

Human Nature, Non-Violence And A Transformational Approach To Peace

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the issue of violence and human nature. A specific focus is put on the practice of non-violence to achieve peace. The paper also raises the complex issue of evil in human nature. First, the author challenges Darwinism as a social theory capable of pursuing peace and harmony in human society. Second, he suggests a transformative path which consists of recognizing one's own shadow and the role it plays in perpetrating violence on others. The idea of killing and sacrificing others to make the world a better place may seem to lead to utopia. However, history has demonstrated that holocausts, genocides and violent wars have troubled humanity over many decades but have not yet transformed human society into a peaceful and harmonious one. The paper concludes with an invitation to conflict resolution practitioners to explore and consider non-violent methods as the essence of sustainable peace following the models Gandhi, Mandela, and Martin Luther King, Jr.

KEY WORDS: Non-violence, Peacemakers, Shadow, Evil, Transformation.

Date of Submission: 12-10-2022

Date of Acceptance: 28-10-2022

I. INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, people have wondered about the basic state of human nature. Are we made to cooperate, to collaborate, to live together in peace and harmony? Or are we made to act selfishly, to be aggressive, to fight and kill one another to survive? Over the years, philosophers, theologians and scientists have tackled these questions.

According to Darwinian thinking, animals and human beings alike will always pursue their own best interests through the survival of the fittest. In this context, the strongest are those who survive based on selfish aggression and the use of violence, which suggests that human beings are destined to fight and kill one another in order to survive. Hollywood has supported this idea and brainwashed millions of people to believe that only competition and conflict can bring about a better society.

Today, however, there is much evidence to show that altruism and cooperation are part of our biological makeup. The surprising phenomenon that challenges Darwinism is that independent sources of observation and research have offered clear evidence that human beings are able to put the needs of others ahead of their own. Altruism is not only part of human behavior but also can be seen in the animal world. For example, the behavior of creatures caring for others at the expense of themselves is well known. Ants, bees and some birds will help their relatives raise their young rather than raise their own. Even the simplest social creatures, such as single-celled bacteria, slime molds and other microbes sometimes sacrifice their own well-being for the sake of the group (Sarich 2013).

More specifically, scientific research has shown that the intuitive response or first instinct of human beings is not selfish but cooperative. Dacher Keltner, professor of psychology at the University of California Berkeley, argues in his book *Born to Be Good: The Science of a Meaningful Life* (Keltner, 2009) that human beings are fundamentally born good and that emotions that promote kindness, compassion and peaceful relationships activate the vagus nerve. The longest nerve in the human body, the vagus nerve is also known as the "love nerve." According to Keltner, "A well-reacting vagus nerve is a ticket to good health. It calms us, it slows the heart rate, and it strengthens our immune system" (Keltner, 2009, pp. 225-230).

Research has shown that compassion and kindness impact the body in ways that make us healthy. In his book *The Five Side Effects of Kindness*, David R. Hamilton (2017) presents evidence that kindness and compassion foster cardiovascular health, impact the immune system, alter the neural structure of our brains, slow ageing and lead to happiness. In reality, the activities that enable peace, forgiveness and reconciliation are

good for human health and can bring happiness. As Hamilton's work reveals, human beings are naturally wired to be kind.

Understanding that every human being is born to be good is the hope of humankind. This hope is that there will come a day when we will live in peace and harmony together. In fact, the above-mentioned research suggests that world peace is not just an idea, it can happen because we were made to be at peace and to bring peace to others.

HUMAN ORIGINS AND THE AUTHENTIC SELF

In January 1987, Rebecca Cann, Mark Stoneking, and Allan Wilson published a paper that fundamentally shifted our understanding of human evolution. Since then, the theory that human beings evolved separately on different continents about two million years ago has fallen apart. Their scientific discovery revealed that all humans carry mitochondrial DNA in their cells that dates back to a single woman who lived around 200,000 years ago in East Africa. This woman was given the name Mitochondrial Eve.

