PREFACE

Nonviolence has been a central feature of my research and teaching in Peace Studies for more than ten years and for even longer as a basis for my practical involvement in campaigns for peace and human rights. It is through campaigning, teaching and research that I became interested in exploring the deeper connections between nonviolence as a form of political action and some of the central issues of political theory, concerning the role of power and violence in human affairs.

Much of the writing about nonviolence has focused on chronicling and documenting its uses in specific campaigns or political events, sometimes as a core element of significant social and political change; in other cases, to be supplanted by various forms of political violence; and, in some instances, to be defeated or crushed by more powerful political opponents. Efforts to assess the reasons for these successes and failures, and to provide a more strategic and systematic approach to using the methods of nonviolence effectively, have also been prominent in the literature on nonviolence. These discussions have been shaped, to some extent, by the distinction between so-called principled and pragmatic proponents of nonviolence – the former, basing their commitment to nonviolence on ethical or, perhaps, religious principles; and the latter, on evaluations of its political effectiveness.

My aim in this book is to take these discussions and debates to another level. Nonviolence as a form of political action necessarily connects to some of the core themes in political theory, concerning forms of political organisation, the relationship between the individual and the state and the role of violence and coercion in political institutions and processes of social change. In other words, it encompasses issues and concerns that go beyond a specific focus on documenting historical examples of nonviolence, or its distinctive characteristics as a form of

strategic political action, to connect to broader themes within political theory. This book is an attempt to evaluate some of the core concepts and assumptions associated with nonviolence, in the context of these broader themes and debates within political theory.

The purpose of this evaluation is both to critically examine some of the theoretical presuppositions of nonviolence and to argue that such an exploration of nonviolent political action can contribute to, and expand, the scope of political theory. In other words, instances of nonviolent political action are not simply spontaneous eruptions of popular sentiment (although this can be one of their apparent features) that are somehow marginal to the essential issues of political theory. Rather than being mere political epiphenomena that somehow distract us from the real business of politics, such examples of nonviolence in action raise crucial and profound questions for central themes within political theory. Thus, it is hoped that such an exploration of the place of nonviolence within political theory will strengthen our understanding of nonviolent political action and help bring it in from the margins of political debate and discussion, through demonstrating its relevance and contribution to some of the central themes of political theory.

My colleagues in the Nonviolence Commission of the International Peace Research Association have provided an open and congenial environment in which to subject some of the ideas and arguments in this book to critical scrutiny, in the form of papers presented at successive IPRA conferences. Some of Chapter 5 appeared as an article on 'Nonviolent political action and the limits of consent' in *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory* 111 (December 2006). Similarly, much of Chapter 6 is reprinted with permission from 'Pacifism in international relations', in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Ethics and International Relations*, ed. Patrick Hayden (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009).

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*Iain Atack,
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