing and participating in nonviolence or *satyagraha* does not require one to reject the utility or morality of all violence and warfare.

The Failure of Pacifism

There are many ways one might assess the success or failure of ideologies. On its own terms, it might be argued that pacifism has failed because it has not eliminated war and violence from human life. However, even the most committed pacifists would probably say such a standard is too high, as few pacifists claim that the complete eradication of violence can be achieved.³⁷ Alternatively, we might say that pacifism has succeeded in at least one sense: Even if only adopted by a minority of thinkers or persons throughout history, the idea that violence and war should be rejected on principle has almost always played some role in conversations about the problem of self-inflicted human suffering. Pacifism has shown remarkable persistence through the ages.

However, I wish to argue that despite its long and esteemed intellectual heritage, pacifism has failed *politically* when held in comparison to other contemporary ideologies. At one point or another over the course of the last century, liberalism, republicanism, socialism, communism, and fascism have each been adopted by millions of persons to become part and parcel of large-scale governance structures. Pacifist principles have never been adopted by a sufficiently large number of people to make it the

animating principle and taken for granted assumption of a sizable political community.³⁸

Millions *have* been convinced that particular wars or acts of violence are pragmatically or morally wrong. During the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, anti-war and peace movements have on occasion garnered vast numbers of supporters. However, while such movements have often been led by pacifists, the majority of the participants have grounded their opposition in just-war principles or internationalist liberalism, both of which affirm that some wars are just, necessary, and legitimate.

For instance, with the memory of the Great War still fresh, the 1930s saw what was perhaps the high water mark of anti-war sentiment in Great Britain. In 1934 and 1935, the League of Nations Union created an informal “peace ballot,” which garnered the participation of 11.6 million British citizens, or around 38 percent of the adult population; 95.9 percent of participants believed “Great Britain should remain a member of the League of Nations,” 90.6 percent were in favor of “all-round reduction in armaments by international agreement,” 82.5 percent were in favor of “the all-round abolition of national military and naval aircraft by international agreement,” and 90.1 percent demanded that “the manufacture and sale of armaments for private profit be prohibited by international agreement.” Yet even amidst this unprecedented expression of desire to avoid war and even among this self-selected group, 58.7 percent of those who participated agreed that “if a nation insists on attacking another, the other nations should combine to compel it to stop by, if necessary, military measures.”³⁹

Despite revisionist histories of a public united in the war effort, public opinion in the United States was ambivalent at best about entering World War II, in part because of disillusionment with American involvement in the Great War. Although most Americans intensely disliked Hitler, Roosevelt saw the need for a massive propaganda campaign to overcome “a psychology which comes very close to saying ‘Peace at any price.’”⁴⁰ German military victories combined with the attack on Pearl Harbor overwhelmed isolationist tendencies, with 56 percent of Americans favoring sending American troops abroad in March 1942.⁴¹ A similar dynamic played out in the peace movements and anti-nuclear campaigns of the 1980s in the United States. Although organized by pacifists who thought that the nuclear age might finally lead to an outright rejection of war, the movement saw “a gradual replacement of absolute pacifism with modified, circumstantial versions of antiviolence” in order to accommodate “political contexts dominated by Political Realism.”⁴²

Given extant polling data, it appears that the belief that some wars are legitimate and justified continues to be the dominant opinion among the people of the world. Consider, for instance, what might be considered a hard case: public opinion regarding the authorization of force by

international institutions as opposed to one’s own government. Polling from 2006–2008 found that strong majorities in 16 countries on four continents (over 60 percent in all cases and as high as 89 percent in the case of Nigeria) believe that the UN Security Council should have the right to authorize military force to defend a country under attack. Strong majorities in 18 countries (over 60 percent in all cases and as high as 90 percent in the case of Kenya) believe that the UN Security Council should have the right to authorize military force to prevent severe human rights violations such as genocide.⁴³ In 2002, strong majorities of people in six European countries and the United States approved of using troops from their own country to uphold international law (German and US approval were the *lowest*, at 68 percent and 76 percent respectively).⁴⁴

Yet this does not generally translate into publics believing that their governments should *only* go to war with United Nations approval. While publics in Great Britain, France, and Germany by strong majorities believe UN approval should be sought, publics in the United States, Russia, Turkey, Pakistan, Jordan, and Morocco are more evenly divided on the issue.⁴⁵ Approval for particular wars may run very high for those countries involved. For instance, despite the fact the UN did not authorize the war, 72 percent of Americans approved of the decision to go to war in Iraq in March 2003.⁴⁶

As one might expect, among those who use the techniques pacifists have developed, there is a much stronger commitment to pacifism. However, what evidence we have suggests that even people who have directly participated in confronting violence with nonviolence are not always, themselves, pacifists. Timothy Garton Ash, summarizing his recent and extensive edited volume of non-violent case studies says that “again and again [adopting nonviolence was] often less unequivocal than is generally assumed.”⁴⁷ A study of participants in three of Gandhi’s most successful *satyagrahas* found that most were committed pacifists, at least in the context of the particular campaign. However, the study also attributed this not so much to an ideological commitment as to a belief in Gandhi’s leadership.⁴⁸

With respect to the American civil rights movement there is both direct and indirect evidence that some significant number of those who participated were not pacifists. In 1964, after the March on Washington and in the wake of dramatic political successes that used nonviolence, only 17 percent of African Americans supported withdrawal from Vietnam. This was a higher percentage than the 13 percent of whites and by 1970 that number had ballooned to 57 percent (37 percent for whites).⁴⁹ However, the statistic leaves little doubt that most of those who were sympathetic to and likely many of those who participated in nonviolent direct action were not pacifists. The direct evidence includes a study of 165 white activists who spent the summer of 1965 organizing voter registration

drives in the South. The study found that most (but not all) were pacifists at the time and that their pacifism had waned, especially with regard to the issue of self-defense, 20 years later.⁵⁰ (However, the commitment to pacifism among such activists was still much higher than in the general population.)⁵¹ We also have direct evidence from oral histories, which report that leaders in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference had to work hard to convince African American participants to refrain from retaliating against white violence and terrorism.⁵²

To take one final example, there is also indirect evidence for a less than pacifist ideology among participants in a more recent nonviolent uprising. In 2011, Egypt witnessed one of the most dramatic unarmed insurgencies in modern history. The revolution brought millions into the streets.⁵³ However, the Egyptian public, by a majority of 78 percent, was among those mentioned above who approve of the UN Security Council's right to authorize the use of military force to defend a country. Strong majorities also approve of the Security Council's right to authorize the use of military force to prevent severe human rights violations (83 percent), prevent a country that does not have nuclear weapons from acquiring them (74 percent) and—in perhaps the most relevant poll question given the nascent revolution—64 percent of Egyptians said they believed the Security Council had the right to authorize force to restore a democratic government that has been overthrown.⁵⁴

The failure of pacifism to garner widespread support on par with other modern ideologies is also reflected in the dearth of literature in political science on the topic. A number of critically important book-length studies of Gandhi by political theorists and comparativists excepted,⁵⁵ there has been very little interest in pacifism in American political science since the civil rights movement. The last article on pacifism to be published in the *American Political Science Review* (prior to Karuna Mantena's 2012 piece discussed here later) was Mumford Sibley's "The Political Theories of Modern Religious Pacifism" in 1943.⁵⁶ Even including the recent upsurge in interest in nonviolence, there have been only a handful of articles devoted to discussing pacifism in all of the major generalist political science journals combined in the United States over the last 40 years.⁵⁷ Just war theory, treatments of international relations from a liberal perspective, the democratic peace theory, realist and, more recently, constructivist perspectives have dominated discussions of war and peace.