The discovery of Mitochondrial Eve gave crucial support to the theory of Africa being the cradle of humanity where modern humans evolved, most likely in East Africa, somewhere between 150,000 and 200,000 years ago (Haskett, 2014). This scientific discovery confirms that all human beings originated from the same family line. Therefore, race, culture, religion and ideology are not things that should divide us. Our differences should be an opportunity to celebrate one another. Hatred, resentment and the use of violence to address issues does not lie at the core of what it means to be a human being.

If human beings are born to be good and come from the same family line, why do we fight and kill one another?

From a spiritual perspective, our authentic identity is universal and eternal. Our true identity goes beyond ethnicity, religion, creed, race, sexual orientation and political viewpoint. The soul, our soul which is divine, is actually our common identity. Furthermore, power, wealth and title do not define our true and eternal self. We are the image of God, the essence of God. The differences between us are part of an illusion. This tends to separate us and makes us think that we are not the same in essence. In reality, those who can see beyond the illusion do not dwell much on external appearance, culture, religion, nationality, race, etc., but rather on the true self that is the heart or the spirit of every individual. When we can learn to see each other as the image of the divine, then we can see each other's deepest value. Unfortunately, religion and politics have emphasized the illusion, the false perception of one another, which leads us to separation and hatred. When we learn to see the divine in the other, we can value one another despite our differences.

More importantly, our divine identity is patient, kind, compassionate, forgiving, humble and courageous. Fear, hatred, anger, resentment, arrogance and violence are not part of who we truly are. An authentic journey of personal transformation teaches us to see beyond our external self and embrace our authentic self. When we understand that many people are reacting according to their external self, we can be patient with them and give them room to grow and mature spiritually (Rohr, 2013).

CAN WE JUSTIFY THE USE OF VIOLENCE ?

The use of violence is not always the best option to address conflict. Whenever we use violence it violates and jeopardizes fundamental principles such as fairness, justice and equity. In most cases, injustice is created by trying to achieve fairness and justice through the use of violence. Even though the intention is good, the outcome could be damaging for both of the parties in conflict. Truly, after a violent conflict, it is ideal that the winner of the conflict consider how to affect constructive reparation and healing toward the loser.

The case of American reparations after dropping the atomic bomb in Japan is one good example, as the moral decision was to protect the weak and the vulnerable and end World War II. Some believe America's action was unjust and immoral, considering it a crime ; others, especially veterans, strongly believe that dropping the bomb was the best alternative, as it certainly saved many lives in the future (Holmes, 2005).

In 1945, nuclear blasts destroyed the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. While they did succeed in ending World War II, the consequences to human life are still being felt today. A week after the nuclear attacks, thousands of Japanese who did not immediately die started "to experience inexplicable combinations of symptoms: high fever, dizziness, nausea, headaches, diarrhea, bloody stools, nosebleeds, and whole-body weakness" (Southard, 2015). Many of them lost their hair, their wounds started to ooze pus, and "purple spots appeared on their bodies, signs of hemorrhaging beneath the skin" (Southard, 2015). Some had internal organ infections. Many people died quickly in extreme pain; others endured prolonged suffering. Dr. Tatsuichiro Akizuki, an eyewitness to the atomic bombing, compared the situation to the Black Death pandemic that ravaged Europe in the 1300s (Southard, 2015).

Even though the purpose of bombing Japan was to end World War II, and at the time appeared to be the right thing to do, it is still morally difficult to digest. It seems incongruous that the American intention was to save tens of thousands of lives by taking tens of thousands of lives. The long-term effects experienced by

innocent people can only be considered an injustice. In a situation such as this, reparation was necessary to heal and support the victims.

The use of violence in conflict is sometimes necessary, but only when all other means have been tried without result. Unfortunately, there are cases where the only way to prevent the killing of millions of innocents is to use force. The 1994 genocide in Rwanda taught the world this important lesson. The fact that UN forces could not intervene due to their mandate, and were not willing to violate national sovereignty, resulted in the deaths of nearly one million innocent people. It is a moral imperative to use force only to protect, not to destroy, because we are “one humanity” regardless of our ethnic, religious and racial differences. The responsibility to protect must be an international ethic and the United Nations must intervene whenever and wherever there is the threat of mass murder and genocide (Doyle, 2011).

