

Roots of Violence, Seeds of Peace

Grace M. Jantzen

It was a good piece of land, about half an acre, well drained, gently sloping, and sheltered from the east wind: perfect for growing vegetables and a few raspberries. I was gradually making my way as an academic in London University, but I had come from a prairie farm in Saskatchewan and love the soil and all growing things. Working a vegetable patch would be a perfect balance to long hours at my desk. There were some weeds and a coarse grass growing on the patch, but it was autumn; I would have until spring to prepare it for seeding. So whenever I could take a break from my books I spent an hour or two pulling up the weeds and digging in a load of farmyard manure. As I turned the soil over I noticed long white root systems from the coarse grass: I pulled up what I could, and chopped up what was left with my spade, carefully burying it as I went along. After some weeks I was rewarded with a lovely clean plot of land ready for spring planting. But when spring began to arrive, long before any seeds could go in, the plot was covered in virulent coarse grass. It was, of course, couch grass; by chopping up the roots and burying them I had propagated it in just the way it likes best, and I had all to do again.

In the years since then, as the world has continued its escalating spiral of hatred and violence, the labyrinthine system of that couch grass has come to be a metaphor of buried violence always ready to spring up and stifle the fruitfulness of the earth. In this essay I propose to look again, not so much at the particular outbreaks of violence, worrying as they are, but at its root system, the labyrinth of aggression and violence which springs up in destruction and warfare. In the discourses of modernity, aggression has been taken as

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“natural,” an innate feature of what it is to be human. If that is the case, then non-violence cannot work; since what is innate will always find a way to erupt into expression. I wish therefore to show how violence has been naturalized and how it can be denaturalized, exposing its tangled roots to make way for seeds of peace.

Underground: The Cultural Habitus

Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist, devoted his efforts to developing a logic of practice, an account of how people in a culture develop a “practical sense for what is to be done in a given situation.”¹ He calls this shared practical sense the *habitus*. The habitus is the common sense world as it appears to, and is inhabited by, its participants. As children, we acquire a sense of how to behave: a whole range of attitudes, tastes, and values acquired and absorbed through our upbringing develop within us a sense of “how things are done” in the multiple situations, trivial and complex, which make up our daily life. It is this complex of tastes and preferences and learned behaviour patterns, this habitus, that enables us in most situations to know spontaneously what to do: we have a sense of what is needed or appropriate and how to do it. And it feels completely natural or even instinctive: indeed *not* to behave in accordance with the habitus — to wear beach clothes to a funeral or to eat stew without cutlery — could only be done with deliberate forethought and to achieve some (perhaps shocking) objective. The habitus makes social life possible: within a fairly limited range of possibilities we know what sort of behaviour is expected in various social roles and contexts, and can give our attention and energy to putting our own distinctive personal style on the ways in which we fill these roles and encounter new situations.

Because the habitus is the disposition formed by the internalization of cognitive structures and past experience and training, actions and attitudes that spring from this disposition feel entirely natural: they are not perceived as unusual or against the grain. As Bourdieu puts it, “the *habitus* — embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history — is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product. As such, it . . . produces history on the basis of history” and the social norms that are thus reproduced and perpetuated “tend to appear as necessary, even natural.”² “Natural,” here should be taken in its strong sense, that is, as part of the laws

of nature. There are, of course, endless illustrations of this: women have been seen as “naturally” the ones who should look after the young; boys are “naturally” better at math and woodwork while girls take “naturally” to sewing and cooking; same sex attraction is “unnatural” or “contrary to nature;” Blacks are “naturally” superior in sports and dance Above all, men³ are “naturally” violent: aggression is part of human nature. But is it?

Because the habitus is largely below the level of consciousness, it is entirely possible for a society to be in the grip of a dominant symbolic system without bringing it to critical scrutiny. When this is the case, then not only will individuals “naturally” act in accordance with it, but society, ranging from its choices of expression and entertainment to its policies and structures, will also reflect and reinforce it. Culture will be filled with symptoms of this habitus; its master discourses will frame and be framed by it; the everyday functioning of systems and individuals will be in accordance with it — and yet it may never be critically scrutinized. Indeed, there may be a strong resistance to bringing it to consciousness, since critical awareness could feel like a challenge to human nature itself and would certainly be a challenge to “common sense.” Thus history will be produced on the basis of history, patterns will repeat themselves ever and again.