The Success of Nonviolence

Although the assertion that war and violence can and should be rejected on principle has not held much sway with the public, the techniques that pacifists have developed have been adopted in nearly every country in the world.⁵⁸ A skeptic of the influence of pacifism in this regard might point out that, in part, this is due to the fact

that pacifists simply created a concept of "nonviolence" and placed an array of political practices that have existed for millennia under that rubric. However, evidence increasingly suggests that whether by naming such practices or pioneering their use, pacifists have expanded the influence, visibility, and effectiveness of nonviolent political practices. While pacifism as an ideology has failed, the political techniques they developed have had wide and enduring success in achieving political goals of the highest order.

One kind of evidence for the success of nonviolence comes from empirical political science. The idea that war is an empirical problem has driven a generation of research in political science and peace studies.⁵⁹ Recently, scholars in this tradition have turned their attention to nonviolence and the techniques pacifists have developed, with a particular emphasis on "people power" movements or "civil resistance" in opposition to governments.⁶⁰ In the main, these studies have asked why civil resistance movements succeed or fail, an issue I will discuss later. But Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan's groundbreaking 2011 study examines the question of the political effectiveness of civil resistance relative to violent insurrection. Chenoweth and Stephan examine all known cases of armed and unarmed insurrections from 1900 to 2006 (323 cases) and find that the use of nonviolence greatly enhanced the chance of success for campaigns seeking to oust regimes and slightly increased the chance of success in anti-occupation and territorial campaigns.⁶¹ Their findings hold across regime type, suggesting that authoritarian regimes are no less vulnerable to nonviolent tactics.⁶² They also find that nonviolent campaigns that topple regimes are much more likely to beget democratic institutions.⁶³ Finally, they find that both the frequency and the success rate of nonviolent insurrections are increasing.⁶⁴

Yet even these remarkable findings do not quite capture the pivotal role nonviolence has played in epochal political changes. In world historical perspective, the spread of democracy is perhaps the most important political trend of the last three centuries. Chenoweth and Stephan's study suggests that in the last century, at least, nonviolence played a critical role in creating and solidifying democratic regimes. However, the spread of democracy would be much less meaningful if it had not been accompanied by two other changes that have been largely achieved through nonviolence.

The first is the legal abolition of slavery.⁶⁵ Slavery had been banned by individual political entities even in ancient times, but for almost all of human history some or most governments allowed or directly participated in slavery.⁶⁶ Slave rebellions occurred throughout history, sometimes numbering in the thousands, but only one, the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804), ever succeeded. The American Civil War might be considered a second case where violence led to abolition. However, the end of legally

sanctioned slavery was achieved for the most part through nonviolent techniques which, as discussed above, were theorized and developed by pacifist abolitionists.⁶⁷ By encouraging and assisting thousands of runaway slaves (many of whom themselves became abolitionists), boycotting products made by slave labor, tirelessly speaking and organizing international conventions, publishing newspapers and pamphlets, founding political parties and pressuring politicians, nineteenth and twentieth century abolitionists brought an end to the most lucrative and dynamic slave system in the history of the world.⁶⁸ Despite the extraordinary violence of slavery itself and the vicious violence used to defend the institution from abolitionists and slaves who dared to claim freedom, the goal of making slavery illegal in every country in the world was mostly accomplished without violent revolutions.

The second epochal event is the entry of women into politics in large numbers. Women have always had an important influence on politics, have sometimes resisted male dominance with violence, and have sometimes played an important role in violent revolutions alongside men.⁶⁹ However, the mid-nineteenth century women's movement, growing out of the abolitionist movement, was of a different character both in terms of its grand ambitions and distinctive political techniques. Early feminists took on a wide range of issues from property ownership to the right to vote and hold elective office. But among their most radical claims was the notion that women in general were capable of and suited for public, political action. Through rallies and meetings, declarations and hunger strikes, political organizing and public campaigning, they precipitated a historic change in the relationship between women and government. Despite brutal repression and ongoing organized and institutional resistance by men, women have been able to dismantle and replace the patriarchal legal structures in a large number of countries. Their achievements have been gained *without a single violent revolution*.

Along with this evidence for the relative effectiveness of nonviolence, there is gathering evidence for the ineffectiveness of violence in a variety of empirical literatures. Careful studies of military power show that, counter-intuitively, states with greater material capabilities are no more likely to win wars, or even battles, than states with lesser material capabilities.⁷⁰ Moreover, the likelihood that materially strong actors will lose wars has increased dramatically over the last two centuries.⁷¹ The effectiveness of violence used by governments to control their populations has also been called into question. Decades of research on the death penalty has been unable to establish that it reduces crime.⁷² Studying the effectiveness of torture is a controversial issue,⁷³ but qualitative studies drawing upon first-person accounts suggest that it is generally an ineffective way to garner reliable information.⁷⁴ Among non-state actors, large-n empirical studies increasingly show that terrorism is ineffective.⁷⁵

Finally, another trend may be related to the success of nonviolence. Two recent book-length studies argue that violence and war are on the decline in the world.⁷⁶ Joshua Goldstein argues that fewer wars are beginning, more are ending, and that the wars that remain are less lethal and smaller.⁷⁷ He argues that NGOs and the efforts of international institutions are the source of this decline, but accords most of the credit to United Nations peacekeeping in particular.⁷⁸ Steven Pinker's argument is even more ambitious. In one of the more extensive compilations of social science research in recent memory, Pinker argues that violence at every level—familial, tribal, neighborhood and state—has declined the world over.⁷⁹ Domestic violence, rape, murder, the death penalty, judicial torture, slavery, death rates in genocides and terrorism, lynchings, and the lethality and frequency of warfare over not only a 50-year time period but a 500-year time period have been reduced.⁸⁰ Factors such as changes in military technologies, resource availability, levels of affluence, and religion are not major causes of increases or declines in violence, he argues.

One might quibble with the way Goldstein and Pinker use various pieces of evidence, but the overarching narrative and the sheer weight of the evidence is convincing. Their explanations for why violence is waning, however, fail to adequately account for the potential influence of nonviolence. Instead, their arguments for the most part are consistent with the conventional wisdom (and the failure of pacifism), which affirm the distinction between good and bad violence. Goldstein's main thesis is that UN peacekeeping has played a crucial role in reducing warfare,⁸¹ and Pinker's core claim is that a great deal of the reduction in the overall violence in the world can be attributed to the "pacifying" violence of powerful states.⁸² Neither notes that not only has war decreased, but the rate of victory for attackers as opposed to defenders fell dramatically in the last quarter of the twentieth century⁸³ and they do not consider Jonathan Schell's related claim that "cooperative power"—as opposed to physical violence—has become the "political bedrock of our unconquerable world."⁸⁴ While it may be correct that certain applications of violence can produce a net benefit in terms of reducing violence, another explanation or contributing factor seems equally viable. The development and expansion of the techniques of nonviolence may have made violence less politically effective and, therefore, less useful and "necessary" over time.

