

Should I Help the Empire with My Hand?

Confucian Resources for a Paradigm of Just Peacemaking

Confucianism is not generally considered to be a pacifist tradition. However canonical texts like the Mencius offer important elements that could undergird a paradigm of just peacemaking: a prophetic critique of the status quo on grounds of social welfare, an emphasis on relationality, a strategic position advocating the extension of empathy, and a faith in the goodness of human nature and thus the perfectibility of human persons. Among other things, these points represent significant motivators for social justice, conflict transformation, and restorative justice. Perhaps most importantly, however, the this-worldly orientation of the Confucian tradition, as found in the Mencian example, offers a theoretical model with potential for dissolving the traditional paradigm's dichotomy found in such oppositions as ideal and real, faithfulness/effectiveness, and clean hands/dirty hands that have historically made debates between pacifism and Just War so intractable.

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“Just Peacemaking” is the name given to a new paradigm advocated by Glen Stassen and an impressive collection of fellow scholars. ^[1] These thirty authors, themselves a mix of pacifists and just war theorists, have done an admirable job of grounding their peacebuilding model in both empirical evidence of concrete practices ^[2] and Christian biblical theology.

^[3] While the former opens the paradigm to universal appeal and application, the latter, while no less necessary for its part, leaves a multifaceted question hanging in the air: What resources exist for grounding parallel models in other religious traditions? I take as my inspiration the many productive efforts to find interreligious support for discussions of global human rights and am gratified to discover that there is already an ongoing effort to ground the just peacemaking model in the Abrahamic traditions of Judaism and Islam, ^[4] but this obviously leaves much work to be done outside of the Western family of beliefs.

As a comparativist, I acknowledge dual objectives in my investigation. When exploring the

possibilities for grounding a model of just peacemaking in another tradition, in this present case the Confucian tradition of East Asia, I am also interested in discovering new resources for approaching our own ongoing questions in new ways, perhaps with fresh eyes gained from a different perspective. For this present work, I have looked primarily at the ancient Chinese text Mengzi, or in the Latinized form familiar in the West today, the Mencius, in either case, of course, named after the author, Master Meng. ^[5] This choice was made partly because there is already at least one excellent study on peace and the Analects of Confucius ^[6] and partly because my investigation into one particular passage yielded insight worth pursuing within the context of the perennial Western debates on pacifism.

The double purpose thus finds its unity in the conversation that arises between a contemporary paradigm and an ancient text from an alien tradition. While the former seeks some common ground for authentically framing the paradigm in terms of that alien tradition, the latter, in keeping with the dialogic nature of the conversation metaphor, challenges the contextual understanding out of which that paradigm has grown, as we shall see, calling into question the traditional polarities of means and ends, consequentialism and deontology, effectiveness and faithfulness.

I shall begin by quoting the passage in question, although its relevance may not become entirely clear until the final section of this essay:

Chunyu Kun said, “Is it prescribed by the rites that, in giving and receiving, man and woman should not touch each other?”

“It is,” said Mengzi.

[Chunyu Kun then asked,] “When one’s sister-in-law is drowning, does one stretch out a hand to help her?”

[Mengzi replied,] “Not to help a sister-in-law who is drowning is to be a brute. It is prescribed by the rites that, in giving and receiving, man and woman should not touch each other, but in stretching out a helping hand to the drowning sister-in-law one uses one’s discretion.”

[Chunyu Kun continued,] “Now the Empire is drowning. Why do you not help it?”

[Mengzi replied,] “When the Empire is drowning, one helps it with the Way [or Dao]; when a sister-in-law is drowning, one helps her with one’s hand. Would you have me help the Empire with my hand?” ^[7]

It is helpful to note a few things about the passage just quoted. Firstly, and perhaps somewhat ironically, Mengzi presumes the inherent goodness of both the empire and the duty of helping it, in marked contrast to the perspective held by many contemporary Christians that empire is fundamentally at odds with the Reign of God. This may be to some extent simply a translation issue, since translators Brian Van Norden and Irene Bloom both render the Chinese here merely as world, ^[8] but it remains worth noting that Mengzi lived in a time of empire and, despite a radical critique of the status quo, an interest in social justice, and an alternative paradigm of power, one searches in vain for a direct renunciation of the feudal system and the empire structure of his day. We would do well, however, to recall that there is a similar lack in the recorded words of Jesus (or even Paul) with regard to any explicit critique of the institution of slavery or the empire of their day.

Secondly, remaining for the moment with the Western comparisons, we find metaphorical reference to hands in the well-known accusation that pacifists are only concerned with the purity of clean hands, what I shall later refer to as the clean hands critique. Can we perhaps see Chunyu Kun's question to Mengzi as a challenge to get his hands dirty in the effort to save the Empire, bending his legalistic principles in the service of a less selfish goal than mere personal virtue?

Thirdly, if I may stretch this comparative metaphor even further, the references to hands call to mind the story, which appears in all three of the synoptic Gospels, of Jesus healing a man's withered hand on the Sabbath, against the legalistic opposition of the Pharisees of his day. Recall how theologians like Reinhold Niebuhr and other "Christian Realists" have accused Christian pacifists of adopting a new legalism in the law of love. In this connection, we might profitably ask if Mengzi is here himself guilty of the sort of legalism that so angered Jesus.

So, having thus introduced some of the salient themes and issues, I shall now proceed to establish what I take to be the central problem for pacifism, explain how I think the model of just peacemaking addresses that problem for Christians, and then broaden just peacemaking to another religious tradition, considering the appropriateness of a Confucian text as a resource for Just Peacemaking.