Violent Rhizomes

My suggestion is that the habitus of the west is violent, and that western history, including its most recent history, is a re-enactment of this violence which has been internalized to such an extent that in any situation requiring response, violence seems natural, the only alternative. Violence has so colonized our habitus that we have collectively lost the capacity to imagine other sorts of response. In the global context this is regularly expressed in military terms: from the Gulf War to Bosnia, from Kosovo to Afghanistan, the alternatives are presented as either “doing nothing” or military bombardment. Since there is a felt moral and political need to do something, the west, claiming God and goodness on its side, goes to war.

Yet it is not war, worrying though that is, upon which our attention should be focused. Many thoughtful people deplore war — sometimes all wars, sometimes specific wars, as unjustifiable morally or tactically — and would hold that the values of western society are and should be fundamentally

peaceable. But if I am anywhere near right, war is no more than an explosive exportation of the systemic violence which spreads its underground tentacles throughout our cultural habitus. Susanne Kappeler, in her book *The Will to Violence*, puts this point starkly:

War does not suddenly break out in a peaceful society; sexual violence is not the disturbance of otherwise equal gender relations. Racist attacks do not shoot like lightning out of a non-racist sky, and the sexual exploitation of children is no solitary problem in a world otherwise just to children. The violence of our most commonsense everyday thinking, and especially our personal will to violence, constitute the conceptual preparation, the ideological armament and the intellectual mobilization which make the ‘out-break’ of war, of sexual violence, of racist attacks, of murder and destruction possible at all.⁴

Once we are alert to it, we can see violence everywhere, expressing and reinforcing our habitus in ways that seem entirely natural, taken for granted. Consider for example language itself, saturated with images of war even in contexts where a moment’s thought shows the inappropriateness of metaphors of violence: the *battle* against homelessness, a *fight* against cancer (or AIDS, or child abuse), *war* on want, the *weapons* of effective argument, an *arsenal* of antibiotics . . . if our choice of words expresses and reinforces our habitus, a look at the vocabulary of any newspaper (and even many a sermon) should give us pause.

When we move from language to wider cultural manifestations, violence is similarly endemic. Science and technology, the emblems of western rationality, are skewed in many western countries to a major focus on military research and development, and the economies of these countries is heavily dependent upon the manufacture and trade of arms. From theater and film to novels and music, from video games to children’s toys, we are a society which consumes violence, taking for granted its “entertainment” value, reproducing and naturalizing violence. My argument is not that we become more violent (or that children learn violence) by watching violent television and playing violent video games, though that may well be so. Rather, I am pointing to some symptoms of the endemic violence of our cultural habitus, spreading its

underground roots through every area of our social and cultural life and springing up wherever opportunity offers. None of this is new; I rehearse it only to give substance to my claim about the violence of our habitus.

The Master Discourses: Violence Naturalized

But what if violence is inevitable, a part of the human condition that cannot be escaped? If this is so, then we can work against this or that manifestation of violence, but violence will always break out again because it is part of human nature. It goes deeper than our habitus, deep as that goes. The habitus is ingrained by linguistic and cultural conditioning so that responses *seem* instinctive, but actually they are not: with different conditioning we could learn to behave otherwise. But perhaps violence not only *seems* but *is* rooted in human nature: in original sin, perhaps, or in testosterone, or in an externalized death drive. In this section I will survey some of the major narratives of western modernity and show briefly how each of them naturalizes violence, giving it a place as part of human nature and thus as having explanatory value. My contention is that none of these theories is correct; they assume rather than prove that violence is essential, and in so doing are further manifestations of the violent habitus of western modernity. As such, however, they produce history on the basis of history: by naturalizing violence they render it theoretically inevitable and practically repeated. What is necessary is to dig up the roots of these master discourses and expose them for what they are, in order that more creative alternatives may find room to grow. Here I can only offer the briefest of sketches of these discourses. What follows should therefore be taken as programmatic, an initial indication of how the master discourses that shape the habitus of western modernity naturalize violence.