Explaining the Effectiveness of Nonviolence

The increasing use and success of nonviolence, the decreasing use and effectiveness of violence, and the still-stagnant political fortunes of pacifism beg for theoretical explanation and innovation. In a recent exchange, Sharon Nepstad and Wendy Pearlman discuss the pros and cons

of “bigger theory-building” versus “exhaustive explorations(s) of complexity.”⁸⁵ In what follows, I bring together various literatures in different fields for the purpose of building a pragmatic theory of pacifism. I began this article by drawing upon Theodore Koontz’s definition of pacifism. Whereas Koontz associates pacifism with the rejection of physical violence on the basis of *moral* principles, I defined pacifism as the rejection of physical violence for moral or pragmatic reasons. Koontz’s definition is more precise and for the most part captures the spirit of pacifist arguments, if we are describing the long history of pacifist ideology. However, I insist that an ideological position rejecting violence can be made on pragmatic grounds because of developments in recent scholarship.

After nearly 40 years of sporadic interest in pacifism and nonviolence in established academic fields, the last few years have seen an upsurge in work on the topic. In sociology and political science, and among both political theorists and empiricists, there is a remarkable convergence in the character of interest in the topic. First, scholars have been keenly interested in explaining the effectiveness of nonviolence. How can nonviolence withstand the forces of violence, especially in direct confrontations with extreme repression? Second, since the effectiveness of nonviolence cuts against the conventional wisdom, its increasingly visible role has inspired a reassessment of the very nature of politics itself. What do explanations for the effectiveness of nonviolence tell us about politics, power and human conflict? I examine the first, more specific question here and then turn to the second, more far-reaching query in the final section.

Through careful examination of case studies and large-n statistical analyses, a number of causal mechanisms have been discerned regarding the effectiveness of nonviolence in the arena of civil resistance. Three critical factors appear to be at play: the organization and location of bodies, the sheer number of participants, and the loyalty of the armed forces.

First, in a comparative study of unarmed insurrections in South Africa, the Philippines, Burma, China, Nepal, and Thailand, Kurt Schock forwards the idea that successful uses of nonviolence find ways to 1) maintain and increase political *leverage*, meaning, to “mobilize the withdrawal of support from opponents or invoke pressure against them through the networks upon which [they] depend for their power,” and 2) to remain *resilient* in the face of repression, or “continue to mobilize collective action despite the actions of opponents aimed at constraining or inhibiting their activities.”⁸⁶ Schock argues that discerning the critical means for maintaining leverage and resilience requires paying attention to how bodies are organized. He notes that nonviolent techniques sometimes involve the *concentration* of bodies, or the gathering together of people in a public space to protest and demonstrate against the state, and at other times, they involve *dispersion*, where

people withdraw participation and remove themselves from the scene, as during general strikes and boycotts. He posits that the agile use of concerted action requires using both techniques—and a diversity of techniques more generally. When organizers are astute observers of the strengths and weaknesses of a given regime, they calibrate the methods of resistance accordingly.⁸⁷ Schock’s work is complemented by Wendy Pearlman’s findings that there is an organic relationship between the degree of internal cohesion in the organizational structures of social movements and the likelihood and ability of movements to use nonviolence instead of violence.⁸⁸

Second, Chenoweth and Stephan argue that nonviolence has a critical and distinctive advantage over violence in resisting governments. Their data shows that nonviolence is much more likely to attract “high levels of diverse participation” and that the number of people participating in a campaign increases the probability of success.⁸⁹ They posit that the superiority of nonviolence on this score is due to the relatively low entry cost for participants. Active participation in violent campaigns requires physical skills and abilities that participation in nonviolent campaigns may not. Violent campaigns tend to attract young, able-bodied men but nonviolence can draw from a much wider pool of participants. Critical-mass theories of collective action suggest that open, mass action can lead to a decline in peoples’ perception of risk, whereas violent campaigns may increase perceptions of risk.⁹⁰ Moral barriers to participation in nonviolence are lower and indeed, nonviolence can potentially mobilize “the entire aggrieved population,” whereas many may find participation in a violent campaign morally objectionable.

These factors suggest a connection between Schock’s claims regarding the diversity of nonviolent tactics and Chenoweth and Stephan’s claim that nonviolence has a distinct advantage when it comes to participation. Civil resistance campaigns can draw upon participants with “varying levels of commitment and risk tolerance” because nonviolent campaigns can make use of those who are willing to place their lives on the line in direct action but also those who are more risk averse but willing to stay home in a boycott or strike. Violent campaigns, however, generally require participants to have high levels of commitment and risk tolerance.⁹¹

A third factor in the effectiveness of nonviolence is the ability of such campaigns to disarm their opponents through defections and shifts in loyalty in security forces. In a book appearing concurrently with Chenoweth and Stephan’s volume, Sharon Nepstad studies civil resistance in China, East Germany, Panama, Chile, Kenya, and the Philippines. The three cases where the campaigns ended in success all involved security force defections and she traces how those campaigns were able to effect them while the others did not. She notes that defections can come from the top down as in Chile, the bottom up as in East

Germany, or some mix of the two as in the Philippine case. Sticking rigorously to nonviolence, the presence of a shared collective identity among the soldiers and the resisters, and a critical-mass dynamic where troops were more willing to defect when they were aware that other soldiers were doing so, all seem to have played a role.⁹² Nepstad's broad claim, that security force defections play a critical role in success, are generally reinforced by Chenoweth and Stephan's large-n findings. They show that nonviolent campaigns are more likely than violent campaigns to produce security force defections and that such defections improve the chance of success by nearly 60 percent.⁹³ Even when violent campaigns manage to garner widespread participation, their use of violence prevents them from fully realizing the effect numbers have on encouraging defections in nonviolent campaigns.⁹⁴ Chenoweth and Stephan note that the defections of civilian bureaucrats, economic elites, and others may be important as well, but are more difficult to measure and observe.⁹⁵ Both studies show that nonviolence tends to "pull apart the opponent's pillars of support" whereas violence is more likely to "push them together."⁹⁶

A Pragmatic Pacifism: People Centered-Power and the Character of Politics

The study of nonviolence serves as a feedback loop where practice can inform a new brand of pacifism keen to emphasize certain aspects of political reality. A critical part of this brand of pacifism is a reconsideration of certain aspects of politics and power. While peace studies scholars often distinguish between strategic nonviolence and principled nonviolence, there has not been an equally vigorous effort to describe a pragmatic pacifism that complements the tradition of moralistic pacifism. The work of some important twentieth-century progenitors and new interpretations of Gandhi's thought and practice can be brought together for that purpose. Explanations for the effectiveness of nonviolence, work being done on military power, and the renaissance in Gandhi studies in political theory grapple with a wide-variety of circumstances. But they reveal striking common themes and interconnections. To be clear, not all of the scholars mentioned here are self-identified pacifists and the claim to pragmatism to some degree fights against the notion that pacifism is ideological. Yet, taken together, recent scholarship points the way toward a distinctive and compelling set of reasons for rejecting violence in politics.

