

**LESS VIOLENT:
EXPLORING EVOLUTIONS OF MIND, BEHAVIOR AND POLICY
TOWARD A MORE PEACEFUL WORLD**

Materials:

Pinker, Steven. 2012. *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*. Penguin Books, ISBN No. 978-0-14-312201-2

and sections of (to be determine):

Gopin, Marc. 2009. *To Make the Earth Whole: The Art of Citizen Diplomacy in an Age of Religious Militancy*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers ISBN No. 978-0-74-255863-2

The Global Situation and the State of Our Human Nature

Is the world becoming less violent? For the first time in human history science is establishing some hopeful indicators that, based on the global average of homicide and aggravated assault rates, we are becoming far less violent than ever before in history. At the same time there is also a massive amount of violence at the state level internationally and at the local level that is disturbing and worrying. In a crowded world of seven billion people, the deliberate harm to innocents that does occur involves extremely large numbers of people, and we now nervously watch much of it instantly in our highly networked world. In fact, citizen victims of war have risen astronomically since World War I.

It is hard to imagine that the world is a more peaceful place given the horrors we see with our own eyes in the media every day. Another reason that we find it difficult to accept that there is less global violence is because the violence that *does* exist is unevenly and unfairly distributed: civilians suffer far more than militaries, women and children suffer far more than men, minorities far more than majorities, the poor far more than the wealthy, the global south far more than the global north, less developed countries far more than the developed ones, just to cite a few imbalances.

Some areas like Western Europe are more peaceful than ever before in their history, whereas Africa and the Middle East seem full of weapons, revolutions, repression, and massive violence. The imbalance of suffering globally not only strikes us as unfair, but as bewildering as we struggle to answer the most essential question: where are we going as a human community that is highly interconnected? Where to our fate as a species when we are more interdependent than ever? We need each other to survive, and we cannot tell whether we are getting safer or whether we are in trouble. The answers to these questions are a basic part of the journey that this APT will undertake, a journey I invite you to take with me.

One thing is certain. It is increasingly clear that we *do* as humans have the capacity and the tools to become less violent *when* we put our minds to it. But we are immature as a global community as to how to do this together in an effective and lasting way.

This APT is setup to be a space of exploration, and related projects and writings, is set up to be a space of exploration on how we become less violent. We will:

- A. Explore how less violence is already happening,
- B. Recommend how to accelerate the process,
- C. Demonstrate current events for their relevance to our recommendations,
- D. Analyze cultural, psychological, social, political and military developments, for what we can learn about the challenges of shifting the world toward less violence

How to Organize the Phenomenon of Less Violence

We will explore the way human beings become less violent by how they change their:

1. minds,
2. behaviors,
3. policies.

The Mind

What I mean by “mind” includes every aspect of what human beings feel, think, believe, imagine, and invent. It means all the human creations that come from our minds, both individually and collectively. This includes, for example, culture, religion, academic subjects, philosophy, literature, poetry, mysticism, wisdom literature, comedy, dreams and nightmares, nonviolent philosophies and fascist philosophies, fantasies of peace and fantasies of genocide, dreams of power and nightmares of powerlessness, pro-social and antisocial feelings, ideas that build and ideas that destroy, ideas of purity in religion that create nonviolence and ideas of purity in religion that create murder.

I am suggesting that everything we feel, think, believe and invent can be understood and evaluated in terms of its leading either toward more violence or less violence. For example, thoughts and feelings of compassion induce less violence in people, in relationships and in societies, *when those feelings are directed to everyone*. As another example, spiritual and religious conceptions of the world that see every human being, even every creature as sacred, often will lead to less violence between people. But extensive conceptions of hell and who should be there often lead toward more violence. A conception of a child as an image of God leads to less violence, a conception of a child as possessed by the Devil usually leads to more violence. A conception of whole classes of people, such as the rich, or intellectuals, or Tutsi, as needing to be suppressed in order for the world to thrive, generally leads to violence and even mass murder. Racial thinking in general has rarely led to less violent human behavior, and mostly to more violent behavior. It is the mind that leads our bodies to violent behavior or nonviolent behavior, and it is the mind that creates violent policies or less violent policies in the course of human history of societies and states.