The Central Problem of Pacifism

Arguably, two of the central problems for specifically Christian pacifism are whether Jesus truly meant what pacifists think ^[9] and whether Jesus' model is truly normative for the rest of us. Despite a long history of controversy over the first question, Reinhold Niebuhr famously argued that the pacifist interpretation was largely accurate, saying, in his oft anthologized chapter "Why the Christian Church Is Not Pacifist":

It is very foolish to deny that the ethic of Jesus is an absolute and uncompromising ethic. It is, in the phrase of Ernst Troeltsch, an ethic of "love universalism and love perfectionism." ^[10]

Niebuhr contends, however, that this new legalism of the love ethic ought not to be normative for us (though he paradoxically calls it "finally and ultimately normative"). ^[11] For by his analysis, an absolutist nonviolent ethic means simply that a new law has been founded, with all the formalist problems of the old law. In a typically Pauline ^[12] and Protestant interpretation, Niebuhr reminds us that Christ did not bring a new law to condemn us, but rather the good news of God's grace to release us. ^[13] By contrast, any form of legalism ignores the sinful nature of humanity and the profound inability of human persons to find justification through works. The emphasis on works and law becomes a sort of idolatry.

In a similar manner, Jesus confronts the Pharisaical legalism of his day on the matter of the Sabbath regulations in a rather striking (and symbolically relevant) example. As already cited above, a man with a shriveled hand approaches Jesus on the Sabbath, while the Pharisees watch to see if he will break the Sabbath rule of rest by the work of healing (Matt. 12:9-14, Mark 3:1-6, Luke 6: 6-11). Knowing what they are thinking, Jesus asks them bluntly (in Matthew), "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a man than a sheep!" (Matt. 12: 11-2, NIV). ^[14] He thus calls to the Pharisees' attention the hair-splitting emphasis on outward actions in stark contrast to the intended ethical import of the law. ^[15] And then, according to Mark, Jesus gets angry and says to the man, "Stretch out your hand" and the hand is then healed (Mark 3:5, NIV). The Pharisees in these conflicts are too concerned with their own legal uprightness; they are only concerned with clean hands.

Now to make the same point with examples of Jesus healing on the Sabbath in the face of

criticism from his Pharisaical opponents, I could have appealed to his healing of a crippled woman (Luke 13:10-17), a man suffering from swelling (Luke 14:1-6), a crippled man (John 5:1-18), or a blind man (John 9:1-16). I chose the example of the man with the crippled hand, not merely because it appears in all three of the Synoptics, but also for the metaphorical value of an image associated with hands. As a pacifist myself, I find the strongest argument against pacifism is what might be called the “clean hands critique.” As philosopher Brian Orend puts the case,

The pacifist, it is said, refuses to take the brutal measures necessary for the defense of himself and his country, for the sake of maintaining his own inner moral purity. It is contended that the pacifist is thus a kind of free-rider, gathering all the benefits of citizenship while not sharing all its burdens. Another inference drawn is that the pacifist himself constitutes a kind of internal threat to the over-all security of his state. ^[16]

In specifically Christian terms, J. Lawrence Burkholder makes a compelling case for social responsibility in his book, *The Problem of Social Responsibility from the Perspective of the Mennonite Church*, echoing Niebuhr’s view that the absolute perfectionist pacifism of traditional Anabaptist-Mennonite thought may be maintained only at the expense of abdicating any responsibility for effecting justice in the world. ^[17] Note that Niebuhr thinks Jesus’ ethic cannot ultimately be normative for us today because it fails to be “immediately applicable to the task of securing justice in a sinful world.” ^[18] The conclusion seems to be that the Christian pacifist, if motivated by an ethic of love for others, undermines her own moral value by blindly adhering to a rule of omission even in situations where its violation would arguably lead to greater benefits for others, not for any concrete alternative good produced, but merely to retain her moral purity, her clean hands.

Ironically, Orend, after presenting what he refers to as “a very popular just war criticism of pacifism,” proceeds to quickly dismiss it. ^[19] As he rightly implies, anyone can be accused of clinging to moral purity when their view of responsibility conflicts with another’s. But there is a strong parallel here between the anti-pacifist clean hands critique and the typical utilitarian criticism of rule-based normative theories as “rule idolatry.” ^[20] Since the charge has normally applied to positions with the potential for undermining the very values aimed at, it is difficult to see how it would be applied in the reverse direction. What sense is there, the utilitarian asks, in refusing to kill one person, when that act would save fifty other lives,

unless you attach an undue moral worth to your personal purity, your clean hands? ^[21]

Given the immediately preceding points, however, one may well ask why Niebuhr, in privileging the work of effecting justice, is not guilty of an “effectiveness idolatry.” It is true that his position is not a legalism per se, but it still represents a work that he feels so bound to that it trumps the plain reading of Jesus’ ethic that he ultimately calls normative. This is surely a simplification of his view that comes dangerously close to a straw person attack, except that it seems just as certain that whatever answer he could give about *Gelassenheit* and grace could be applied to one’s attempt to pursue Jesus’ ethic in the first place. Why does acknowledgement of our sinful nature (and the need for forgiveness) mean that we need to abandon what Jesus taught? Is it so that we can pursue our own ideas about social justice, only then to fall back on grace when we (inevitably) fail? Why not aim directly at the supposed ideal? Where does this discontinuity come from?

The Just Peacemaking Model

Though I think Orend dispenses with the important clean hands argument entirely too quickly, ^[22] he makes an important point in his dismissal: “The very idea of a selfish pacifist simply does not ring true: many pacifists have, historically, paid a very high price for their pacifism during wartime (through severe ostracism and even jail time) and their pacifism seems less rooted in regard for inner moral purity than it is in regard for constructing a less violent and more humane world order.” ^[23] But here we need to ask what sort of pacifism we are talking about. Orend notably excludes religious pacifism from his considerations and—John Howard Yoder’s remarkably diverse typology as set forth in his book *Nevertheless* notwithstanding—the traditional example of isolationist pacifism historically lived out by the *Stille im Land* (and awarded special status as non-heretical pacifism by Niebuhr) ^[24] has very little claim on Orend’s generous description, unless it be that the “less violent and more humane world order” constructed is merely that within the separatist community (in the various Mennonite and Amish enclaves or colonies around the world) or, more recently, the church within the world.