Material resources, economic interests, and bureaucratic structures all play a role in the conflicts examined by Schock, Nepstad, and Chenoweth and Stephan, but their central locus of concern is the organization, actions, and loyalties of ordinary people. Though none of the three studies mentioned above dismisses structural factors, two of the three challenge the long-standing view in the social-

movements literature that structural and political opportunities are required for nonviolence to appear and be effective.⁹⁷ All three challenge the common assumption that wielding weapons against those who do not have them ensures political success. Chenoweth and Stephan believe their study amounts to a

call for scholars to rethink power and its sources in any given society or polity. Although it is often operationalized as a state's military and economic capacity, our findings demonstrate that power actually depends on the consent of the civilian population, consent that can be withdrawn and reassigned to more legitimate or more compelling parties.⁹⁸

This is a call to examine how the behaviors of ordinary people are not simply determined by other, more powerful forces and people. The study of nonviolence suggests that concerted action moves politics and is to some extent self-generating. Trends in the political science literature, one empirical and the other theoretical speak directly to this rethinking of power.

A refocusing of attention on people and how they organize themselves is underway in perhaps an unlikely field: studies of military power. Both the victors and losers in wars use violence, but the theory of power percolating in this work is consistent with a pragmatic pacifism. A recurring theme of recent work on military power is that material superiority plays a much less important role in determining the outcomes of wars than how people organize themselves when practicing violence. I mentioned above that empirical studies demonstrate that even at the level of battles, much less wars, there is strong evidence that material superiority does not lead to victory.⁹⁹ The strange puzzle of the materially weak winning wars has been the subject of sustained study in its own right. Arreguín-Toft finds that the critical factor is the strategic interaction between combatants. In large measure, the various strategies he describes can be mapped on to Schock's models of dispersion and compression, for instance, with some combatants choosing direct engagement and others electing for guerilla warfare.¹⁰⁰ Similarly, Stephen Biddle argues that the "modern system" of force employment, or a particular method for tactically arranging and organizing troops, is the critical explanatory factor in victory since the first World War.¹⁰¹ In an exchange with eminent military scholars, Biddle refutes the view that new military and information technologies have changed how military power is exercised and notes that his analysis only scratches the surface in measuring "soft" variables. He measures how people are organized in battle, but other people and organizational factors such as morale and logistics might be equally important.¹⁰²

Even military scholars who assume that using more violence will lead to victory find that governments cannot use violence without the support of certain domestic publics. The civil resistance literature, which argues that the

defection of security forces is an important factor in bringing down regimes, bears a relationship to Gil Merom's argument that militarily powerful democracies cannot sustain their war efforts against lesser militaries when important constituencies withdraw their support.¹⁰³ More broadly, other works on military power in the last decade suggest that

materialist indicators of power could prove to be highly misleading: We may discover that there is a tremendous disconnect between a state's access to technological, financial, and human resources and the social, political and other intangible factors that allow it to translate those resources into military power in war.¹⁰⁴

From within the US military itself, the dramatic initial failures of the war in Iraq led to a new Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual, which "practically screams out" that superior military might needs political support to be effective.¹⁰⁵

A people-centered understanding of power has also had a revival in political theory. The precursors of the recent upsurge can be found in the highly influential thought of Hannah Arendt and the all but ignored work of Gene Sharp.¹⁰⁶ Arendt was both deeply impressed with nonviolence and hesitant to place faith in the applicability of Gandhi's methods in extreme circumstances.¹⁰⁷ Yet her fundamental categories of politics and her view of power as "concerted action" challenge the view that politics can be anything but human words and deeds (as opposed to material resources and technologies). For Arendt, "to act" means to say or do something in the presence of others that reveals something unique about that individual. Power is concerted action and therefore, by definition, pluralistic, somewhat coordinated but also somewhat unpredictable. It is never coerced. Indeed, while power and violence can be combined and violence can sometimes take on the qualities of action, they have an uneasy relationship to one another.¹⁰⁸ Power and violence are phenomenologically opposite.¹⁰⁹ Violence is the use of implements to either destroy or physically intimidate others. Regimes that rely upon violence can win the obedience of their subjects and officials while destroying civil society, but they have trouble generating active participation, which is the source of the energy and dynamism of all societies and political orders. Rulers often use violence when power is slipping away or as a substitute for power. But even totalitarian regimes need some power because they count on the active cooperation of the secret police and a network of informers.¹¹⁰ This emphasis on the quality of action and the claim that action and power expressed as physical violence have a somewhat degraded quality resonates with Chenoweth and Stephan's assertion that broad-based and diverse movements are more effective than violent insurgencies.¹¹¹

In *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, Gene Sharp more clearly specified the relationship between this view of power

and traditional understandings. Sharp lists sources of power familiar to most political scientists and theorists: authority, human resources, skills and knowledge, material resources, and sanctions (including physical violence), but argues that these sources depend upon cooperation. For Sharp, power is a function of the degree of cooperation that a ruler is able to muster from four groups of people: the general population, the ruler's agents, foreign governments, and foreign peoples.¹¹² Sharp does not deny that material resources, authority, and the ability to impose sanctions help people win the cooperation of other people. It is just that most traditional theories of power fail to realize the extent to which the cooperation of other people also affects one's ability to deploy material resources, retain authority, and impose sanctions.¹¹³

More recently, a number of scholars have extended and updated these arguments. My own work posits that Arendt's theory of power can be used as a philosophical foundation for a "credible" pacifism. I offer a pointed critique of moralistic pacifism, in that I allow that physical violence may be just in certain situations.¹¹⁴ But in support of the brand of pragmatic pacifism that I am forwarding here, I argue that even in extreme situations there is almost always a nonviolent method that can take the place of violent alternatives. I make this argument in two ways. First, I argue that Arendt's theory of action demonstrates that violence is not as reliable as is often assumed. Killing people does not have predictable political results because it operates in the "somewhat intangible" "web" of human relations," which makes it difficult to know what meanings people will assign to it or what actions they will take in response to it.¹¹⁵ Second, I offer a corresponding explanation for the underestimated effectiveness of Gandhi's *satyagraha*. By taking on suffering while consciously refusing retaliation, Gandhi's methods take control of and usurp the meaning of an opponent's violence in the moment it is being practiced.¹¹⁶ Both violence and nonviolence can fail or be successful, but the reasons they succeed or fail are more similar than different and turn on how people respond to each.

This line of thinking is consistent with the current revival of Gandhi scholarship, which forwards the idea that his well-earned reputation as a political moralist has overshadowed his most important insights into the character of politics. Three scholars have pointed to Gandhi's theory and practice of political action as an alternative to the brand of formalistic liberalism that has dominated Anglo-American political theory and philosophy for a generation. In a critique of liberal approaches to moral and political controversies, Farah Godrej highlights the ways in which Gandhi offers a "more realistic understanding of political life than its Rawlsian counterpart."¹¹⁷ She argues that the reliance of liberalism on dialogue and consensus building leaves little room for true agonism. Liberalism envisions political orders that either bracket their most

fundamental controversies or devolve into violent conflict when those issues come to the fore. In contrast, Gandhi's *satyagraha* engages with the "conflictive, and often imperfect nature of the political world"¹¹⁸ and offers up a means that takes politics "beyond merely a matter of reasoned deliberation and speech, [by turning] the body into an instrument of nonrational, emotive persuasion."¹¹⁹ This more holistic and realistic human psychology acknowledges both the integrative character of human faculties and our limitations when it comes to knowing the truth. In addition, Gandhi's method of self-suffering tests the commitment of those who practice it and places the most deleterious consequences of political action on the shoulders of those who believe they are in the right. In this way, nonviolence acknowledges our always partial access to truth and the plurality of human perspectives but also allows for dramatic political actions that express our deepest frustrations and disagreements.

