On the Enemy We Were Asked to Find

A Meditation on War, Conscience, and the Practice of Compassion

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Macon, Georgia
November 8, 2026

In conversation with Smedley D. Butler, Henry David Thoreau, William James, Martin Luther King Jr., and Thích Nhất Hạnh.

I. The Country That Remained

There is a difference between leaving a country standing and leaving its people free to live within it.

In an earlier meditation, *On the Country Left Intact*, we considered the distinction between the preservation of territory and the preservation of political life.

Sun Tzu preferred the capture of an enemy state without its destruction. Tacitus, writing from within the Roman imperial tradition, preserved the accusation that conquest could create desolation while calling the result peace.

The observations concern different aspects of military power.

One asks how destruction may be avoided.

The other asks whether those exercising power possess the authority to determine the moral meaning of its consequences.

Neither question is sufficient alone.

For it is possible to preserve a city because one intends to possess it.

It is possible to spare a population while denying its members meaningful participation in determining their future.

And it is possible to achieve a military objective without establishing the conditions under which those affected may safely resume their lives.

These distinctions do not diminish the importance of survival.

A life spared is a life spared. The prevention of suffering does not become less valuable because the person responsible acted from prudence rather than compassion.

But the preservation of life establishes responsibilities extending beyond the moment of danger.

The country may remain.

Its roads may reopen, its markets resume their commerce, and its public institutions continue functioning.

Yet the people who inhabit it may still have questions.

Who will determine the conditions under which they live?

Who will answer for what has occurred?

And who will hear them when they speak?

These questions lead us beyond the conduct of armies and the legitimacy of governments.

They bring us to the problem of suffering itself.

For what happens when the people whose lives are being preserved are understood principally through the objectives of those exercising power?

What happens when their suffering becomes an administrative consequence rather than a human experience?

And what happens when those responsible for an undertaking become so attached to its justification that the suffering it produces can no longer be adequately heard?

To consider these questions, we might turn toward a country whose people did not have to imagine the consequences of war.

Vietnam.

II. The Letter That Crossed the Ocean

On June 1, 1965, the Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thích Nhất Hạnh addressed a letter to the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr.

He called it *In Search of the Enemy of Man*.

The letter was written amid the escalating war in Vietnam, when the country's political divisions had become entangled with the military and ideological interests of powerful states.

Thích Nhất Hạnh did not approach the matter as a distant philosopher contemplating the general problem of violence.

He was a Vietnamese citizen attempting to communicate the suffering of his country to people whose government possessed considerable influence over its future.

His letter began with something particularly difficult to explain.

In 1963, Vietnamese Buddhist monastics had died through acts of self-immolation, drawing international attention to religious repression and political suffering.

Western observers had struggled to understand these deaths.

Thích Nhất Hạnh sought to explain the intentions of those who had undertaken them.

As he understood their actions, they were attempting to awaken the conscience of those exercising power and draw attention to suffering that had not received an adequate response.

They did not seek the destruction of their oppressors.

They sought a change in the policies through which oppression was maintained.

This explanation deserves careful consideration.

The deaths were real. Their suffering was terrible. And the circumstances in which human beings came to regard such acts as a means of communicating injustice cannot be adequately understood through admiration alone.

We need not regard their actions as examples to imitate in order to recognize their historical and moral significance.

Nor should respect for those who died require us to conclude that their deaths were necessary.

Indeed, there is another question.

Why had the ordinary expression of suffering proved so inadequate?

Why had the voices of the living become so difficult to hear?

Why had recognition required such extraordinary testimony?

There is something profoundly troubling in the possibility that suffering must become spectacular before it becomes politically intelligible.

A family may lose its home.

A village may lose access to food or medicine.

A child may lose the ordinary security upon which childhood depends.

These circumstances may be documented, reported, and acknowledged without producing a sufficient response.

The suffering is not thereby diminished.

Yet its recognition may remain incomplete until an event occurs that cannot readily be accommodated within the existing account of what is happening.

The difficulty is not merely that institutions sometimes fail to recognize suffering.

It is that institutions may recognize suffering while continuing to regard the arrangements producing it as necessary.