Theological Discourse

In theological discourse violence is frequently taken to be inseparable from human nature, especially “after the Fall”: with original sin, violence is naturalized. To choose one example from many in recent theology, Marjorie Suchocki in her study of original sin entitled *The Fall to Violence* writes that

a tendency toward aggression is built into human nature . . . we are by nature an aggressive species with a history of physical and

psychic violence The capacity for violence is built into our species through aggressive instincts related to survival. When that violence is unnecessary and avoidable, it is sin.⁵

Unnecessary to whom? For what? In the Darwinian terms underlying these assertions, presumably Suchocki sees violence as sometimes necessary and therefore justifiable — not sinful — for the survival of the fittest. I will return to Darwin below: here I want only to point out how violence is naturalized in standard theological discourse, even (as in the case of Suchocki) discourse that considers itself progressive and in tune with modern science.

Earlier theologians, more concerned with fidelity to patristic sources than to scientific speculation, were just as willing to naturalize violence. John Calvin, reaching back to Augustine and forward to the various Protestant theologies of modernity, asserts baldly, “Original sin . . . may be defined a hereditary corruption and depravity of our nature, extending to all parts of the soul . . .” from which proceed such works as “theft, hatred, murder, revellings . . .” Even infants, though they have not yet done these deeds, are “polluted.” “Nay, their whole nature is, as it were, a seed-bed of sin, and therefore cannot but be odious and abominable to God.”⁶ In Calvin’s uncompromising view, the violence which the Bible attributes to God — the genocide of the flood or of the Egyptians at the Red Sea — is labelled divine justice and power, while the violence of humanity is sinful and an abomination.

Karl Barth, standing in the Calvinist tradition, shows how a more subtle reading is possible. Barth says,

In most of us the murderer is suppressed and chained, possibly by the command of God, possibly by no more than circumstances, convention, or the fear of punishment. Yet he is very much alive in his cage, and ready to leap out at any time . . . *Homo homini lupus* [Man is a wolf to man]. There exists in every man a very deep-seated and almost original evil readiness and lust to kill. The common murderer or homicide is simply the one in whom the wolf slips the chain.⁷

Yet Barth backs away just slightly from the Calvinistic naturalizing stance: the lust to kill is “almost original” — but not quite. Barth continues: “Moreover, the point has also to be considered that no single man and therefore no criminal

is identical with the indwelling wolf. It is not his nature. It belongs to the corruption of his nature.”⁸ Barth thus allows himself an escape from the idea that violence is part of human nature as created by God; nevertheless, because of original sin and the resulting bondage of the will, the “indwelling wolf” is the prevailing reality of human interaction. We will meet this wolf again.

Political Discourse

The political discourse of modernity, in its early phases much influenced by Christian teaching,⁹ similarly finds itself on aggression and violence as inherent in human nature and the structure of society. This is most overt in the social contract theory of Thomas Hobbes. According to his portrayal of humanity in the “state of nature,” human appetites and aversions keep people in constant competition: “they are in that condition called Warre; and such a warre, as is of every man against every man.”¹⁰ Two fundamental facts structure this situation: (1) death is the evil most to be feared; (2) “nature hath made men so equal” that it is within the power of anyone to kill anyone else: “the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest, either by secret machination, or by confederacy with others”¹¹ Unless some remedy were found, human beings would destroy one another: in Hobbes’s most famous phrase there would be “continuall feare, and danger of violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short.”¹² In order to avoid this miserable situation people join together in a social contract, one which in Hobbes’s formulation involves giving up mutual violence and ceding the right of violence to a sovereign in return for protection from enemies and a rule of law. The aggressive impulse has not gone away; violence is still natural; but nature is subordinated to a political arrangement which each participant recognizes to be for their own good.¹³

Subsequent social contract theorists like Locke and Rousseau modified Hobbes’s position: Locke, for example, in his *Second Treatise on Government* described the state of nature as “a state of perfect freedom” and “equality” in which the law of Nature prescribes mutual respect for one another’s lives and property.¹⁴ Violence is justifiable only when one’s property (including the property one has in wife, children, and one’s own life) is under threat. But for all the urbanity of Locke’s account, the “murderer” is never far away;¹⁵ the

social contract is still the forcible suppression of violence and tyranny which even in Locke is endemic in human nature.¹⁶