At this juncture, we might consider what distinguishes just peacemaking from this traditional form of Christian pacifism, noting that the authors of the just peacemaking model consider it to be compatible with both pacifism and just war theory. ^[25] The concrete

practices advocated are broken down into the following 10 categories:

1. Support nonviolent direct action
2. take independent initiatives to reduce threat
3. Use cooperative conflict resolution
4. Acknowledge responsibility for conflict and injustice and seek repentance and forgiveness
5. Advance democracy, human rights, and religious liberty
6. Foster just and sustainable economic development
7. Work with emerging cooperative forces in the international system
8. Strengthen the United Nations and international efforts for cooperation and human rights
9. Reduce offensive weapons and weapons trade, and
10. Encourage grassroots peacemaking groups and voluntary associations. ^[26]

If just peacemaking could be characterized simply by a disposition, it might be the interest in actively maintaining peaceful relations—as opposed to mere abstention from violence—and if it could be boiled down to a bumpersticker, it might read “Wage Peace.” We must be clear here that this proactive element is already present in some forms of pacifism prior to the just peacemaking model. In fact, since the authors of the model emphasize the effectiveness of their practices based on historical and contemporary experience, there is nothing novel about the proactive approach.

Rather, the distinction between just peacemaking and pacifism in this regard lies in this disposition as explicitly integral to the model, whereas pacifism is itself such a large umbrella concept that these ideas come across as novel, uncommon, or revolutionary. So much is this so that, in the late Twentieth century, Daniel Berrigan can claim, “There are no makers of peace because the making of peace is at least as costly as the making of war—at least as exigent, at least as disruptive, at least as liable to bring disgrace and prison and death in its wake.” ^[27] Likewise, though members of the historic peace churches responded to a similar challenge laid out by pacifist Ron Sider with the subsequent development of the Christian Peacemaker Teams, it remains an alternative movement with few parallels. ^[28] Furthermore, (as mentioned already above) the just peacemaking paradigm is importantly meant to be compatible with just war theory, which is actually the majority view among the

model's authors.

Though the just war theory, when applied stringently, disavows most uses of military engagement and is considered by many to be a tool of peace, the proactive peacemaking element is egregiously absent from its historical application. For a theory ostensibly oriented around a disposition against violence—taking as a grounding presupposition that violence must be morally justified—the historical application of, for example, the *jus ad bellum* condition of last resort amounts disappointingly to nothing more than a slippery slope that for many pacifists demonstrates the illegitimacy of ever admitting justification for violence. ^[30] The attention just peacemaking gives to concrete practices for preventing wars before they become “inevitable” is a much needed and long overdue corrective to this dominant view.

When the minority pacifist view is then explicitly supplemented by a model like just peacemaking, the clean hands critique seems far less compelling. Consider again the consequentialist calculus of better or worse results where the pacifist is accused of privileging his clean hands at the expense of his social responsibility for creating a more peaceful world. The proponent of “realism” frames the question concerning the worth of a particular violent action but ultimately begs the question. In isolating each case to the particular details of certain crisis situations, the framer of the question ignores the cost of military preparedness, ignores the long term effects of exacting justice from one perspective, while inciting the enactment of justice from some other perspective, and ignores the creative possibilities of forgiveness, reconciliation, and conflict transformation. ^[31] In short, “Violence is the behavior of someone incapable of imagining other solutions to the problem at hand.” ^[32]

As with theodicies and the problem of evil, however, the problem of responsibility remains, though the edge becomes dulled. I would argue that this will always be the case, and appropriately so. What the “realist” means by responsibility represents moral claims on us that ought not to be ignored any more than the very real evil that the religious skeptic points to in the problem of evil. As twentieth century philosopher W. D. Ross explains in his value pluralist normative theory, though your actual duty may defeat all other *prima facie* duties, the claim on you by those *prima facie* duties does not *eo ipso* simply disappear. ^[33] In the case of social responsibility and violence, the tragic question the pacifist must always confront is whether this particular situation (say the Nazis in World War II) would not in

fact yield a much worse evil if left unaddressed with a violent option. Though I would argue that the reverse question—whether this tragic war could have been avoided, thus saving the world much evil—is the more sorely needed corrective, this remaining tension is likely the reason why the majority of the *Just Peacemaking* authors still believe that the possibility of a just war remains a necessary and legitimate option.

The Confucian Tradition and Peacemaking

Having set up the model of just peacemaking and the problems it addresses, it is time to assess the promises—and challenges—offered by the Confucian tradition. Given the modern reputation, in many ways deserved, of Confucianism as a staunchly conservative and traditionalist defender of the status quo, it is easy to forget that Confucius, and his later follower Mengzi, were in many ways prophets of dissent and critics of the status quo. They were both unreservedly critical of practices contemporary to them that they saw as immoral, and also of individual rulers and ministers. At times, Confucius even had reason to fear for his life in this regard. As sinologist Judith Berling remarks, it was only later, after the *rujia* (or school of the scholar, as the early Confucian tradition was called in Chinese) became the official state ideology, that the tradition became too closely identified with the status quo and thus ineffectual as a critical voice.^[34] Of course, the other major contributor to this conservative reputation is the Confucian emphasis on maintaining *li*, or what some call “ritual propriety.” At first blush, this emphasis on rituals, etiquette, and moral rules looks strongly like a form of legalism.