The human consequences become known.

The justification remains intact.

Thích Nhất Hạnh's letter challenged this separation.

But it did something more.

Rather than identifying the people responsible for violence as enemies whose destruction would resolve the problem, he directed attention toward the conditions within human beings and their institutions that permitted such violence to continue.

He named intolerance, fanaticism, dictatorship, greed, hatred, and discrimination.

These were the enemies he wished humanity to confront.

Not humanity itself.

III. The Enemy Who Was Not a Person

The distinction is more demanding than it first appears.

It is tempting to understand injustice through the identification of enemies.

An enemy gives a grievance a recognizable form.

The causes of suffering, which may otherwise be complicated and difficult to remedy, become associated with a person, a population, or an institution.

The problem acquires a face.

The solution may then appear to require the humiliation, removal, defeat, or destruction of those who possess it.

There are circumstances in which identifying responsible actors is indispensable.

A person who commits violence may need to be restrained.

An official who abuses public authority may require investigation.

A government responsible for unlawful conduct may need to be challenged through legal, political, or international mechanisms.

A person who has suffered an injury may possess a legitimate claim to remedy.

Compassion does not eliminate these obligations.

Nor does recognizing another person's humanity establish that their conduct must be tolerated.

But there is a difference between identifying someone as responsible for harm and concluding that the person has become the embodiment of everything we oppose.

The first permits accountability.

The second risks making accountability indistinguishable from vengeance.

Thích Nhất Hạnh recognized a parallel between the struggle for peace in Vietnam and King's struggle against racial oppression in the United States.

The historical circumstances were different.

The structures of power, the forms of resistance, and the immediate political objectives were not interchangeable.

Yet both struggles raised a common question.

Could injustice be opposed without requiring hatred toward the people whose conduct sustained it?

King's nonviolent movement did not proceed from the assumption that segregation was a minor misunderstanding that could be corrected through expressions of goodwill.

Its demands were substantial.

The movement confronted laws, institutions, economic arrangements, and practices through which racial inequality was maintained.

It required public action, organized resistance, and the willingness to endure considerable personal risk.

Its refusal to cultivate hatred did not make its opposition less serious.

It made the purpose of that opposition more precise.

The objective was not simply to exchange the positions of those who possessed power and those who suffered beneath it.

It was to transform the arrangements through which suffering was produced.

This distinction remains important because human beings are capable of change.

A person who has acted unjustly may come to recognize the injustice.

An institution that has produced harm may be reformed.

A society that has tolerated discrimination may establish protections through which its members become more fully secure.

None of these outcomes is guaranteed.

Some people resist correction.

Some institutions protect themselves from scrutiny.

Some injuries cannot be repaired.

Yet the absence of a guarantee does not make transformation morally irrelevant.

Indeed, if correction were impossible, much of the purpose of law, education, public accountability, and democratic participation would become difficult to explain.

We do not establish institutions of justice merely to announce that wrongdoing has occurred.

We establish them, in part, because we recognize that conduct can be restrained, corrected, and sometimes transformed.

To understand the circumstances that contribute to harmful conduct is not to excuse the harm.

To recognize the humanity of someone who has acted cruelly is not to require affection for that person.

And to refuse hatred does not oblige the injured to abandon their claims.

The refusal to make another person an enemy is not the refusal to hold that person responsible.

It is the refusal to make their destruction the purpose of our response.

There is, however, another responsibility.

For the recognition of an aggressor's humanity must not become an occasion for neglecting the humanity of those who require protection.

To recognize the suffering of those who cause harm is not to ask those who suffer from that harm to endure it.

Compassion belongs to the injured as surely as it belongs to those responsible for the injury.

And a peace founded upon compassion cannot reasonably require the vulnerable to surrender their protection in order to demonstrate it.

IV. The Accounts That Did Not Balance

Thirty years before Thích Nhất Hạnh wrote to King, Major General Smedley Darlington Butler published *War Is a Racket*.

Butler's criticism of warfare was particularly uncomfortable because it came from a man who had spent much of his life participating in the military institutions he would later question.

He had served in numerous American military interventions and received two Medals of Honor.