THE SEVEN “C’s” THAT LEAD TO VIOLENCE

In his book *Falling Upward*, Richard Rohr (2011) laid out the seven C’s that lead to violence. It is important to remind ourselves about how we react when things do not go our way. First, we **Compare**, thinking that the person or the group we are dealing with is socially, financially or spiritually inferior so we can treat them as we want. When we experience some resistance from their side, we enter into some kind of **Competition**, thinking that we must have the last word no matter what. When resistance is still there, we enter into an open **Conflict** by fighting, hurting and destroying. To justify our deeds, we **Conspire** with people who side with us so that we can normalize the use of violence. Our allies give us the strength to **Condemn** our enemies and we believe they deserve to be punished. Next, we **Cancel** out contrary evidence by denying any facts that could be in favor of the enemy. Finally, we **Crucify** the enemy with impunity because we strongly believe the enemy deserves his own death (Rohr, 2011).

This pattern is consistent in personal relationships, group relationships and even in the larger spheres of national and religious relationships. For example, some radical believers may compare and assess their faith as better than that of others, and so their ministry becomes about competition instead of collaboration with other faith traditions. Then, when there is an issue, they may enter into open conflict by attacking, judging, blaming and labeling others as evil or satanic. They may also seek allies with whom to conspire, so they can justify as normal what they say about others. They may join with their allies to condemn and cancel out contrary evidence that could support the good points of other faiths. Then they justify war against others, call it “holy war,” and believe those not like themselves deserve the equivalent of crucifixion.

THE ISSUE OF EVIL

The concept of evil is universally present in every society. However, how to deal with evil or overcome evil is different from one culture to another. In the Bible and the Quran for example, evil is mostly associated with Satan, demons and dark forces. The Greek word for evil is *pónos* which means pain. In French, pain is also translated as *mal*, meaning evil or bad or hurting. The definition of evil as pain shows that people in the past have associated evil with that which hurt, or which caused pain. It can be a physical pain or an emotional pain. Nature can cause pain and suffering through earthquakes and tornadoes. Human beings can also cause pain to others by treating them unjustly or using violence to hurt them. The use of violence for selfish motives, or out of fear or anger, is in its essence a lack of love and appreciation for others.

In fact, the feeling of pain itself is probably a neutral feeling, however the violent reaction to the pain caused to others is called vengeance. Vengeance momentarily satisfies a person, but not definitively. When we see other people as the root cause of our pain, then we demonize them and it is easier to want to get rid of them by using any means, including violence.

Life can also cause pain. For example, we feel pain when we experience loss, failure or lack of appreciation for everything we have done. It is painful to see our work rejected, unrecognized or lost. Our reaction to loss, failure and lack of appreciation will determine if we are acting in an evil way or not. Do we hurt back when we are hurting inside? Attacking back when we are threatened is so natural to us. It becomes the norm in many places in the world as the way of overcoming evil. However, causing pain to others has not been successful in overcoming evil and bringing lasting peace in our relationships with one another.

For many Christians who uphold Jesus as the model and the way to follow, perceiving how Jesus dealt with evil can be very helpful. Jesus was a Jew and grew up learning the Jewish tradition. He also challenged many aspects of his tradition. People who were considered evil, impure and sinful in Jewish society were exactly the same people Jesus associated with the most. He did not put himself above the impure or distance himself from them. He touched the impure; he sat with the prostitutes and had dinner with the tax collectors.

Separating oneself from others based on culture, religion or social class can lead to seeing others as inferior beings. Then it is easy to judge, categorize and label others as bad or evil. The feeling of wanting to get rid of the inferior or the bad is easily developed in our psyche. Therefore, when we have the power to get rid of those we perceive as “bad,” we can assist in acts like genocide and mass murder (Knitter, 2005).