Though neither the Confucian tradition in general nor the eponymous figure behind the Mencius text are typically seen as pacifist, this need not, it seems to me, preclude us from finding resources in either the tradition or this text for a model of just peacemaking. If we recall that the just peacemaking paradigm is compatible with both pacifist and just war traditions, then it could well be argued that Confucianism—and the Mencius—have something to contribute, starting with an alternative paradigm of power. Berling gives us further insight into classical Confucian thought by contrasting the Confucian vision with a (more or less) contemporaneous Chinese tradition tellingly named “Legalism.” She says, “Against the dominance of the Legalists’ statecraft, Confucius offered an alternative message. He argued that statecraft, strong laws, and military might would ultimately fail to establish a stable, harmonious social order. . . . Coercive power was ephemeral and could not

establish genuine peace and harmony.” ^[35] Van Norden makes a similar point specifically regarding the text of the Mencius: “Mengzi agreed with Kongzi [the founder of Confucianism], in regarding war as, at best, a regrettable last resort. In what has become a Chinese proverb, he stated that to try to rule via brute force is as ineffectual as ‘climbing a tree in search of a fish.’” ^[36]

Again, although the Confucian tradition may seem to us to be very legalistic, a primary characteristic is arguably to be found, at least in the earliest classical texts, in relationality. Confucius claims that one of the central strands running through all of his teachings is shu, which is often translated as “reciprocity” ^[37] One of his sayings from the Analects is often referred to as the “negative golden rule”: Don’t do to others what you would not want done to yourself. ^[38]

Following this line of thought, Berling speaks directly to the theme of just peacemaking:

Confucians have always understood peacebuilding in a moral/ethical framework rather than a legal framework. Their understanding invites reflection on the causes of the breakdown of peace and harmony, and the bases for lasting or enduring peace.

Peace, the Confucians argue, is a matter of harmonious relationships among people. The loss of peace is the breakdown of such relationships. While specific events and actual or putative injustices are often cited as the destroyers of peace, these are the symptoms of the breakdown of human relationships. Until human beings change their attitudes, their understanding of the facts, their behaviors toward one another, and even their values, the relationship cannot be restored or mended. ^[39]

Before turning specifically to the textual resources of the Mencius itself, it might be worth pausing to ask what would constitute an answer to the first objective of identifying resources for a model of just peacemaking. One reason I have not only listed the ten practices of just peacemaking, but also reduced the model’s aim down to a bumper sticker-sized disposition (Wage Peace), is to draw attention to the central inspiration that informs these concrete practices. I take it that the practice of peacemaking in Christianity did not come straight out of the Bible but was, as the authors of *Just Peacemaking* claim, ^[40]

gathered from evidence of what has actually worked to fulfill the peacemaker role inspired by the teachings of Jesus. For that matter, I take it as well that the list is not closed but would be open to additions or context-relevant adaptations.

Taking up, as one example, practice number 5 (advance democracy, human rights, and religious liberty), there is a large and growing scholarly literature concerning the possible grounding of human rights in Confucian and generally East Asian ways of thinking. ^[41] More specifically, the idea of advancing democracy, in the context of Confucian cultures, has prompted some discussion of consultation groups as potentially more in line with the resources available in the tradition. ^[42] One should note that consultation groups are also advocated by some Western theorists of democratic method ^[43]—and that one of the primary inspirations for democracy in the Confucian tradition is the Mencian claim that government has the central aim of providing for the welfare of the people. ^[44]

Make no mistake—the text of the Mencius is no more pacifist (or democratic) than the US Constitution of 1787 is egalitarian. But just as the incipient principles of justice were enlarged in various subsequent amendments, ^[45] modern scholars of Confucianism have pointed back to the foundational principles found in the Mencius for grounding authentically Chinese ideas of democracy. ^[46] My claim is similarly that there are lessons to be learned from this rich text for a model of just peacemaking.

Mengzi and the Themes of Just Peacemaking

In turning then finally to the text of the Mencius, I shall detail in turn, Mengzi's disposition against war, his appeal to various just war criteria, his recognition of the destructive cycle of violence, and his own alternative model, grounded in his faith in human goodness, before returning in the concluding section to my discussion of hands in relation to the opening passage.

One thing that pacifism, just war, and just peacemaking all share is a strong presumption against violence. Now Mengzi himself was born into the infamous Warring States period and is seemingly interested in a reduction of warfare. Accordingly, in 7B4, Mengzi characterizes war as a “great crime,” ^[47] and in 4A14 he asserts that “those who are good at war deserve the greatest punishment.” ^[48] As already noted, Mengzi claims in 1A7 that rule by force is not effective. ^[49] In many cases, war is counterproductive, so, for example,

Mengzi counsels against waging war during the planting and harvesting seasons. ^[50]

Like the preceding advice, Mengzi's most direct critique of warfare is focused on interests internal to the state, attempting to halt aggressive warfare directed outwards, because of the disastrous effects this causes internally, rather than out of any concern for justice to the states that would otherwise be targets of aggression. This is ironic considering Mengzi's own critique of ethics motivated by psychological egoism (or self-interested calculation), which seems aimed primarily at the doctrines of the Mohists. ^[51] This principle notwithstanding, Mengzi also frames his council against aggressive wars in terms that his royal interlocutors will accept, as, for example, the claim that "the benevolent have no enemies." ^[52] Likewise, when asked who can unite the various Warring States, Mengzi replies that only "One who does not have a taste for killing people can unify [the world]." ^[53] Ultimately, however, when he meets a man who has taken on himself the noble goal of convincing two rulers in conflict that war is unprofitable, Mengzi again criticizes the appeal to interests, claiming that benevolence and righteousness are the proper motivations for avoiding war. ^[54]