His eventual indictment concerned the relationship between armed conflict, private financial advantage, and the unequal distribution of sacrifice.

War could impose enormous costs upon the public while producing considerable benefits for a comparatively small number of economic interests.

Those who profited were not necessarily those who fought.

Those who fought were not necessarily those who determined whether fighting should begin.

And those who suffered most profoundly might possess little influence over either decision.

Butler's argument does not require us to conclude that every war is undertaken exclusively for profit.

Governments may act from fear, ideology, ambition, genuine defensive necessity, mistaken judgment, or some combination of these.

Economic interests may influence policy without fully determining it.

Nor does the fact that a manufacturer profits from supplying an army establish that every use of the equipment supplied is illegitimate.

The difficulty lies in the relationship between interests and judgment.

When institutions benefit from the continuation of an undertaking, the public has reason to examine whether those benefits influence their assessment of necessity.

An undertaking may begin in response to a genuine danger and gradually become sustained by arrangements whose continuation serves interests beyond the original objective.

A measure described as temporary may acquire defenders whose institutional positions depend upon its permanence.

And a policy whose consequences have become increasingly difficult to justify may nevertheless retain the language through which it was originally authorized.

Necessity is a serious claim.

It ought not to become less serious merely because it is made by someone possessing public authority.

Henry David Thoreau approached this difficulty from the standpoint of conscience.

Writing against slavery and the Mexican-American War, Thoreau challenged the assumption that obedience to government relieved the individual of moral responsibility.

The law might authorize an action.

The government might administer it.

The majority might approve it.

Yet none of these circumstances guaranteed that the action was right.

This argument presents difficulties of its own.

Private conscience can be mistaken.

Sincerity does not establish moral truth.

And public institutions cannot function if every individual disagreement automatically invalidates the obligations of government.

But government is no less capable of error than the individuals who constitute it.

A constitutional order cannot reasonably demand that its citizens abandon moral judgment whenever public authority has spoken.

Nor should affection for a republic require the citizen to regard its mistakes as virtues.

The legitimacy of government does not depend upon the perfection of those who govern.

It depends, in part, upon the institutions through which their decisions may be examined, challenged, and corrected.

The citizen who questions a military undertaking is not necessarily indifferent to national security.

The citizen who opposes a particular use of force is not necessarily unwilling to defend others.

And the citizen who asks whether the suffering of foreign civilians has been sufficiently considered is not thereby expressing contempt for the country whose government authorized the action.

These distinctions are essential.

A country is not identical to every decision made in its name.

Its people are not interchangeable with its government.

And the responsibilities of citizenship cannot be reduced entirely to the defense of existing policy.

Butler asks who benefits.

Thoreau asks who remains responsible.

Together, they direct attention toward the institutions through which public power is exercised.

Thích Nhất Hạnh introduces the people whose suffering may be absent from the calculations.

And he asks us to recognize that responsibility does not end when an action has been authorized.

It continues through the consequences.

V. The Courage That Required No Enemy

William James recognized another complication.

In *The Moral Equivalent of War*, he observed that military life had become associated with virtues human societies admired.

Courage.

Discipline.

Endurance.

Sacrifice.

Cooperation in pursuit of a common purpose.

His concern was that the rejection of war might appear to require the abandonment of the qualities historically associated with it.

He therefore proposed that society cultivate those virtues through difficult forms of civilian service.

His proposal deserves criticism.

Hardship does not automatically produce virtue.

Compulsory labor does not become morally admirable merely because it serves a public objective.

Nor should the dignity of ordinary work depend upon its resemblance to military discipline.

But the question James raised remains valuable.

Why should courage require an enemy?

Why should sacrifice acquire its greatest public recognition when associated with organized violence?

Why should the defense of life be regarded as heroic while the ordinary work of sustaining life receives comparatively little attention?

The Vietnamese Buddhist peace movement offered a different way of approaching these questions.

The relief of suffering did not require the defeat of a population.

The reconstruction of villages did not require the humiliation of an opponent.

The care of displaced families did not depend upon their political allegiance.

Such work could be dangerous.

It could demand extraordinary endurance.