In a recent exchange with Anthony Laden, Rainer Forst, David Armitage, Duncan Ivison, and Bonnie Honig, James Tully makes the complementary point that *satyagraha* is the counter-point to Western theories that find a "necessary relation between violence and reason." Citing Honig's interpretation of Haemon's reasonable violence in *Antigone*, he argues that the "familiar outcome" of reasonable violence is not peace and order but "violent struggles for existence or justice" where all sides claim their violence is consistent with reason. Tully argues that nonviolence works because it supplies a "more basic and prevalent" version of reasoned agonism. While not always effective, nonviolence has a better chance of transforming "both the game and game players" in a "sea of violence."¹²⁰

Karuna Mantena goes so far as to say that Gandhi is best understood not as a proponent of pacifism as Koontz defines it, but a critic of "a moralistic politics of conviction or ideological dogmatism."¹²¹ Gandhi's genius was, in effect, to move beyond pacifism as traditionally articulated and describe "a practical political orientation [and] a set of strategic responses rather than simply an ethical stance or standard of moral judgment."¹²² She argues that Gandhi forwarded a brand of political realism that was highly cognizant of the unintended negative consequences of political action that belie the best intentions of violent actors.¹²³ Practicing violence makes it difficult to reverse course or admit one's mistakes, and even when temporarily effective, it ensures that domination becomes a marker of legitimate authority. This inclines more people to use it, creating a competitive and violent atmosphere of escalation.¹²⁴ By offering a "model of self-limiting action," Gandhi hoped to "internally constrain" these negative effects while still vigorously pursuing progressive political ends. Like Schock and Chenoweth and Stephan, Mantena emphasizes that nonviolence works when those who use it are highly attentive to the particulars of a given political context. Only with a pragmatic

approach can psychological and political dynamics be transformed in the midst of conflict.¹²⁵ Nonviolence demands moving away from abstract goals and utopianism, which often tend toward violence. Gandhi maintained that political ends had to be grounded in "immediate, intimate, and precise practices" and therefore he refused temporal or conceptual abstraction of the ends from means. Indeed, it was "precisely that separation that opens up the possibility of coercion."¹²⁶

This research provides the basis for a new brand of pragmatic pacifism. In one sense, all of the social scientists and political theorists referenced here forward non-ideological and even anti-ideological understandings of power and politics. Certainly, the analysts of military power mentioned earlier do not adopt pacifism. However, taken together, their work provides a rich array of explanations for political outcomes that sidelines and minimizes the importance of the aptitude for killing and imposing one's will through physical coercion. These works do a better job of explaining why violence either fails or succeeds than traditional theories that place physical violence at the center of politics and show why nonviolence is generally more effective than violence even in extreme circumstances.

This makes for a distinctive kind of ideology. Pragmatic pacifism claims that the task of developing new political strategies to confront violence is never complete and that violence will always reappear. However, it retains an ideological element in forwarding two principles: 1) as yet unseen circumstances can be addressed by creative nonviolence, and 2) politics and power have certain characteristics that make violence unnecessary. These are ideological commitments because they can never be definitively established but nevertheless might become the animating force of a certain brand of politics, which can only respond to the vagaries of a specific context.¹²⁷ On the basis of these propositions, a pragmatic pacifism continues to forward a broad-based rejection of violence.

Pragmatic pacifism induces the two propositions from observations about the character of politics. One could argue that without moralistic pacifism, pragmatic pacifism would not be possible since without faith in the immorality of all violence, certain nonviolent practices would have never been developed. In addition, the moral condemnation of violence is itself an essential part of the *political* strategy of nonviolence, in that nonviolence almost always seeks to delegitimize the violence of one's opponents. Yet we now have sufficient experience with nonviolence to ground a broad rejection of violence in observations of previous practice. All of the research examined here suggests that the effectiveness of nonviolence turns on the ability of those who use it to be pragmatic, creative, and flexible. A pragmatic pacifism observes the increasing use and success of nonviolence, the decreasing use and effectiveness of violence, and forwards the belief

that nonviolence is sufficiently adaptable to confront violence in diverse political circumstances.

Conclusion

Although pacifist ideology has failed, the failure is not set in stone. The current work in empirical political science and political theory provides a new ground and a robust set of reasons for pacifism that complements and goes beyond the traditional moralistic reasons for rejecting violence. In certain respects, pragmatic pacifism blurs the distinction between empirical political science and political theory. Mantena writes that, for Gandhi, “the *is/lought* question is reconfigured as a *means/ends* question, one in which the tighter imbrication of the normative and the empirical that realism recommends can be enabling rather than constrictive.”¹²⁸ This increasing overlap has come to be reflected in academic work on nonviolence. Large-*n* quantitative techniques and case study work have pushed social scientists toward the theoretical view that how people organize themselves (and the very fact of their organization) is the critical factor in shaping the character of political societies and institutions. At the same time, political theorists have come to see Gandhi’s theory of nonviolence as more empirically accurate—more attentive to reality—than theories that forward the view that violence allows us to circumvent political constraints and power dynamics. Social science methods and political theory have provided a new understanding of how nonviolence works and why violence frequently fails. The political fortunes of pacifism may yet be revived if nonviolent methods continue to show promise and a brand of pragmatic pacifism offers the best explanation for how politics works.

In the closing passages of “Politics as a Vocation,” Weber tries to bring into balance his view that a realistic understanding of politics requires embracing violence. He notes that while nine out of ten romantics are “windbags,” on rare occasion he encounters a proponent of socialism or international peace with true political maturity.¹²⁹ Such a person, despite the possibility of political failure and though they may be young in years, says “Here I stand; I can do no other.”¹³⁰ Although Weber has tried throughout his lecture to link taking responsibility with doing violence, here he suggests that taking responsibility in politics and acting on principle are not entirely mutually exclusive. Both require embracing the tragic dimension of political action. He cautions that only the principled politician with real courage and fortitude will be able to survive the inevitable disappointments and difficulties of politics. Politics is like the “strong and slow boring of hard boards” and only those who do not crumble in the face of those who oppose them—and do not dismiss those who oppose them out of hand for being too stupid and stubborn—have the calling for politics.