What Christ has taught and modeled to humanity is not to separate from evil but to transform evil into good. On the cross, Christ asked his Father to forgive his enemies. He did not curse his enemies and ask his Father to punish them. That angry feeling is what we have when our enemies are hurting us. We want to be resentful and revengeful. Christ has taught the world that it is okay to forgive those who hurt us for the purpose of peace.

Separation from evil is not a bad thing in itself, and it is obviously necessary for those who are still spiritually immature. However, spiritually mature people do not fear the evil in others because they know love always wins in the end.

Some people believe we should just kill all the bad people in the world and peace will reign forever. Is it really true that when we kill all the bad people we will be at peace? This concept is naïve and simplistic. The mentality of dehumanizing others and being willing to kill them because they are impure, evil or satanic is exactly what Christ taught us not to do when he was on the cross. Calling oneself Christian and going against this basic teaching is simply not Christian. The Bible says Christ became sin and absorbed evil. Christ was absolutely the greatest example of how to deal with evil people through non-violence.

In human history, anytime there is a mass murder or a genocide for political purposes it is because people think we should just kill all the evil and bad people and then everything will be okay. It never works well. Hitler believed the Jews were evil and less than human and perpetrated the Holocaust. In the end, Hitler is remembered as one of the most evil people in the history of humankind. The Rwandan genocide in 1994 taught us that killing those we consider evil in reality makes us more evil than them. The Native Americans have also paid an enormous price in the name of colonialism and imperial thought. The cowboy mentality took over, and thousands of Native Americans were exploited, despoiled and killed in this land of America, the land of freedom (Taskforce for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research. (2010).

Evil from Carl Jung's Perspective

Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung's concept of the "shadow" can help us understand why there is evil in human nature. He said:

The shadow is a moral problem that challenges the whole ego-personality, for no one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort. To become conscious of it involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real. This act is the essential condition for any kind of self-knowledge (Jung, 1979, p. 8).

He described those aspects of the personality that we choose to reject and repress. For one reason or another, we all have parts of ourselves that we don't like—or that we think society won't like—so we push those parts down into our unconscious psyches. It is this collection of repressed aspects of our identity that Jung referred to as our shadow self.

If you're one of those people who generally loves who they are, you might be wondering whether this is true of you. "I don't reject myself," you might be thinking. "I love everything about me." However, the problem is that you're not necessarily aware of those parts of your personality that you reject. According to Jung's theory, we distance ourselves psychologically from those behaviors, emotions and thoughts that we find dangerous. Rather than confronting something that we don't like, our mind pretends it does not exist. Aggressive impulses, taboo mental images, shameful experiences, immoral urges, fears, irrational wishes, unacceptable sexual desires—these are a few examples of shadow aspects, things people carry but do not admit to themselves that they carry.

Common shadow behaviors consist of judging others, projecting one's own insecurities and flaws onto another. They can also manifest in losing one's temper with people in a subordinate position of power, or playing the victim instead of taking responsibility for one's own mistake. A willingness to step on others to achieve one's own ends and cheating to gain success are classic examples of the manifestation of evil. In addition, the inability to acknowledge one's own biases and prejudices toward others, such as racism, xenophobia and sexism can also lead to evil acts. Seeing in others what we won't admit lies within is what Jung calls "projection." Although our conscious minds are avoiding our own flaws, we still want to deal with them on a deeper level, so we magnify those flaws in others. First, we reject, then we project, and then we defend, which eventually leads to violence.

This teaching for lasting peace is not just about fighting our enemies but about transforming our enemies into friends. Overcoming evil cannot be done without recognizing the shadow self. Human beings need to see their own shadow, and then the process to transform pain into love can begin. The work of overcoming pain and healing the divide is the inward process and can lead to a transformative experience.

In fact, non-violence begins with fighting the enemy within. Peace is possible in the world, but it starts with each one of us. If there is no peace in our inner world there will be no peace in the outer world. For some people, it takes one big, sudden shift in consciousness to realize this, and for others, it takes many small steps. However, those who genuinely seek personal transformation will harvest peace in their relationship with others.