And it could require considerable courage.

But its purpose was not to determine who deserved to suffer.

Its purpose was to reduce suffering.

In 1966, Thích Nhất Hạnh brought a practical proposal for peace to the United States.

He called for an end to bombing, limitations on military operations, the beginning of American withdrawal, and conditions under which the Vietnamese people might establish a government responsive to their own aspirations.

He also called for reconstruction assistance without ideological or political conditions.

These were not merely expressions of sympathy.

They were proposed changes to the arrangements through which suffering was being produced.

The distinction matters.

Compassion, in the Buddhist understanding, is not simply an emotion experienced in the presence of another person's distress.

Karuṇā recognizes suffering and seeks its alleviation.

It asks what conditions have produced the suffering, what responsibilities arise from those conditions, and what may reasonably be done to relieve them.

A person whose home is burning does not benefit sufficiently from our recognition that fire is painful.

The recognition matters.

But so does the water.

The same difficulty confronts institutions.

A population without adequate medical care requires more than the acknowledgment that its circumstances are unfortunate.

A community whose members have experienced unlawful treatment requires more than assurances that officials are concerned.

A person seeking relief from an injury may require an investigation, a remedy, or a change in the procedures through which the injury occurred.

Compassion must sometimes become policy.

It must sometimes become an appropriation, a legal protection, an inspection, or a correction of institutional practice.

And it may require us to challenge authority precisely because we recognize the humanity of those affected by its decisions.

But compassion is not the only quality necessary for such work.

Mettā, loving-kindness, reminds us that the desire for well-being is not confined to those whose conduct we approve.

To wish that another person cease harming others is compatible with loving-kindness.

To wish that the person develop understanding, accept responsibility, and become capable of different conduct is also compatible with it.

There is no contradiction between wishing another person well and insisting that they be prevented from causing further harm.

Muditā, appreciative joy, asks us to recognize what becomes possible when suffering is relieved.

A country is not merely a territory in which fighting has ceased.

It is also a place where children may return to school, families may prepare meals, and people may discover reasons to enjoy being alive.

A farmer may plant without anticipating the destruction of the harvest.

A child may walk home without fearing the road.

A person may open a window, hear music from a neighboring house, and have no particular reason to think the moment extraordinary.

These are not incidental pleasures.

They are among the reasons peace possesses moral significance.

The happiness of another people need not advance our interests in order to deserve our goodwill.

And *upekkhā*, equanimity, allows us to remain attentive without surrendering judgment to hatred, fear, or attachment.

Equanimity is not indifference.

It does not require neutrality between justice and injustice.

Nor does it demand that every party to a conflict be assigned identical responsibility.

There may be aggressors and victims.

There may be lawful acts and unlawful acts.

There may be policies supported by evidence and policies contradicted by it.

Equanimity does not erase these distinctions.

It permits us to examine them without making another person's suffering an object of satisfaction.

Together, the Four Immeasurables offer no guarantee that political decisions will become easy.

They do, however, challenge the assumption that moral seriousness requires hostility.

We may act firmly without cruelty.

We may oppose injustice without abandoning compassion.

And we may recognize another person's humanity without withdrawing the protections owed to those they have harmed.

The difficulty is not that these principles are impossible to understand.

It is that they require practice precisely when practicing them is least comfortable.

VI. The Peace That Required Protection

There remains a serious objection.

What becomes of non-harming when the refusal to use force permits greater suffering?

A community facing armed aggression may have no opportunity to persuade those threatening it.

A person witnessing immediate violence may be unable to protect the victim through words alone.

And a government charged with protecting its population may confront circumstances in which every available course of action carries some risk of harm.

These difficulties cannot be resolved merely by declaring that violence is undesirable.

Nor can they be resolved by assuming that a sincere intention to protect life necessarily justifies every means employed in its defense.

Thích Nhất Hạnh's opposition to war was profound.

In his 1965 letter, he rejected the necessity of war itself.

We should not obscure that position by attributing to him a qualified endorsement of military force simply because such an endorsement would make his argument easier to reconcile with other ethical traditions.