Biological Discourse

Of all the discourses naturalizing aggression and violence, perhaps the most influential upon late modernity is that of Darwin and his followers. According to Darwin's account in *The Origin of the Species*, the variety of flora and fauna have come about by a principle of natural selection working over vast periods of time. All of life is a struggle for existence, species against species but also often individual against individual. Applying Malthus's theory of the increase of populations if left to reproduce without check, Darwin argued,

A struggle for existence inevitably follows from the high rate at which all organic beings tend to increase As more individuals are produced than can possibly survive, there must in every case be a struggle for existence, either one individual with another of the same species, or with the individuals of distinct species, or with the physical conditions of life.¹⁷

Darwin's reference here to "physical conditions of life" makes clear that the struggle for existence should not be equated with aggression and violence: it might equally be the enhanced ability to manage with little water in a dry place. Nevertheless, Darwin lapses easily into the language of war. In a restatement of his theory in his later book, *The Variation of Animals and Plants under Domestication*, Darwin returned to the Malthusian idea of population increase, and said:

The inevitable result is an ever-recurrent Struggle for Existence. It has truly been said that all nature is at war; the strongest ultimately prevail, the weakest fail . . . the severe and often-recurrent struggle for existence will determine that those variations, however slight, which are favourable shall be preserved or selected, and those which are unfavourable shall be destroyed.¹⁸

In a situation where "all are at war" aggression will be an advantage for survival, and it is therefore consistent with natural selection to assume that aggression will be bred into those who survive as central to their nature.

In fact, that conclusion goes beyond what Darwin himself said, and perhaps beyond what he would be happy with, but it was taken for granted by the proponents of Social Darwinism from Herbert Spencer onwards, who were willing to use Darwin's theory of the survival of the fittest to validate every sort of conquest from the colonial appropriation of Africa to the unification of German states under Prussia. It became taken for granted that aggression and violence are hard-wired into the human psyche. Moreover, (in something of a reversal of Darwinian theory which would imply that aggression should increase over time as a selective advantage) aggression became associated with primitive cultures. The rise of civilization involved finding ways of dealing with aggression in ways that did not harm society: sports like football and fox hunting; vicarious participation in violence through film, video, and games; and from time to time the necessary blood-letting of war.¹⁹

Philosophical Discourse

In his famous account of the lord and bondsman in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel set the agenda for modern and postmodern philosophical discourse. In Hegel's usage the question is the emergence of subjective consciousness, in relation to the material world and to other people. As Hegel presents it, in the encounter between the self and the other "each seeks the death of the other" and to that end stakes his own life: only through such a life and death struggle can they gain the freedom of self-consciousness.²⁰ The struggle is for recognition: each attempts to force it from the other in this "trial by death." The one who finally chooses to give way rather than die becomes subservient, the other becomes the lord.

But just when the lord seems to have achieved his desire, things turn out differently. The lord puts the bondsman to work for him, work in the material world, where the bondsman's strength and skill are taxed in a new struggle, this time with physical reality. In this struggle, which the lord has spared himself by requiring it of the bondsman, the latter comes to a self-understanding that would never have been possible had he not done battle both with the material and with his own limitations in relation to it. Therefore, "through work . . . the bondsman becomes conscious of what he truly is," a self-awareness not available to the lord and superseding his own self-consciousness.²¹

Many following Hegel made this multi-faceted struggle and its implicit or explicit violence central to their understanding of social reality. Marx and Engels famously took it over as an account of class struggle in the development of modern capitalist economics. Their *Communist Manifesto* begins:

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebian, lord and serf, guildmaster and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.²²

Marx's theory of the emergence of a communist society is based on this naturalization of violence, drawn explicitly from his radical reading of Hegel but compatible also with Social Darwinism. But the naturalization of violence belongs as much to the right as to the left. The entire basis of the free market economy is the competitive struggle for survival, the competition which seeks to vanquish and eliminate rivals. Even the language of economics — the *hostile* take-over bids, the *conquest* of markets, and the *dominance* or *defeat* of one company by another — institutionalizes aggression.