Similarly, Mengzi clearly advocates various just war criteria based simply on the rightness of the principles. He repeatedly asserts that only legitimate authorities may enact violence, whether as executioners ^[55] or through warfare. ^[56] Another *jus ad bellum* criterion Mengzi insists on is just cause, insofar as he finds warfare to be justified for only a very narrow range of causes, primarily punitive/corrective actions and war with the purpose of removing a tyrant. ^[57] His comments in 7B3 make it clear that he also thinks the benevolent are restrained in their conduct (a *jus in bello* restriction) when prosecuting a just war, for he claims that the report must surely be false that when the benevolent King Wu overthrew the Tyrant Zhou, "the blood spilled was enough to carry staves along with it." ^[58]

Though the *jus ad bellum* requirement of last resort might require a bit more reading between the lines of the text, translator Van Norden summarizes Mengzi's position on war as "a final resort that usually causes more trouble than it solves." ^[59] We have already noted the ways in which Mengzi thinks warfare is simply counterproductive. However, we find in 7B7 an intriguingly suggestive insight into the cycle of violence that is fed by the violence of last resort. In this passage, Mengzi notes that killing another's father or brother prompts them, in turn, to kill your father or brother. He opens the section by saying, "It is only now

that I understand the severity of killing someone's parent." [60] We may only wonder what has transpired to give the author this insight, but his closing words poignantly emphasize the responsibility bourn by those who contribute to the cycle of violence: "Although you did not kill your father or brother yourself, there is just a moment's time between the two." [61]

Consistent with the Confucian vision Berling outlined above, Mengzi has an alternative paradigm for power. In contrast to the legalist ideal of strong laws with strong penalties, Mengzi repeatedly extols the benefits of benevolent government. He takes more than a theoretical interest in social justice (relevant to practice number 6), giving very concrete advice concerning taxation (which should not be too burdensome), [62] public works (criticizing rulers who fail to repair bridges), [63] and a plan for equitable distribution in agriculture known as the well-field system. [64] As noted above, the purpose of government is, after all, the welfare of the people. When asked how heaven decides on whom it will bestow *tianming* ("mandate" or "Divine Right" to rule, Mengzi replies with the verses from the Odes: "Heaven sees with the people's eyes; Heaven hears with the people's ears"—indicating here and elsewhere that the approval of the people is paramount. [65]

In contrast to the thinking of his later colleague Xunzi, Mengzi has an abundant faith in the natural goodness of humanity, including a capacity for moral perfectibility. [66] No human, according to Mengzi, can be "devoid of a heart sensitive to the sufferings of others". [67] To be human, one must have the sprouts of compassion, shame, deference, and moral judgement. In 2A6, Mengzi makes this case by appeal to a thought experiment where one is asked to imagine the reaction of anyone who sees a baby about to fall into a well. Mengzi insists that anyone (who is still human) would pre-reflectively have an urge to help. [68] This perspective has significant import for practices like conflict resolution (practice #3). Rather than every conflict being caused by a depraved and incorrigible Hitler, a Mencian could, in the way that Gandhi and King obviously did, see his opponent as one with the capacity to be persuaded, as one open to the workings of empathy—ultimately one amenable to cooperative problem-solving.

For Mengzi, his belief in humanity's moral perfectibility culminates in the repeated claim that anyone can become a Yao or a Shun (two famous sages from a previous era). [69] In practical terms, his dialogues with the rulers of his day demonstrate his belief that even those who currently fail at fulfilling the role of king (because they lack concern for the well-

being of their people) have the heart of empathy necessary to become true kings. In the dialogue with King Xuan of Qi, Mengzi explains his strategy of extending benevolence—moving from the example of empathy toward an ox that the king saved from being sacrificed to empathy for his people. ^[70] Though Confucianism is known for the idea of love with distinctions, affirming the naturalness of loving more those who are closer to us, ^[71] the tradition does not leave it at that, but sees rather an obligation to extend that empathy outwards ^[72] in a way that contemporary Confucian scholar Tu Weiming characterizes as a series of concentric circles. ^[73] For Tu, the trajectory that can be traced from this origin in the Mencius through the work of Neo-Confucian Wang Yangming culminates in what Tu calls the “anthropocosmic vision,” where benevolence is an obligation not merely to one’s own family, or nation, or even species, but to the entirety of the cosmos.

Though Mengzi represents only the beginnings of this development in the tradition, it is already clear in the Mencius that the model of the ideal ruler would transcend the interests of his own realm. In fact, the ideal war seems to be exemplified by the campaign of King Tang who reportedly marched in each of the cardinal directions, meeting with no resistance because all of the surrounding peoples were eager to be liberated from their own unworthy tyrants. Similarly the ideal form of rule is noncoercive, based in *de*, or virtue, rather than force. ^[74] Citing passage 2A3 from the Mencius, Van Norden makes this point in the introduction to his translation, appealing to Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., as exemplars of leadership through *de*, which amounts to a sort of moral charisma. ^[75] Mengzi further explains in 2A6 that if a compassionate ruler were to implement compassionate government, “bringing order to the world is in the palm of your hand.” ^[76]

Helping Hands that Compromise the Way of Heaven

This conveniently brings us back to metaphors dealing with hands. As a pacifist, I have always taken the question of responsibility represented by the clean hands critique to be the most formidable criticism to confront—the idea that there are significant goods to be pursued for which the pacifist has abandoned responsibility in order to keep his or her hands clean, perhaps like Pilate washing his hands of it all. As Niebuhr puts it, Christian pacifists seem guilty of adopting a new legalism in the law of love. But Jesus had little patience for the legalism of the Pharisees who criticized him for healing on the Sabbath. According to the Gospel of Mark, Jesus responds angrily when asking the man to stretch out his withered

hand to be healed.