When violence is used to achieve a goal, the winner celebrates his victory for a period and the loser prepares to take revenge whenever the opportunity arises. The result is that both parties in the conflict will be engaged in an interminable, vicious battle. There is a famous saying about this dynamic of violence: "Whoever wants peace must prepare for war." However, the absence of war is not necessarily peace. A moment of calm does not mean there is genuine peace and security. Peace for a limited time is not true peace, either. How then do we obtain true peace? How do we live together in peace and harmony, respecting our differences and resolving conflict in a non-violent way?

Peacemakers as models

Mahatma Gandhi

Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) was the father of the non-violence movement in the modern world. Gandhi did not have earthly possessions; he was small in stature and shy by nature. Gandhi was not a scholar; however, he was strongly committed to truth and used non-violent protests to challenge social injustice in India. He challenged the Indian caste system, fought against the British foreign rule over India and obtained independence for all Indians. He campaigned to stop poverty, to encourage ethnic and religious conciliation, and to promote women's rights. Gandhi achieved his goals without using violence and by insisting on truth. He became the father of the nation and was referred to as Mahatma, or Great Soul. Gandhi's approach to peace became a great lesson for all people. Many people understand today that non-violent protest can be a practical way to bring peace (Dear, 2002).

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Dr. King is known as one of the greatest non-violent leaders in world history. His inspiration came from both his Christian faith and the peaceful teachings of Mahatma Gandhi. He led the civil rights movement in the late 1950s, helping to achieve legal equality for African Americans in the United States in the 1960s. While some black Americans were advocating the use of violence to attain freedom, Martin Luther King, Jr. used the power of words and acts of non-violence instead. He resisted, protested, and guided grassroots organizations using civil disobedience to achieve seemingly impossible goals. He was able to touch his enemies' minds and hearts and move them to reconsider their perspectives. He believed that women and men, regardless of their skin color or religion, are equal members of the human family. Unfortunately, Dr. King was brutally assassinated on April 4, 1968. However, he is remembered as a model peacemaker for Americans and the worldwide community (The King Center, n.d.).

Nelson Mandela

Nelson Mandela was able to forgive the government that jailed him for 27 years. He emerged from that injustice without bitterness to make peace with his oppressors. He ended apartheid, the colonial system of racial segregation that existed in South Africa for nearly half a century, with kindness. He championed reconciliation among South Africans, both whites and blacks. Mandela strongly believed in the principles of nation-building and cooperative governance. He inspired confidence in all South Africans. He was known as a great negotiator, humble and fair in his approach to peace.

More important than anything, Nelson Mandela was a master of forgiveness. He admired the American civil rights activist Martin Luther King, Jr., and Indian independence leader Mahatma Gandhi, both of whom were assassinated while actively engaged in their callings. In 1993, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, which he shared with former South African president Frederik Willem de Klerk. Once again Mandela proved that it was possible to bring peace without violence and that enemies could become friends (Polgreen, 2013).

II. CONCLUSION

This paper supports the view that human nature fundamentally is good; however, one must recognize the shadow self or evil within and dominate it. In fact, collaboration and genuine care for others are embedded in human nature in the shadow itself. This gives tremendous hope to the world that violence is not the only alternative to solve humanity's problems. Peacemakers, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Nelson Mandela were certainly not perfect, but they were able to overcome the evil within for peacemaking. The common denominator among all these leaders is that they sought peace through non-violence. They were unwavering practitioners of non-violence, determined to pursue peace through dialogue and forgiveness. They were without doubt certain of their own shadow but overcame it.

The use of violence is a reaction centered on our own wounds (Nouwen, 1979). If we cannot effectively transform our pain into a sacred gift for the world, then we should prepare for violence, war and chaos. Therefore, our world needs more peacemakers who can actively manifest non-violence to bring peace in the society. The unnecessary suffering of the world caused by war can end when more people take the journey

of transformation. This inward journey of non-violent practice will bring forth an era of peace and stability to the world.

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KONE Drissa. "Human Nature, Non-Violence And A Transformational Approach To Peace." *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention (IJHSSI)*, vol. 11(10), 2022, pp 84-89. Journal DOI- 10.35629/7722