But neither must we dismiss the problem of defensive necessity in order to take his argument seriously.

The tension deserves examination.

A person may believe that defensive force can sometimes be justified while recognizing that the language of defense is vulnerable to misuse.

A government may possess legitimate security responsibilities while remaining obligated to demonstrate that its chosen measures are necessary and lawful.

And a population may require protection without thereby granting unlimited moral authority to those who claim to act on its behalf.

The Buddhist commitment to non-harming does not eliminate these questions.

It makes their consequences more difficult to disregard.

For even when force is justified, suffering remains suffering.

The person injured does not become less injured because the action was authorized.

The family displaced does not become less displaced because the objective was considered important.

And those who act in good faith do not thereby become incapable of causing preventable harm.

International humanitarian law establishes obligations governing the conduct of hostilities, including the protection of civilians and limitations upon methods of warfare.

These legal principles possess their own scope and requirements.

Buddhist compassion does not replace them.

Nor should the language of non-harming be mistaken for a legal determination concerning any particular conflict.

But the two inquiries can illuminate one another.

Law asks what conduct is permitted, prohibited, or required.

Compassion asks us to remain attentive to the living beings affected by that conduct.

A lawful action may still produce suffering that deserves acknowledgment and relief.

An unlawful action does not become acceptable because it was motivated by sympathy for a population.

And a legitimate defensive objective does not dissolve the obligations owed to those who are not participating in hostilities.

The distinction matters because human suffering cannot be understood entirely through the question of who was right.

Responsibility must be established.

Wrongdoing must be examined.

But the person who has been wounded does not need to await the final settlement of political responsibility before receiving care.

The person who has lost a home does not require an ideological classification before being recognized as displaced.

Compassion begins with the recognition of suffering.

Justice requires that we also examine its causes.

Neither inquiry is complete without the other.

This is where the difference between non-harming and non-intervention becomes especially important.

They are not synonymous.

To refuse hatred is not to refuse protection.

To understand the causes of violence is not to permit violence to continue.

And to recognize the humanity of those responsible for harm is not to require their victims to remain exposed to it.

Indeed, a serious commitment to compassion may require intervention.

It may require an individual to speak, a community to organize, or an institution to exercise lawful authority against conduct that threatens others.

The difficulty is to undertake these responsibilities without becoming indifferent to the suffering that may accompany their exercise.

This requires judgment.

It requires restraint.

It requires attention to evidence, alternatives, and consequences.

And it requires the humility to recognize that an action undertaken for a legitimate purpose may nevertheless require correction.

There is no guarantee that such judgment will be perfect.

That is among the reasons accountability remains necessary.

A government does not become more trustworthy by claiming that its good intentions render examination unnecessary.

It becomes more trustworthy by demonstrating that its decisions remain answerable to the people whose lives they affect.

VII. The Country That Could Still Breathe

On May 31, 1966, Thích Nhất Hạnh and Martin Luther King Jr. met in Chicago.

Their meeting brought together two men whose religious traditions differed, but whose public work had led them to related questions concerning suffering, dignity, and the practice of nonviolence.

King had already begun expressing opposition to the Vietnam War before receiving Thích Nhất Hạnh's letter.

Their encounter did not create his moral concern.

It contributed to a conversation through which two distinct struggles could recognize something of their shared ethical purpose.

In January 1967, King nominated Thích Nhất Hạnh for the Nobel Peace Prize.

On April 4 of that year, King delivered *Beyond Vietnam* at Riverside Church in New York.

There, he connected the suffering caused by war to the moral responsibilities of American society.

He examined the relationship between military expenditure and domestic poverty, between national interests and public conscience, and between the exercise of power and the human consequences of its use.

His argument did not depend upon the assumption that concern for American citizens and concern for Vietnamese civilians were competing obligations.

Indeed, it challenged the idea that the moral significance of suffering could be determined by nationality.

The question was not whether Americans should cease caring for their country.

It was whether care for their country could remain morally adequate while disregarding the suffering caused by actions undertaken in its name.

This was not an abandonment of public responsibility.

It was an enlargement of its scope.

And it brings us again to the question with which we began.

What must remain possible for the people whose country has been preserved?

