

## Topical Seminars

### Preparation for Tuesday October 17, 2017 Seminar

Lewes Public Library at 5:30 pm

#### **Part I - Is American Nonviolence Possible**

Please read "Is American Nonviolence Possible" by Todd May, beginning on page 696 in The Stone Reader. As you do, please keep in mind the May's reference to Kant on page 700, "...Immanuel Kant said that the core of morality lay in treating others not simply as means but also as ends in themselves."

Here are a couple of questions:

1. On page 698, May states *We must understand that nonviolence is not passivity. It is instead creative activity*. Does May make the case for this statement in this essay? Do you agree with him, given the inherent violence in the world today?
2. On page 700, May states that our task should be *to create a culture where violence is seen not as the first option but as the last*. Is this realistic?

I found the following in a 2003 publication by Walter Wink (which I have excerpted for space) and thought it might be interesting in light of this essay:

*Jesus abhors both passivity and violence as responses to evil. His is a third alternative not even touched by these options.*

*"If any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." Why the right cheek? How does one strike another on the right cheek anyway? A blow by the right fist in that right-handed world would land on the left cheek of the opponent. To strike the right cheek with the fist would require using the left hand, but in that society the left hand was used only for unclean tasks. The only way one could strike the right cheek with the right hand would be with the back of the right hand. What we are dealing with here is unmistakably an insult, not a fistfight. The intention is not to injure but to humiliate, to put someone in his or her "place." One normally did not strike a peer thus, and if one did, the fine was exorbitant (4 zuz was the fine for a blow to a peer with a fist, 400 zuz for backhanding him; but to an underling, no penalty whatsoever- Mishnah, Baba Qamma 8:1-6). A back hand slap was the normal way of admonishing inferiors. The only normal response would be cowering submission.*

*To turn the other cheek robs the oppressor of the power to humiliate. The person who turns the other cheek is saying, in effect, "Try again. Your first blow failed to achieve its intended effect. I deny you the power to humiliate me. I am a human being just like you. Your status does not alter that fact. You cannot demean me."*

*Such a response would create enormous difficulties for the striker. Purely logistically, what can he do? He cannot use the backhand because his nose is in the way. He can't use his left hand regardless. If he hits with a fist, he makes himself an equal, acknowledging the other as a peer. Even if he orders the person flogged, the point has been irrevocably made. The oppressor has been forced, against his will, to regard this subordinate as an equal human being. This response, far from admonishing passivity and cowardice, is an act of defiance.*

Excerpted from “Jesus and Nonviolence, a Third Way” by Walter Wink pp 15-16  
(2003 Augsburg Fortress, Minneapolis)

## Part II -The Moral Hazards of Drones

Please read “The Moral Hazard of Drones” by John Kaag and Sarah Kreps, beginning on page 701 of The Stone Reader.

1. The authors use the tale of the ring of Gyges (in Plato, it’s actually an ancestor of Gyges), taken from Plato’s “Republic,” as a basis for their point that *the technological advantage provided by Gyges’ ring ends up serving as the justification of its use* (p. 703). Are the authors effective in using this myth to make the same point about drones? (If you can lay your hands on a copy of “The Republic” to read the entire discussion of Gyges’ ancestor, it’s well worth the short read: 2:359a – 2:360d).
2. Also from page 703: *What we find unsettling is the idea that these facts (Gyges’ mission, due to the technological advantage, was almost assured) could be confused for moral justification*. And, from page 704: *The use of impressive technologies does not grant one impressive insight. As Gyges demonstrates, the opposite can be the case*. Without significant technological advantage, are we more inclined to exhibit impressive insight in our dealings with our adversaries?
3. From page 705: *Impressive expediency and accuracy in drone targeting may allow policy makers and strategists to become lax in moral decision making about who should be targeted*. Keep this statement in mind as we look to part III of this session, the essay “Rethinking the Just War” by Jeff McMahan beginning on page 711.
4. The authors quote Kierkegaard on the final page: *In possibility everything is possible. Hence in possibility one can go astray in all possible ways*. This is from “Sin and Dread” and the quote here is incomplete. Kierkegaard continues as follows: *In possibility everything is possible. Hence in possibility one can go astray in all possible ways, but essentially in two. One form is the wishful yearning form, the other is the melancholy fantastic- on the one hand, hope; on the other fear or anguished dread*. This fuller quote, I believe, not only gives a deeper statement on this essay’s central point, but also prepares us better for the “Rethinking the Just War” essay and colors the points offered by May’s “Is American Nonviolence Possible” article.