If anything, the situation Mengzi found in the opening passage is reversed, more analogous to the pacifist's legalism than the Christ's Sabbath-breaking. Chunyu Kun, after all, is asking that Mengzi set aside his strict and demanding morality in order to be more practical in his dealings with kings. The analogy of applying one's discretion in saving the sister-in-law with a hand, thus violating the rituals, begs Mengzi to apply the same discretion ^[77] in his overall approach to political reform, perhaps accepting *realpolitik* instead of the Confucian alternative paradigm. But in his commentary on this text, the great Neo-Confucian synthesizer Zhu Xi explains that to bend the Way in order to save the world is "to lose at the start the tool that you use to save it." ^[78]

Translator D.C. Lau says of this example that the use of the hand in saving the drowning woman is an expedient compromise that does not affect the result of saving the woman. It is the result of an exceedingly easy moral calculation, based on one of many means that would effect the same result. He calls this an "instrumental means." As to the Empire, however, "In their time, the common way of describing the Empire in disorder was to say that it lacked the Way. ... Hence to save the Empire is to provide it with the Way. ... We can see from this that the Way is a different kind of means. It becomes part of the end it helps to realize. ... We shall call this 'constitutive means.'" ^[79]

To further clarify what he means by this, Lau explains that the Way "is a unique means for the realization of the desired end of saving the empire. One could, of course, use a watered-down version of the Way instead, but then the end realized would be less perfect." ^[80] Other examples of constitutive means might include the need to practice the virtues in order to become virtuous, there being no other means to that end. The same would be true with acts of friendship necessary to constitute such a relationship, or even the need to practice swimming in order to become a swimmer. Taking this in another direction more directly relevant in content to the issues of war and peace, philosopher Jeffrey Reiman opposes the death penalty not because it is unjust, but because it fails to serve the civilizing mission of the state. He asks whether it is really possible to properly demonstrate the sanctity of life by executing murderers. There is, after all, good reason we do not torture them to death, which would arguably have more deterrent value. ^[81]

So, in the case of our opening passage, Mengzi's interlocutor has here failed to understand

the nature of the Way. Echoing Zhu Xi, Lau claims he “did not realize that the price for such a compromise was so high as to defeat its very purpose.” ^[82] Insofar as Chunyu Kun is suggesting a watered-down version of the Way be offered as a compromise to those rulers who find the Way to be too demanding or too constraining on their personal exercise of power, Lau suggests that Mengzi’s last question probably represents exasperation on his part; fittingly, we might even imagine he is angry: “Would you have me help the Empire with my hand?”

Perhaps more fitting for our current exposition, Van Norden renders the final question “How could I save the world with my hand?” ^[83] If the pacifist’s position is bare abstention from violence, then he is indeed guilty of a new legalism, wishing only to keep his hands clean. But if the pacifist takes a proactive attitude, one we might call “waging peace” and consistent with the model of just peacemaking, then she sees her refusal to participate in violence as part of a larger perspective on power and relationality—one, in fact, that sees the act of living out the alternative as itself integral to the end aimed at. As Mark Juergensmeyer explains in his book *Gandhi’s Way*, “If you attempt to use violent means to achieve a peaceful end, ... you will fail.” ^[84]

Juergensmeyer notes that for Gandhi, “The means and the ends are intertwined inextricably.” ^[85] More specifically, “if you use violence as a strategy for political change, you end up with a political order based on violence. If you do not want that, then you have to plan your strategy for change differently.” ^[86] Although Mengzi ultimately accepts the inevitable justification of some violence, he seems quite clear that the Way cannot be enacted through violence; although he does not directly link nonviolence to his exchange with Chunyu Kun, Master Meng seems quite certain that actually living out the Way is the only path to realizing the Way in the world, ^[87] all of which reminds me of another relevant bumpersticker: “There is no way to peace—peace is the way.” ^[88] And this reference to a Way seems to me to neatly sum up the commonality between the two traditions of Confucianism and just peacemaking: Although neither is explicitly or exclusively pacifist, both offer an alternative path to be followed for the creation of a more harmonious and peaceable world.

The Mencius thus neatly fulfills both of my stated objectives. Within the context of the overall Confucian tradition, this text offers abundant resources for the development of an

authentic model of Confucian just peacemaking (my first objective), while simultaneously offering insights into seemingly intractable disputes within the specifically Christian concern for peacemaking (my second objective). As a pacifist, I am interested in the just peacemaking model of concrete practices for effecting a more peaceful world, because they seem to dull the hard, sharp edge of the clean hands critique. The Confucian, and specifically Mencian, tradition offers an alternative paradigm of power which dissolves for me the conceptual discontinuity between means and ends. Just as Mengzi denies that the Way can be realized in the world by living out any lesser version of it, a more peaceable and harmonious world cannot be realized through violence. It is thus my suggestion that in response to the clean hands critique, we may well echo Mengzi and ask how can we bring peace to the world with blood on our hands?

1. 1. Glen Stassen et al, eds., *Just Peacemaking: The New Paradigm for the Ethics of War and Peace* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2008).
2. 2. Stassen et al., *Just Peacemaking*. The authors explain this orientation on pages 11-13; each chapter supports one of the ten practices with historical examples throughout.
3. 3. Stassen et al. This foundational work is primarily found in the introduction, especially pages 17-34. The authors here reference the ground-laying work of Glen Stassen in his book *Just Peacemaking: Transforming Initiatives for Justice and Peace* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992).
4. 4. Stassen et al., 18-19. See Susan Thistlewaite and Glen Stassen, “Abrahamic Alternatives to War: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives on Just Peacemaking,” <http://www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/sr214.html>.
5. 5. Throughout I adopt the convention, by no means standard, of referring to the text as the Mencius and the philosopher, Confucian disciple, and supposed author as Mengzi.
6. 6. Denise Lardner Carmody and John Tully Carmody, *Peace and Justice in the Scriptures of the World Religions: Reflections on Non-Christian Scriptures* (New York: Paulist, 1998), 70-95.
7. 7. Mencius 4A17. *Mencius*, translated by D. C. Lau (London: Penguin, 1970), 124-5. Character prompts have been added to clarify the dialogue; the names of Ch’un-yü K’un and Mencius have been changed to Pinyin spelling to accommodate uniformity within this essay.