They must be able to live.

They must possess some security against arbitrary violence.

Their rights and interests must receive more than ceremonial acknowledgment.

Their grievances must be capable of being heard.

And the arrangements governing their future must remain open to questions of legitimacy, responsibility, and participation.

These conditions will take different institutional forms in different societies.

They cannot be reduced to a single historical model or imposed upon every political circumstance without regard for its character.

But the underlying concern remains.

A people are not merely the inhabitants of a territory.

They are not simply the labor available to an economy, the recipients of administrative services, or the population counted after a military operation.

They possess relationships, histories, loyalties, disagreements, and aspirations that cannot be fully represented by the objectives of those exercising power.

Nor can their suffering be adequately understood through the intentions of those responsible for the circumstances in which it arose.

Smedley Butler reminds us that the interests surrounding war require scrutiny.

Henry David Thoreau reminds us that the authority of government cannot entirely replace the judgment of conscience.

William James invites us to consider whether the qualities admired in war might find more constructive expression in the service of humanity.

Martin Luther King Jr. asks whether a nation can fulfill its moral responsibilities while neglecting the suffering caused by its own actions.

And Thích Nhất Hạnh asks us to reconsider the enemy itself.

Not because wrongdoing is imaginary.

Not because oppression can be corrected merely through expressions of goodwill.

And not because those responsible for suffering should be released from accountability.

But because the purpose of confronting injustice cannot be reduced to the destruction of those who participate in it.

A society that defeats an enemy without examining the conditions that produced the conflict may discover that those conditions remain.

A government that removes an unjust authority without establishing accountable institutions may reproduce familiar forms of domination beneath different names.

And a population that has survived war may find itself living within arrangements whose legitimacy remains unsettled.

The work of peace therefore extends beyond the cessation of violence.

It requires attention to the causes of suffering as well as its immediate consequences.

It requires institutions capable of restraint, citizens capable of conscience, and communities in which compassion is not regarded as separate from the responsibilities of justice.

It also requires humility.

For those who act in the name of protection may cause harm.

Those who seek peace may misunderstand the needs of others.

Those who oppose injustice may become attached to their own righteousness.

And those who exercise authority may mistake the success of an undertaking for proof that every aspect of it was justified.

None of these possibilities makes the pursuit of peace futile.

They make the willingness to examine ourselves indispensable.

The Buddhist understanding of interdependence reminds us that human lives are sustained through relationships and conditions extending beyond the boundaries of individual intention.

Our actions may reach people we will never meet.

Our decisions may impose consequences upon people who had no opportunity to participate in making them.

And suffering does not become morally insignificant merely because it was unforeseen, unintended, or experienced by strangers.

To recognize these connections is not to erase responsibility.

It is to understand that responsibility exists within a world in which our actions extend beyond ourselves.

This recognition need not produce despair.

It may invite care.

We may never establish institutions incapable of error.

We may never eliminate every circumstance in which human beings threaten one another.

We may never reach a condition in which conscience is no longer required to challenge authority.

But we can remain willing to examine the suffering our actions produce.

We can refuse to confuse public necessity with unlimited permission.

We can recognize that accountability need not become vengeance.

And we can cultivate the forms of courage that make protection, reconciliation, and correction possible.

There is nothing passive in this undertaking.

It requires discipline to refuse hatred when hatred offers an easier explanation.

It requires humility to acknowledge that those we oppose may possess fears, histories, and forms of suffering we do not fully understand.

It requires courage to confront injustice without surrendering the humanity of those responsible.

And it requires persistence to transform compassion from a private feeling into a public responsibility.

The lotus does not require the fire in order to possess beauty.

Nor does humanity require an enemy in order to practice courage.

We return, then, to the country left standing.

Its buildings remain.

Its roads are beginning to reopen.

The authorities have announced that order has been restored.

Perhaps its inhabitants are relieved.

Perhaps many welcome the changes.

Perhaps others remain uncertain about what their lives will become.

The fighting has ceased, and that is no small thing.

But the condition of the country cannot be understood entirely from the declarations of those who determined its fate.

There are questions that only the lives of its inhabitants can begin to answer.