The “success” of nonviolence as I have described it here strongly confirms the view that politics is difficult and frus-

trating. Chenoweth and Stephan note that while nonviolent civil resistance succeeded nearly twice as often as violent campaigns in the last century, the techniques still only succeeded about half of the time.¹³¹ Hannah Arendt’s conception of power is intimately linked to her assertion that political action rarely succeeds in achieving its ends and often produces unpredictable results.¹³² In part, the general trend in Gandhi scholarship, which downplays or disputes aspects of his moralism, stems from a desire to moderate the sky-high expectations Gandhi’s own rhetoric sometimes set for nonviolence. But Gandhi also beseeched campaigners to not be too concerned with the results of their endeavors and instead focus only on using nonviolent means, because other people’s reactions to one’s efforts never could (or should) be entirely under one’s control.¹³³ Indeed, Weber’s description of a mature and principled politician as one who fails in the immediate term but persists in pressing forward in spite of failures bears a striking resemblance to Gandhi’s model of the nonviolent activist.¹³⁴

Yet Gandhi’s claim to be a “practical idealist,”¹³⁵ interpreted through the lens of the pragmatic pacifism I have described here, also tells us that Weber’s final nod to the tragic idealist has it backwards when it comes to the issue of political maturity. Actions motivated by good intentions that in practice lead to bad outcomes are just as often the hallmark of those who embrace the use of violence as those who reject it. The good intentions of keeping us safe, overthrowing a corrupt regime, punishing criminals or defending freedom frequently end up being a catalogue of excuses for violence that leads to more conflict and suffering and stands little chance of political success. The weight of extensive empirical evidence demonstrates that the practitioners of violence are more often the tragic idealists than are pacifists. Nonviolence grapples more effectively with the frustrating, difficult and unpredictable aspects of politics than violence. Pragmatic pacifism is the stance of a mature political actor.

Notes

- 1 Weber 1958, 121.
- 2 *Ibid.*, 123.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 126.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 119.
- 5 The most sophisticated form of this argument understands necessary violence as “tragically” necessary, making “good” violence good in a qualified and peculiar sense.
- 6 I borrow the phrase “pragmatic pacifism” from David Cortright but use it differently; see note 8.
- 7 Koontz 2008, 233.
- 8 Koontz acknowledges that “pacifism” has meant different things in different time periods and that others argue for various types of pacifism. See, for instance, Yoder 1992. Cortright offers an extensive

- “history of peace” that names what I have called pacifism here “absolutist pacifism.” He employs the term “pragmatic pacifism” to refer to people who allow for defensive war or war by international institutions. However, Cortright’s distinction muddies the waters conceptually because some “absolutist” pacifists reject violence on pragmatic grounds and there is little to distinguish his use of the phrase “pragmatic pacifism” from liberalism and just-war theory. See Cortright 2008, 30–31.
- 9 Although there is a pacifist tradition in Judaism as well. For instance, see Polner and Merken 2007 and Wilcock 1993.
 - 10 Hornus 1980; Zampaglione 1973, 242–259.
 - 11 Garrison said at the first meeting of his American Anti-Slavery Society that “we register our testimony, not only against all wars, whether offensive or defensive, but all preparations for war . . . against all appropriations for the defence of a nation by force and arms on the part of any legislative body; against every edict of government, requiring of its subjects military service”; Garrison 1995, 15. For an analysis of Douglass, which complicates his stated commitment to pacifism, see Kohn 2005.
 - 12 Addams writes: “I became gradually convinced that in order to make the position of the pacifist clear it was perhaps necessary that at least a small number of us should be forced into an unequivocal position”; Addams 1995. On Sylvia’s split with her mother and sister, both of whom supported the war, see Hochschild 2011, 106–108. On the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom see Confortini 2012.
 - 13 Writing in a publication of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, G.H.C. Macgregor doubled down on the pacifism he had espoused prior to World War II, writing that all individuals of good conscience must make their “refusal to countenance war . . . absolute”; Macgregor 1953, 105. The original War Resisters’ International declaration states in part that “war is a crime against humanity. I am therefore determined not to support any kind of war, and to strive for the removal of all causes of war”; War Resisters’ International.
 - 14 The National War Tax Resistance Coordinating Committee website describes the history and aims of the movement at: <http://www.nwtrcc.org/>.
 - 15 Gandhi 1957, 21; Chadha 1997, 5, 13.
 - 16 Gandhi writes in *Harijan* in November 1938 that “the German persecution of Jews seems to have no parallel in history. . . . If ever there could be a justifiable war in the name of and for humanity it would be a war against Germany But I do not believe in any war”; Gandhi 1999, 239–241.
 - 17 Gandhi recommends nonviolence in response to rape in *Young India* in 1925 and in *Harijan* in 1940. Key passages are quoted in Gandhi 2000, 15–16.
 - 18 Gandhi 2009, 83–84.
 - 19 *Ibid.*, 116.
 - 20 King 1986, 233. King’s position on self-defense is nuanced. For instance, he writes in response to recent riots that it “goes without saying that people will protect their homes.” However, using his own refusal to place an armed guard at his home in Montgomery after it was bombed in 1955 he says “it is extremely dangerous to organize a movement around self-defense. The line between defensive violence and aggressive or retaliatory violence is a fine line indeed”; 6–57.
 - 21 The Dalai Lama allows that a bodhisattva could possibly use physical violence to save the innocent without bad intentions or corrupted emotions, but so few people have been able to achieve this status that this position amounts to a nearly total rejection of violence in practice. See Bstan-’dzin-rgya-mtsho 1990, 24–25.
 - 22 Wink argues that the specification “right cheek” must have indicated a blow with the back of the hand since a right-handed blow in a tussle among equals would generally fall on the left side. Bringing other historical and textual evidence to bear, Wink argues that the passage must therefore refer to a humiliating slap from a social or political superior. Turning the other cheek then becomes a sign of rebellion and resistance to the established order; Wink 1992. For a critique of Wink’s thesis see Richard Horsley’s response in the same volume.
 - 23 Gandhi’s translation and interpretation of the *Gita* is influential but also controversial. See Gier, 2004, 37–38; Gandhi 2000.
 - 24 See Livy 2008.
 - 25 Socrates not only performs a kind of nonviolence in his refusal to cease practicing philosophy but at times expresses substantive claims that accord with contemporary understandings of nonviolence. Plato reports in *Gorgias* that Socrates concludes his famous discussion with the belligerent Callicles by saying: “Permit anyone to despise you as a fool and treat you with contumely if he wishes, and yes, by Zeus, be of good cheer and let him strike that unworthy blow; for you will suffer nothing terrible, if you practice virtue and are noble and good in reality and truth”; Plato 1984, 527d. For some of the issues surrounding Socratic practice as civil disobedience see Villa 2001, 41–56.
 - 26 Ballou 2003, 3.
 - 27 *Ibid.*, 4.
 - 28 On the influence of Ballou and the Society on Thoreau, see Adams 1945.