8. 8. Bryan Van Norden, trans., *Mengzi: With Selections from Traditional Commentaries* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2008), 97-8; Irene Bloom, trans., *Mencius* (New York: Columbia UP, 2009), 82.
9. 9. The plain reading of Jesus' words notwithstanding. I am reminded of a recent bumper sticker that reads, "When Jesus said love your enemies, I think he probably meant don't kill them."
10. 10. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Christianity and Power Politics* (Archon, 1969), 8.
11. 11. Niebuhr, *Christianity and Power Politics*, 9.
12. 12. I say Pauline, because, of course, the New Testament witness on this topic is far from univocal. In the Gospel of Matthew, for example, where Jesus calls us to a higher righteousness, he explicitly says that our righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees (5:20).
13. 13. This view is found throughout Niebuhr's works, but see especially *Christianity and Power Politics*, 2-3.
14. 14. See also Luke 13:15 and 14:5.
15. 15. I recognize that the Pharisees of this story were most likely from the school of Shammai, typical of the region of Galilee in Jesus' day, whereas Jesus' own interpretation more closely resembled that of the school of Hillel, more prominent in Judea in the same period.
16. 16. "War," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/war>.
17. 17. J. Lawrence Burkholder, *The Problem of Social Responsibility from the Perspective of the Mennonite Church* (Elkhart: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1989), see for example 114; compare Niebuhr, *Christianity and Power Politics*, 4-5.
18. 18. Niebuhr, *Christianity and Power Politics*, 9.
19. 19. Niebuhr, *Christianity and Power Politics*, 9.
20. 20. On what Smart calls "rule worship," see J. J. C. Smart and Bernard Williams, *Utilitarianism: For & Against* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1963), 5-6.
21. 21. Hugh LaFollette, *The Practice of Ethics* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2007) 210. As LaFollette puts the charge, "They care more about the rules than the people whose lives we affect."
22. 22. "War," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/war>. Brian Orend says, "This 'clean hands' argument is easily, and frequently, over-stated. It is important to note that, to the extent to which any moral stance will commend a

certain set of actions or intentions deemed morally worthy, and condemn others as being reprehensible, the ‘clean hands’ criticism is so malleable as to apply to nearly any substantive doctrine. Every moral and political theory stipulates that one ought to do what it deems good or just and to avoid what it deems bad or unjust. So this popular just war criticism of pacifism is not strong.” Insofar as the clean hands critique closely parallels one of the central criticisms employed by utilitarians against deontological normative theories—the charge of rule idolatry—I consider this dismissal to be too quick. As stated above, the argument is made in both objections: that the value motivating a particular rule (say, love of neighbor or the value of life) may in certain circumstances overwhelmingly count against strict adherence to that same rule (as, for example, the prohibition of violence).

23. 23. “War,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/war>.
24. 24. Niebuhr, *Christianity and Power*, 4-5.
25. 25. Stassen et al, *Just Peacemaking*, 9-11.
26. 26. Stassen et al, *Just Peacemaking*, back cover.
27. 27. Daniel Berrigan, *No Bars to Manhood* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), 57-8.
28. 28. Christian Peacemaker Teams, “History,” <http://www.cpt.org/about/history>.
29. 29. Stassen et al, *Just Peacemaking*, 9.
30. 30. James Sterba “Reconciling Pacifists and Just War Theorists,” *Social Theory & Practice* 18 (Spring 1992): 35. Sterba, for example, claims “one strains to find examples of justified applications of just war theory in recent history,” and is in fact able to cite only two he thinks qualify.
31. 31. David Kratz Mathies, “Does the Ballot Box Lie outside the Perfection of Christ?” *Conrad Grebel Review* 21, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 112-13, and J. Denny Weaver, “Responding to September 11—October 7 and January 29: Which Religion Shall We Follow?” *Conrad Grebel Review* 20, no. 2 (Spring 2002): 92-3. Even on their own terms of effectiveness, the realist typically gets an unrealistic “pass” on expected results. The claim that nonviolence is actually more effective than violence is of course a central thesis of Peter Ackerman & Jack Duvall, *A Force More Powerful: A Century of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: Palgrave, 2000).
32. 32. John Paul Lederach quotes Vicenç Fisas in *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace* (New York: Oxford UP, 2005), 29. The original quotation, apparently paraphrasing Bruno Bettelheim, is found in *La Paz Es Posible* by Vicenç