Whether they are safe.

Whether their rights are respected.

Whether they may speak without fear.

Whether their suffering receives attention before it becomes a catastrophe.

And whether what has been declared peaceful can become a peace they are able to inhabit.

The country has been left standing.

That is an achievement.

But the people who inhabit it were never merely the objects of a military undertaking.

They were people.

Their lives possessed meaning before the conflict began.

Their suffering mattered while it continued.

And their future remains worthy of consideration after the fighting has ended.

The purpose of peace is not merely to leave a country without enemies.

It is to make possible a country in which people need not become enemies in order to be heard.

And perhaps the measure of our compassion lies not only in what we are prepared to do when suffering becomes impossible to ignore.

It lies also in what we are willing to hear before it does.

Sources and Textual Notes

1. Makita R Thatcher, *On the Country Left Intact: A Meditation on Tacitus, Sun Tzu, and the Meaning of Peace* (October 27, 2026).

This essay serves as a companion meditation, extending the earlier examination of military restraint, political legitimacy, and the conditions required for meaningful peace.

2. Smedley Darlington Butler, *War Is a Racket* (1935).

The discussion concerns Butler's criticism of war profiteering, economic incentives surrounding military conflict, and the unequal distribution of its financial and human costs.

The Warbler Classics Annotated Edition (2024), ISBN 9781965684160, includes Butler's work alongside Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience* and James's *The Moral Equivalent of War*.

3. Henry David Thoreau, *Resistance to Civil Government* (1849), subsequently known as *Civil Disobedience*.

The discussion concerns the relationship between individual conscience, government authority, and moral responsibility.

4. William James, *The Moral Equivalent of War* (1910).

The discussion draws upon James's examination of the virtues associated with military service and his proposal that those virtues might be cultivated through alternative forms of collective endeavor.

5. Thích Nhất Hạnh, *In Search of the Enemy of Man* (June 1, 1965).

Letter addressed to Martin Luther King Jr., published in *Dialogue* (La Boi Press, Vietnam), 1965.

The discussion examines Thích Nhất Hạnh's explanation of Buddhist self-immolations, his distinction between human beings and the conditions through which they cause suffering, and his appeal for the recognition of Vietnamese civilian suffering.

Text preserved and published by Plum Village.

6. Thích Nhất Hạnh, *A Proposal for Peace* (June 1, 1966).

Presented in Washington, D.C., and subsequently included in the Congressional Record.

The proposal called for an end to bombing, limitations on military operations, the beginning of American withdrawal, political arrangements responsive to Vietnamese aspirations, and reconstruction assistance free from ideological conditions.

Text preserved and published by Plum Village.

7. Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Vietnam: Lotus in a Sea of Fire: A Buddhist Proposal for Peace* (1967; Parallax Press, 2022).

The discussion considers the Vietnamese Buddhist peace movement, the relationship between political autonomy and nonviolence, and the practical expression of compassion through social action.

8. Martin Luther King Jr., *Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence* (April 4, 1967).

Address delivered at Riverside Church, New York.

The discussion concerns King's examination of war, poverty, national responsibility, nonviolence, and the moral implications of American foreign policy.

Historical context is informed by the Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute at Stanford University.

9. International Committee of the Red Cross, materials concerning the conduct of hostilities and protection of civilians.

Consulted for the distinction between the moral purposes of an undertaking and the legal obligations governing the conduct of armed conflict, including civilian protection, proportionality, and precautions in attack.

Interpretive note: The conversation among Butler, Thoreau, James, King, and Thích Nhất Hạnh is a contemporary philosophical comparison. Their positions are not represented as identical. In particular, Thích Nhất Hạnh's opposition to war should not be mistaken for an endorsement of every position taken within theories of justified defensive force. The discussion of Buddhist non-harming is an ethical inquiry rather than a statement that all Buddhist traditions adopt a uniform position concerning the use of force. References to international humanitarian law are general and do not constitute legal findings concerning any particular conflict.

The discussion of Buddhist self-immolation concerns the historical explanation provided by Thích Nhất Hạnh and does not endorse or prescribe such acts.