- 29 Of Ballou, Garrison, and Thoreau, Ballou was the only one to oppose the Civil War, believing that his technique provided a full-fledged alternative to violence.
- 30 Tolstoy 2006, 19. See Ballou 2003, 165–180.
- 31 The three terms—*tapas*, *satyagraha* and *ahimsa*—generally bear the following relationship to one another in Gandhi’s writings: nonviolence (*ahimsa*) encompasses all activities that are consistent with morality and truth, including Gandhi’s extensive “constructive programme” for India. *Satyagrahas* are political campaigns and a form of *ahimsa*, which sometimes involve civil disobedience and generally involve at least the potential for *tapas*.
- 32 Sharp 1973, vol. II.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 109.
- 34 On the context in which a nonviolent action takes place affecting its character see also Schock 2003, 705.
- 35 The proponents of strategic nonviolence emphasize its practical, political, and material benefits, while those who advocate for principled nonviolence emphasize its spiritual, religious, and moral dimensions. For the former see Ackerman and DuVall 2000. For the latter see Nagler 2004. For a variety of approaches see Holmes and Gan 2005. For interpretations of Gandhi that defy the distinction see Parel 2006 and Terchek 1998.
- 36 For instance, Michael Nagler, one of the leading proponents of principled nonviolence, wrote in 2011 that once the revolution in Libya turned violent, military intervention in support of the rebels was “the least bad solution from the point of view of nonviolence”; Nagler 2011.
- 37 For instance, Gandhi, in the Jain tradition, “took the fact that basic bodily functions necessarily involved *himsa* [violence] as a sign of its ineradicability”; Mantena 2012, 459.
- 38 Pacifism has succeeded politically in relatively small communities of Quakers, Mennonites and Brethren. Although some members of these communities have become convinced of the utility and morality of violence, the dominant ideology remains pacifist.
- 39 Cortright 2008, 77–78.
- 40 Jonas 1966, 716–717; quoted in Casey 2001, 23.
- 41 Casey 2001, 48. World War II dramatically changed attitudes about the United States’s involvement in world affairs, with 76 percent supporting an “active role” by February 1943; Holsti 1996, 17. Holsti (ch.4) also compares the attitudes among opinion leaders and the American public and finds that from the 1970s up until the 1990s the former were generally more keen than the latter to intervene in international affairs, militarily and otherwise.
- 42 Hermann 1992, 870.
- 43 Study by Worldopinion.org and the Chicago Council on Global Affairs and reported by the Council on Foreign Relations. The 16 country group includes Mexico, the United States, France, Russia, Azerbaijan, Egypt, Israel, Palestinian Territories, Turkey, Kenya, Nigeria, China, India, Indonesia, South Korea, and Thailand. The 18 country group adds Iran and Ukraine. Council on Foreign Relations 2011, 23.
- 44 Study by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs in 2006. See Council on Foreign Relations 2011, 14.
- 45 Study by the German Marshall Fund on Transatlantic Trends in 2004. See Council on Foreign Relations, 2011, 28–29.
- 46 Pew Research Center, 2008.
- 47 Roberts and Garton Ash 2011, 372.
- 48 One study of the attitudes of “rank and file” in three of Gandhi’s most successful campaigns found that while few “showed familiarity with the religious or philosophical aspects of nonviolence . . . its requirements in the context of the *satyagrahas* were simple . . . no physical violence under any circumstances.” However, the study warned that “the faith of *satyagrahis* in nonviolence was cathetic-emotive rather than rational or pragmatic . . . [The same] participants may develop a cathetic-emotive response to either violent or nonviolent behavior, depending upon the commitment of their charismatic leader . . . unless a secular nonviolent ideology becomes enshrined in the hearts and minds of men”; Nakhre 1976, 195.
- 49 Lunch and Sperlich 1979, 36. However, African American non-respondents probably biased this number toward a pro-war stance until some opinion leaders in the black community spoke out forcefully against the war. See Berinsky 2004, ch. 5.
- 50 The study asked questions such as whether “violence is proper when it is the only way of defending yourself from others.” On a scale of 1 to 6 (1 being strongly agree and 6 being strongly disagree) the mean answer was 4.2 in spring 1965, 4.06 in fall 1965 and 2.82 in summer 1984; Marwell et al. 1987, 366.
- 51 The authors of the study write that “most of the activists (57 percent) still do not believe that it is correct to use the threat of violence to avoid violence from others. A sizable minority (27 percent) do not even think violence is proper as a means of defending themselves. The activists . . . are a rather distinct group of people—still ‘leftish,’ still pacifist”; Marwell et al. 1987, 372.
- 52 For instance, Andrew Young remarked in an interview that: “Occasionally people would . . . jump up and want to talk bad, and [come] back to the church and [start] talking about going to get their

- guns. You had to talk them down . . . by simply asking questions, ‘What kind of gun you got? . . . And how many have you got? There are at least 200 shotguns out there with buckshot in them. . . . You ever see what buckshot does to a deer?’ . . . most of them had. [M]ake people think about the specifics of violence, and then they realize how suicidal and nonsensical it is.” Interview, Oct. 11, 1985.
- 53 High estimates for the number of people participating in street protests in late January and early February 2011 are 2 million for Cairo. There were also large numbers of people participating in protests in other cities such as Alexandria and Suez. See Nakhoda and Lawrence 2012.
- 54 Council on Foreign Relations, 2011, 23–25.
- 55 These include Terchek 1998; Rudolph and Rudolph 2006; Parel 2006; and Parekh 1989. During and prior to the civil rights movement, critical works include Gregg 1935; Iyer 1973; and Shridharani 1939.
- 56 Sibley 1943. The APSR also published an article on civil disobedience in 1970; Power 1970.
- 57 The *American Journal of Political Science* published one article in the period on the liberal peace and international relations that includes a discussion of a kind of Kantian pacifism; Danilovic and Clare 2007. The *Journal of Politics* published a piece by William Marty in 1971, which describes itself as “a rational attack upon an absolutist ethic of nonviolence”; Marty 1971, 4. *Polity* published a piece on the civil rights movement in 2005 and a work on cosmopolitan political theory, which discusses Gandhi, in 2009; Luders 2005, Godrej 2009. *Political Research Quarterly* published four articles on pacifism in the 1960s, including a plea for further study of Gandhi’s methods; Power 1963; Tinker 1971; Steck 1965; and Leonard 1969. But since then it has only published one related article, on peace movements in the 1980s; Hermann 1992.
- 58 The Global Nonviolent Action Database provides a “case map” with electronic pins that blanket much of the planet; Lakey 2012.
- 59 The *Journal of Conflict Resolution* and the *Journal of Peace Research* have had and continue to have broad influence in political science.
- 60 Roberts and Garton Ash 2011; Nepstad 2011; Schock 2005; and Chenoweth and Stephan 2011.
- 61 For regime change, 27 percent of violent campaigns achieved success, 61 percent failed and 12 percent had partial success. The corresponding figures for nonviolence are 59 percent, 17 percent, and 25 percent. For violent anti-occupation 36 percent, 54 percent, and 10 percent. For nonviolent anti-occupation 35 percent, 41 percent, and 24 percent. No nonviolent campaigns for secession have succeeded but only four of the forty-one attempts at violent secession achieved their aims; Chenoweth and Stephan 2011, 73.
- 62 Ibid., 66–67.
- 63 Ibid., 213.
- 64 Ibid., 7.
- 65 The qualification “legal” is required here because slavery still exists in many forms despite the ban by governments of the world; see Bales 2004.
- 66 Patterson 1982; Miller 2012.
- 67 The political process leading to the passing of the Thirteenth Amendment was arguably the real end of slavery in the United States. Others have argued that slavery did not end until the civil rights movement; see Blackmon 2009. For a comparative analysis of various post-emancipation situations see Foner 1983.
- 68 Slave rebellions, slave ship insurrections, and the Haitian Revolution played an important role in the debates between abolitionists and proslavery forces, but were often a political liability for abolitionists; Matthews 2006. On violent rebellions see Lovejoy and Hogendorn 1993; Genovese 1979; and Taylor 2006.
- 69 See Beard 1987; Melzer and Rabine 1992; and Rowbotham 1974.
- 70 Biddle 2004. See also Brooks 2003 and Brooks and Stanley 2007.
- 71 Arreguín-Toft 2005, 4.
- 72 For an overview see Donohue and Wolfers 2006.
- 73 For a recent exchange see Schiemann 2012 and Howes 2012.
- 74 Rejali 2007, ch. 21.
- 75 Abrahms 2006. Pape claims that terrorism *has* been successful, especially against democracies; Pape 2003. Both his methods and theory have been the subject of critique. Ashworth et al. 2008; Chenoweth and Stephan 2011, 25–26.
- 76 A precursor study is Payne 2004.
- 77 Goldstein argues that, in broad scope, war has been decreasing since ancient times. However, his main focus is on the reduction in warfare since its recent peak in the World Wars; Goldstein 2011, ch. 2.
- 78 Goldstein 2011.
- 79 Pinker 2011.
- 80 See list of figures at Pinker 2011, xvii–xx.
- 81 Although peacekeeping itself may involve more or less use of force. See Goldstein 2011, 114–115.
- 82 Pinker introduces a variant of the prisoner’s dilemma he calls the Pacifist’s Dilemma and suggests that factors such as the proliferation of strong states (to punish aggressors), commerce (which increases the benefits of mutual pacifism), and the feminization of cultures (which makes aggression less beneficial) can change the incentive structures that encourage