- Fisas (Barcelona: Intermon Oxfam, 2002), 58.
33. 33. W. D. Ross, *The Right and the Good* (New York: Oxford UP, 2002), 28.
Contemporary philosophers sometimes make the distinction between defeated duties that are “silenced,” having no residual claim on us, and those that are merely overridden within the relevant context.
34. 34. Judith A. Berling, “Confucianism and Peacebuilding,” in *Religion and Peacebuilding*, edited by Harold Coward and Gordon S. Smith (Albany: SUNY, 2004) 100.
35. 35. Berling, in *Religion and Peacebuilding*, 94-5.
36. 36. *Mengzi*, translated by Bryan Van Norden, xxvi. This quote immediately reminds me of the Western equivalent, reportedly delivered to Napoleon by the Frenchman Talleyrand who said, “You can do anything with bayonets, Sire, except sit on them.”
37. 37. Confucius, *The Analects, Oxford World’s Classics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 4.15 and 15.24.
38. 38. *The Analects*, 15.24; also 5.12 and 12.2.
39. 39. Berling, in *Religion and Peacebuilding*, 103.
40. 40. Stassen et al, *Just Peacemaking*, 11-13.
41. 41. See, for example, Stephen C. Angle, *Human Rights and Chinese Thought: A Cross-Cultural Inquiry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Joanne Bauer and Daniel Bell, *The East Asian Challenge for Human Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); William Theodore de Bary and Tu Weiming, eds., *Confucianism and Human Rights* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); Michael C. Davis, ed., *Human Rights and Chinese Values: Legal, Philosophical, and Political Perspectives* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1995); William Theodore de Bary, *Asian Values and Human Rights: A Confucian Communitarian Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).
42. 42. See especially Stephen C. Angle, “Decent Democratic Centralism,” *Political Theory* 33, no. 4 (August 2005), and “Must We Choose Our Leaders? Human Rights and Political Participation in China,” *Journal of Global Ethics* 1, no. 2 (Dec. 2005); Frank J. Schwartz, *Advice and Consent: The Politics of Consultation in Japan* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
43. 43. Daniel Yankelovich, *Coming to Public Judgment: Making Democracy Work in a Complex World* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1991); James S. Fishkin, *The*

Voice of the People: Public Opinion and Democracy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

44. 44. There is much in the Mencius to substantiate this claim and some specific points will follow below. In general, however, rulers have responsibilities to the people and tianming is specifically given to the benevolent ruler. See, for example, Mencius 1A4, 1B1, 1B2, 1B6, 2A5, 5A5, and 7B14.
45. 45. Constitution of the United States of America, amendments 13, 15, 19, 23, 24, and 26.
46. 46. See, for example, Sor-hoon Tan, *Confucian Democracy: A Deweyan Reconstruction*, SUNY Series in Chinese Philosophy and Culture (Albany: SUNY Press, 2003). See especially 132-45.
47. 47. *Mengzi*, translated by Bryan Van Norden, 186.
48. 48. *Mengzi*, translated by Bryan Van Norden, 96.
49. 49. *Mengzi*, translated by Bryan Van Norden, 13.
50. 50. Mencius 1A3 and 1A7.
51. 51. See for example Mencius 1A1.
52. 52. Mencius 1A5; *Mengzi*, translated by Bryan Van Norden, 6. See also 7B3 and 7B4.
53. 53. Mencius 1A6, *Mengzi*, translated by Van Norden, 7.
54. 54. Mencius 6B4. Here again, Mengzi takes his anti-Mohist line, saying that profit is not the appropriate motivation for doing what is right. It is, however, extremely ironic that this is an isolated passage—and scant on argumentation—whereas the other orientation is both more frequent in occurrence and more concrete in its persuasive appeal.
55. 55. Mencius 2B8.
56. 56. Mencius 2B8 and 7B2.
57. 57. Mencius 1B11, 2B8, and 7B2; see also 1B8 and 5B9.
58. 58. D. C. Lau, trans., *Mencius* (London: Penguin, 1970), 194.
59. 59. *Mengzi*, translated by Bryan Van Norden, 197.
60. 60. *Mengzi*, translated by Bryan Van Norden, 197.
61. 61. *Mengzi*, translated by Van Norden 186.
62. 62. Mencius 1A5, 1B5, and 3A3.
63. 63. Mencius 4B2.
64. 64. Mencius 3A3.

65. 65. Mencius 5A5.
66. 66. These arguments constitute the general topic of book 6A in the *Mencius*.
67. 67. Mencius 2A6; and *Mencius*, translated by D. C. Lau (London: Penguin, 1970), 82.
68. 68. Mengzi would thus argue that there are no natural killers but would not deny that something could happen that would fundamentally desensitize a person to the suffering of others. For Mengzi, however, such a process is essentially (and quite literally) dehumanizing. See Mencius 6A2 and especially 6A8. Cf. Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992).
69. 69. See for example Mencius 6B2.
70. 70. Mencius 1A7.
71. 71. Mencius 3A5 and 5A3.
72. 72. Mencius 1A7, 7A15, and 7B1.
73. 73. Arvind Sharma, ed., "Confucianism," *Our Religions* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 142-145, 205. For a parallel use in environmental ethics, see Peter Wenz, *Environmental Justice* (Albany: SUNY, 1988), 310-35. The parallel is so close, it is hard to believe this is not Confucian-inspired.
74. 74. Mencius 2A3; cf. Analects 2.3.
75. 75. *Mengzi*, translated by Van Norden, xvi-ii.
76. 76. *Mengzi*, translated by Van Norden, 46.
77. 77. For other examples of discretion in Mengzi's thought, see Mencius 4A26, 4B29, 4B31, and 6B1.
78. 78. *Mengzi*, translated by Van Norden, 98.
79. 79. *Mencius*, translated by D. C. Lau, 245.
80. 80. *Mencius*, translated by D. C. Lau, 245.
81. 81. Jeffrey Reiman, "Justice, Civilization, and the Death Penalty," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 14, no. 2 (Spring 1985).
82. 82. *Mencius*, translated by D. C. Lau, 250.
83. 83. Mencius 4A17; *Mengzi*, translated by Van Norden, 97-8.
84. 84. Mark Juergensmeyer, *Gandhi's Way: A Handbook of Conflict Resolution*, rev. ed. (Berkeley: U of California, 2005), 39.
85. 85. Juergensmeyer, *Gandhi's Way*, 41.
86. 86. Juergensmeyer, *Gandhi's Way*, 40.

87. 87. See also Mencius 1B9, where Mengzi again expresses disapproval at an expedient call to set aside the Way.
88. ~~88~~. Attributed to A. J. Muste in *Nevertheless: The Varieties and Shortcomings of Religious Pacifism*, by John Howard Yoder (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1992), 73, 171 (n. 1).

Endnotes:

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