(Persons are also directed to see the film Eye in the Sky, which raises a number of issues about the use of drones.)

## Part 111 - Discussion of Article "Rethinking the Just War"

Please read the article Rethinking the Just War by Jeff McMahan starting on page 711 of the Stone Reader. McMahan makes a rather complex journey through the history and development of Just War theory and the gives a sketch of the Revisionist Alternative. The following summary from a Wikipedia contributor aptly summarizes the theory.

"**Just war theory** ([Latin](#): *jus bellum iustum*) is a [doctrine](#), also referred to as a [tradition](#), of [military ethics](#) studied by military leaders, [theologians](#), [ethicists](#) and [policy makers](#). The purpose of the doctrine is to ensure war is morally justifiable through a series of [criteria](#), all of which must be met for a war to be considered just. The criteria are split into two groups: "[right to go to war](#)" (*jus ad bellum*) and "[right conduct in war](#)" (*jus in bello*). The first concerns the morality of going to war, and the second the moral conduct within war."

"Just War theory postulates that war, while terrible, is not always the worst option. Important responsibilities, undesirable outcomes, or preventable atrocities may justify war.

Opponents of Just War theory may be either inclined to a stricter [pacifist](#) standard (proposing that there has never been and/or can never be a justifiable basis for war)<sup>[3]</sup> or toward a more permissive [nationalist](#) standard (proposing that a war need only serve a nation's interests to be justifiable). In a large number of cases, philosophers state that individuals need not be of guilty conscience if required to fight. A few nobilify the virtues of the soldier while declaring their apprehensions for war itself. A few, such as Rousseau, argue for insurrection against oppressive rule."

McMahan relates the Just War theory to contemporary issues including nuclear deterrence and pre-emptive actions. Lately, actions by decentralized organizations such as Al Qaeda, point to a need for a revised theory because of the move away from state-centered conflicts. The author writes "...it is the individual persons, not states, who kill and are killed in war, and that they, rather than their state, bear primary responsibility for their participation and action in war." In contrast, the current Just War theory puts the responsibility for just and unjust war in the hands of the state, while requiring that soldiers only follow the rules of *jus in bello* (discrimination, necessary or minimal force and proportionality) without regard whether or not they are fighting on the side of the just or not.

McMahan goes on to argue that even those who are civilian non-combatants who try to defend themselves are considered as combatants simply to acting to save themselves and are subject to being harmed within the constraints of *jus in bello*. In civilian life, a victim has both a right against attack and a right of defense. If, for example, a thief enters your house and threatens to kill you, and you defend yourself, the thief is always wrong and has no right to claim self-defense if he shoots you.

For our discussion, let's focus on the author's support for the revisionist alternative to the Just Theory as discussed on pages 725-726 of the Stone Reader McMahan. Some questions for consideration.

1. Is it reasonable to expect citizens of a state to individually decide their willingness to fight on the basis of their individual judgment of whether a war is just or unjust?
2. Is the author undermining the revisionist perspective later in the discussion on pp. 725-726 by his seemingly ambivalent caveats?
3. If you are a military drone operator for a country that is engaged in an undeclared war with the ISIL organization and you are assigned to direct the drone to hit a target that you know will involve the killing of non-combatant civilians who have made no effort to defend themselves (as they have no idea the drone will strike them), using the Traditional Theory of War, are you justified in doing so? What about the revisionist alternative?
4. If a home defense organization (described as a terrorist organization by their adversaries) goes into the territory of their enemy and attacks both military and non-military targets, are their actions justified using the traditional Just War theory? If the country that was attacked strike back by sending rockets into the territory of the defense organization knowing they will be killing non-combatants, is the country justified in doing so according to the traditional Just War theory? What about the revisionist alternative?

The seminar will be led by David White and Aram Terzian who have prepared this preparatory document.