Psychoanalytic Discourse

The master discourse that has become perhaps the most effective in inscribing violence as natural is that of psychoanalysis. Sigmund Freud, in his *Civilization and its Discontents*, says this:

. . . Men are not gentle creatures who want to be loved, and who at the most can defend themselves if they are attacked; they are, on the contrary, creatures among whose instinctual endowments is to be reckoned a powerful share of aggressiveness. As a result, their neighbour is for them not only a potential helper or sexual object, but also someone who tempts them to satisfy their aggressiveness on him, to exploit his capacity for work without compensation, to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and to kill him. *Homo homini lupus*.²³

Re-enter the wolf. Freud was deeply influenced by Darwin.²⁴ For Freud, ultimately biology and psychology were inseparable; and at their heart lies the instinct of aggression, as primary and inescapable as instincts of self-preservation. Violence and mutual hostility are as inevitable as eating, sleeping and sex: “the inclination to aggression is an original, self-subsisting instinctual disposition in man.”²⁵

Freud, therefore, considers how this aggressive instinct is to be satisfied without destroying humanity. Aggression turned inwards, in guilt or depression, is unhealthy. But if the aggression is turned outwards, “the organism will be relieved and the effect must be beneficial” — at least for the organism itself. Because of its instinctual nature, moreover, “there is no use in trying to get rid of men’s aggressive inclinations.”²⁶ The only question is how they can be diverted in such a way as to be containable within civilization; whether the instinct of Eros, which stands in the balance against this destructive death instinct (Thanatos), will be strong enough to enable humanity to sublimate their destructive impulses.

Denaturalizing Violence

In the face of such unanimity in modernity’s master discourses, it must at first seem foolish to resist the claim that aggression is innate and violence inevitable. The best we could do is try to channel it into the least destructive ways; though even that is an endless and possibly unachievable task. If aggression is instinctual, on a par with the need for food or sex, then pacifism is at best like virginity: perhaps a few can choose it, with varying quotients of liberation and personal cost, but it is neither possible nor desirable for humanity as a whole. Social conditioning can teach us to eat with a knife and fork, and to behave sexually within socially sanctioned parameters, but it would be futile to forbid eating or sexual expression. If the urge to violence is similarly natural — an innate part of human nature — then it is just as futile to bewail it. We would do better to find a “knife and fork” for aggression, a channel for its expression which does the least amount of damage.²⁷

Against all of this, I suggest that it is false that violence is natural. My claim is rather that violence saturates the western habitus, and that those who see violence as innate — Hobbes, Darwin, Freud and the rest — have not made their case. Rather, they have reflected their violent habitus, built it into

their theories, and thereby reinscribed it in western thinking and practice. It is a classic example of Bourdieu's theory of history being produced on the basis of history, the habitus reinscribing itself at an ever deeper level. To substantiate this claim, consider the following.

1. Each of the discourses cited is of course vast; there are whole libraries of theology, evolutionary biology, psychoanalysis, and the rest, in which their claims and implications are carefully scrutinized. However, perhaps just because of this vastness, their accounts of human aggression are seldom all considered together. But such a juxtaposition reveals an intriguing pattern. Each discourse asserts the centrality of aggression to human nature (and, in the case of Darwin, to our animal ancestors as well), and uses this claim as the basis of their larger theory. The innateness of violence is an *assumption*, not the conclusion of an argument. That assumption is then pivotal for the theory that follows. So, for example, *because* Hobbes takes the state of nature to be "the war of all against all," he devises the theory of the social contract; similarly, Hegel *assumes* that a struggle to the death is the only way in which the desire for recognition can be gratified.

But where is the evidence? The claim that aggression is innate or natural is presumably meant to be an empirical claim. As such it can ground the theory that is built upon it. But it can only do so if it is itself true; and its truth is dependent upon evidence that confirms it. Yet not one of the theorists I have cited evaluates the empirical evidence for the premise that aggression is natural. What they do instead is look around them at all the aggression and violence in the world, and move directly from its perceived ubiquity (sometimes, like Barth or Freud, acknowledging that they find it in their own hearts also) to the assumption that it is innate. Granted, the world is full of human-produced violence, and it is important not to pretend otherwise. But if the question is whether that violence is rooted in innate aggression or better understood as a result of social formation, an expression of our habitus, then simple appealing to the sheer prevalence of violence proves nothing one way or the other. So far, the evidence is compatible with either hypothesis. It is therefore unwarranted for the theorists of modernity simply to assume that violence is innate.