- aggressors to harm “pacifists.” However, he does not consider how the use of nonviolent techniques against an aggressor might change their incentives; Pinker 2011, 678–692.
- 83 Attackers won wars over 60 percent of the time from 1900–1974, but less than 25 percent of the time from 1975 to 1999; see Biddle 2004, 23.
- 84 Schell 2004, 431–432.
- 85 Pearlman and Nepstad 2012, 995.
- 86 Schock 2005, 142–143.
- 87 For instance, Chinese students in 1989 relied heavily on one nonviolent method, gathering in Tiananmen Square. They might have had a better chance of remaining resilient and regaining leverage if they had cultivated dispersive nonviolent techniques after the military cleared the square; *ibid.*, 166–169.
- 88 Pearlman 2011, 2, 11–20. See also Siegel 2011.
- 89 Chenoweth and Stephan 2011, 32, 40.
- 90 Despite these informational advantages for nonviolence, they acknowledge that violent acts can be an effective tool for gaining media attention and spreading propaganda; *ibid.*, 36.
- 91 *Ibid.*, 32–39.
- 92 Nepstad 2011, 128–130.
- 93 Chenoweth and Stephan 2011, 58.
- 94 *Ibid.*, 48.
- 95 *Ibid.*, 49.
- 96 *Ibid.*, 58.
- 97 Tarrow 1998; Schock 2005, 153, 162; Chenoweth and Stephan 2011, 18–19, 21; Nepstad 2011, 124–126.
- 98 Chenoweth and Stephan 2011, 25.
- 99 Biddle 2004, 21.
- 100 Arreguín-Toft 2005, 29–33.
- 101 Biddle 2004, Chapter 3.
- 102 Biddle 2005, 456–457, 462.
- 103 Merom 2003.
- 104 This from a review of Reiter and Stam 2002 and Pollack 2002. See also Brooks 2003 and, 2008.
- 105 Power 2007. See also Isaac et al. 2008.
- 106 Sharp is widely influential in peace studies and has been read closely by leaders of nonviolent movements around the world. See Stolberg 2011 and Arrow 2011. However, his name has appeared only twice in *Political Theory* since *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* was negatively reviewed in *Political Theory* in 1974 (the reviewer calls the work “unclear,” accuses Sharp of introducing an “illusory distinction” between physical violence and nonviolence, and claims that the work prides itself on its “non-existent novelty”). The other two references are in a review essay in connection with Arendt’s influence and in Tully’s recent discussion of non-
- violence discussed later; Friedrich 1974; Lane 1997, 138.
- 107 Arendt 1970, 53; Arendt 1994, 171; see also 187–188.
- 108 For an extensive discussion of this issue see Howes 2009, 107–110.
- 109 There is controversy among Arendt scholars as to her success in separating violence and power. See Kateb 2000, 133; Isaac 1992, 134; Canovan 1992, 141; McGowan 1997, 264.
- 110 Arendt 1970, 43–56.
- 111 They write: “Thus, numbers may matter, but they are insufficient to guarantee success. This is because the quality of participation—including the diversity of resistance participants, strategic and tactical choices made by the opposition, and its ability to adapt and innovate—may be as important as the quantity of participants”; Chenoweth and Stephan 2011, 39.
- 112 Sharp 1973, 37.
- 113 Sharp also presages interpretations of Gandhi that emphasize his political insights and sees connections between Arendt’s work and his own. See Sharp 1979.
- 114 Howes 2009, 179.
- 115 *Ibid.*, 104–105, 116–117.
- 116 *Ibid.*, 123–129.
- 117 Godrej 2006. It should be noted, however, that Rawls does provide a theoretical justification for the role for civil disobedience in democracies in his seminal work; Rawls 1971, ch. 6.
- 118 Godrej 2006, 315.
- 119 *Ibid.*, 304. In a separate piece, Godrej argues that Gandhi fused “warrior-like political nonviolence . . . with ethical asceticism,” demonstrating that “political assertiveness [is most effectively and properly] expressed through the bodily dimension of political action”; Godrej 2012, 438. This is not to say that Gandhi rejected reason *in toto*, but only that nonviolent “bodily self-suffering appeals to both reason and emotion [which] are thus complementary”; Godrej 2012, 454.
- 120 Tully 2011.
- 121 Mantena, 2012, 455. Other portrayals of Gandhi as a kind of political realist include Terchek, 2011, 126–127, Shridharani, 1939, Chapters 9 and 10, Gregg, 1959, Chapters 6 and 7.
- 122 Mantena 2012, 459.
- 123 *Ibid.*, 460.
- 124 *Ibid.*, 460–461.
- 125 *Ibid.*, 462.
- 126 *Ibid.*, 462. See also Mehta 2010.
- 127 Bondurant contrasts Gandhi and Marx in this regard: “Where Marx . . . predetermined the structure and direction of conflict, the Gandhian

philosophy insists that the process and technique must suffice. A technique such as *satyagraha* could only lead to solutions yet unknown”; Bondurant 1958, 194.

128 Mantena 2012, 468.

129 One biographer writes that Weber was thinking “first and foremost of the pacifists” in his critique of an ethics of conviction. He had undoubtedly set his sights on critiquing pacifists such as Tolstoy and Germans who were disenchanted with the violence of the war, but he may have also had Woodrow Wilson and his adoption of pacifist rhetoric for martial ends in mind as well. See Radkau 2011, 516–517.

130 Weber 1958, 127.

131 Chenoweth and Stephan 2011, 8–9.

132 Arendt 1998, 205.

133 For Gandhi on means and ends see Gandhi 2000, 26–28.

134 Weber also writes that only a kind of “inner poise” can prepare us for the fact that ten years from now it is “very probable that little of what many of you, and I too, have wished and hoped for will be fulfilled”; Weber 1958, 127.

135 Gandhi 2000, 6.

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