2. What happens, if instead of jumping to either conclusion we take more time over the evidence itself? We might begin with the simplest question: *Who* is violent? It is immediately apparent that violence is much less equally

distributed in the human population than is the instinct for food or sex. In the first place, violence is strongly gendered. When Hobbes or Locke write of the state of nature, it is the *men* who come together to form the social contract to preserve their property; in psychoanalytic theory aggression is *masculine*, connected to the boy's Oedipal phase; in Marxist accounts the capitalists and the workers are assumed to be *male*. The masculine pronouns and the supposedly generic 'man' in their writings turn out to be specific and accurate.

By and large it is men who make war; men who commit violent crimes such as rape or murder; even men who play football or engage in other aggressive sport-substitutes for violence. This is not to say that women are never violent: some of them are. Neither is it to argue that women are morally superior to men. There are other moral evils besides violence; some of them arguably worse. But the incidence of *violence* is heavily skewed to the male.

The implication is obvious. One can hardly allege in one breath that violence is part of human nature but in the next breath say that it applies to only half of humanity: think of the parallel with food or sex. If women are very much less aggressive than men, then aggression cannot be a human instinct or innate to human nature. At most it could be argued that aggression is instinctive to *male* human nature. The theorists whose views I have presented notoriously do not even consider women in their master discourses: they take for granted that *male* nature is *human* nature, or putting it another way, they take the male as normatively human and render the female invisible.

Now, one response is to retreat to essentialism, either biological or psychological. The biological version links aggression to testosterone; the psychological to the way a little boy must negotiate his Oedipal complex. In either case, aggression is or becomes rooted in the male body or psyche in a way that does not apply to females. But again the logic does not stand up to scrutiny. For the argument to be persuasive, it would have to be possible to measure testosterone levels (or grade the negotiation of the Oedipal complex) and correlate the findings with violent behavior over a large experimental cohort, complete with a control group. Only if the correlates were strong could the hypothesis have credibility. Once again the argument is based on assuming the very thing that is in question: the innateness of aggression. First it is assumed that men are violent by their very nature, and then some gender-specific explanation for that violence must be found.

3. Moreover, not all men are violent. Very many men are gentle and abhor aggression. That is observably true of many individual men in western societies; it is also true of whole societies and cultures in other parts of the world. The aboriginal peoples of Australia and North America, for example, seem to have lived in relative peace before European contact, as did many Asian and African peoples. Some, but by no means all, tribes and peoples have been warlike. Once European contact generated insecurity and introduced alcohol, guns, and measles, the propensity for warfare increased, though even then it is noteworthy how hard many aboriginal peoples tried to keep their peace-loving ways.²⁸

Because so much of what counts as history has traditionally been written by European men for whom wars and conquests have been of central importance, less notice has been taken of peaceable societies in which “nothing happened”; but this is yet another inscription of a violent habitus. The case should not be overstated or romanticized: it is certainly not true that all precontact societies were peaceable (or indeed that war is the only kind of violence). Nevertheless, it is demonstrable that the idea of the “savage” was largely a European invention, projected onto peoples who were being subjected to European behavior much more deserving of that term.²⁹

The existence of largely non-violent societies and of non-violent men in western society drives a coach and horses through the argument that violence is part of (male) human nature. Of course it is always possible to narrow the argument: one can move from “violence is part of human nature” to “violence is part of male nature” to “violence is part of a sub-group of male nature,” but this dwindles to the claim that violence is innate to those who are violent, and only the violence itself can be adduced as evidence. Although modernity’s master discourses naturalize violence, the arguments for such naturalization simply do not hold water.

Taking Responsibility for Peace

But so what? Even if I am right that violence should not be naturalized, there is still the same amount of actual violence in the world. How does theorizing help? When it comes down to the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis, or the so-called “war against terrorism” that is used as a mantra to justify whatever violence strong states wish to unleash, what difference does it make

whether violence is inherent in human nature or not? No amount of theory, however logical and correct, can take the place of practical peaceable action. But neither should theory be underestimated. If as individuals and as a society we tend to act out of our violent habitus, then it is important to understand that habitus in such a way as to effect change. Our actions reflect our assumptions: better to bring them to consciousness and critical assessment. In that way we can take fuller responsibility for our actions and attitudes than if they are left at the level of uninvestigated “common sense.”

I suggest that naturalizing violence has precisely the effect of undermining such responsibility. If violence is “only natural,” if gendered aggression can be shrugged off with the comment that “boys will be boys,” if war is taken as inevitable, then ultimately non-violence cannot work: the wolf will at best be chained and sooner or later will break loose. Of the theorists whose discourses were sketched above, only Freud looked for ways in which civilization might sublimate aggression; and even he conceded that periodic blood letting was inevitable and probably healthy. We see in his writings a theme latent in much modern thought: if violence is naturalized it is partly justified; if it can’t be helped, it must be condoned.

If, however, the assumption that violence is natural is destabilized, then so also is that justification. We have no choice but to take responsibility for it, no shirking from the critical evaluation and re-formation of our habitus. The assumptions that form our habitus and the violent language, practices, and theories which entangle it must be brought to light, not left buried underground to spring up into new batches of war and terror. Only by patient removal of the roots of violence in our habitus can there be a clearing for the seeds of peace. Only then can non-violence work.

Notes

¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical Reason: Or the Theory of Action* (Cambridge: Polity, 1998), 25; cf. his *The Logic of Practice* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990).

² *Logic of Practice*, 56, 53.

³ I use the masculine deliberately, and will discuss its implications later in the essay.

⁴ Susanne Kappeler, *The Will to Violence: The Politics of Personal Behaviour* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995), 9.

⁵ Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence: Original Sin in Relational Theology* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 85.

⁶ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1957), Vol. I, Bk. II, i. 8, 217.

⁷ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. III. 4: *The Doctrine of Creation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958), 413.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 414.

⁹ Note the extent to which both Hobbes's and Locke's political writings are saturated with Biblical references. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (London: Penguin, 1985); John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (London: J.M. Dent, 1924).

¹⁰ *Leviathan* I. 13, 185.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 183.

¹² *Ibid.*, 186; Cf. Alan Ryan, "Hobbes's Political Philosophy" in Tom Sorell, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 208-245.

¹³ To be fair, Hobbes was presenting this movement from a state of nature to political stability as a logical rather than a historical account. Moreover, it can be argued that "when Hobbes talks about human nature, he usually does not mean to be saying something that he thinks true of each and every human being, but only something that holds for a significant portion of the human population. . . ." Bernard Gert, in Sorrel, 166. Neither of these points affects my central argument.

¹⁴ Locke, *Second Treatise on Government* II. 4, 6; 118-120.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 122.

¹⁶ Cf. Richard Ashcraft, "Locke's Political Philosophy" in Vere Chappell, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Locke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 226-51.

¹⁷ Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species* (London: Penguin, 1968), 116-17.

¹⁸ Charles Darwin, *The Variation of Animals and Plants Under Domestication* (London: John Murray, 1868), I. 5-6.

¹⁹ Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 156-68; Stephen Mennell, *Norbert Elias: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 57-59, 140-58.

²⁰ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), B. IV. A. 187; 113-14.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 118.

²² Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 3.

²³ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents in Civilization, Society and Religion*. The Penguin Freud Library, Vol. 12. (London: Penguin, 1991), 302.

²⁴ Cf. Lucille B. Ritvo, *Darwin's Influence on Freud: A Tale of Two Sciences* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 313.

²⁶ "Why War?" in *Civilization, Society and Religion*, 358.

²⁷ This is, of course, what Freud, Elias, et al. advocate.

²⁸ For an instructive view of the variations, and the responses to European contact, see Ronald Wright, *Stolen Continents: The "New World" Through Indian Eyes* (London: Penguin, 1993).

²⁹ Cf. Olive P. Dickason, *The Myth of the Savage and the Beginnings of French Colonialism in the Americas* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1984).