We will therefore explore current events with an eye toward all the most relevant lessons of science, wisdom and philosophy on the power of the mind to create less violence. The mind, what it feels, thinks, imagines, creates, will be one of three central foci of our explorations.

Behavior

When people get less violent this centers on their behavior in immediate surroundings. We will include in 'behavior', however, the entire causal chain coming from single behaviors, such as the ripple effects of a single act of kindness to another human being that may lead to a shift in the recipient's thinking and behavior toward others that day--or even for a lifetime. The causal chain of violence and nonviolence is infinite.

What we do, our behavior, is not only about how we immediately affect others in a more or less violent way. It is about a long string of effects from our original actions that leads toward more or less violence. For example, our original action may be perfectly nonviolent but end up in a causal chain becoming very violent. This especially includes what we buy, what we sell, what we create, which initially may be very nonviolent but in fact may be supporting very violent people or institutions, such as companies that are destroying their workers' lives thousands of miles away. Every action must be judged as more or less violent in terms of its *net effects* that in principal are limitless. The more that we judge the causal chain of effects from single behaviors, the more we get into the realm of law, of policy, of institutions, and how all of them can be more or less violent depending on the intelligence and compassion we bring to crafting them. They need to set in motion behaviors and policies that have a massive ripple effect toward nonviolent human relations.

Behavior also includes everything we say and how we interact with others. Speech is behavior, even nonverbal speech and communication. Behavior includes everything we do on impulse, but also everything we do based on principle, based on conformity to laws, beliefs, opinions or social pressure. All of these behaviors can lead toward more or less violence around us, and all are a model for the human future. The great wisdom and philosophical traditions for thousands of years have all weighed in on how to minimize violent behavior and speech, but we are also learning a great deal from psychology and other disciplines.

Policy

Less violence is a yardstick by which to measure all of our human institutions, our ethics, the laws that govern our societies, our fundamental guidelines on right and wrong, our corporate policies, our organized religion policies, our commerce policies, our budget policies and priorities, our foreign policy priorities, and, of course, our military policies. In every one of these areas of policy there are constant choices leading toward more or less

violence, and we will examine this as the ultimate area in which we create a more or less violent world.

Policy goes far beyond how our policies affect fellow citizens. More or less violence has no limits based on citizenship. Our policies affect every single human being and animal in the present and the future. What we advocate, abide by, and implement every day affects everyone, even thousands of miles away--especially thousands of miles away--beyond our families and beyond our borders. Violence that is displaced onto others as a way of keeping peace between the few is the most insidious form of human violence that must be exposed and neutralized with great zeal.

The interaction of all three: mind, behavior, policy

It is hard to conceive of a *policy* that is not rooted in a way of *thinking* and a kind of *behavior*. It is hard to think of a *behavior* or set of practices that does not have *policy* implications, and that is not rooted in some way of *thinking*, for worse or for better. It is hard to have a *thought* that does not lead to some kind of *behavior* and *policy* in the world that is either more or less violent. That is why as we take up each subject, such as, clothing production, and not see its contribution to more or less violence. We will always be looking at how we think of a piece of clothing, what are our practices around making or buying or selling clothing, and what policies are implied locally and globally. This interaction will lead to the most creative suggestion on a future of less violence.

Why frame our inquiry and subject as "less violence", and not "nonviolence" or "peace" or "conflict prevention" or "increments of positive change" as I have previously?

Nonviolence as a belief and practice has a long and venerated history. Believers in nonviolence from Gandhi to King also have ancient predecessors who saw that the highest experience of human society in its ideal form is a nonviolent one. The Biblical vision of the Garden of Eden, or of the Messianic Era, are among those classical visions. Also, nonviolent resistance refers to a methodology of resisting injustice, often by organized groups, that has a long and noble history. Today it is a sophisticated methodology of social change that can count many success stories, and in fact, its track record of positive social change to democracy is on average far better than the statistical record of violent revolution or war as modes of democratic change (See *Why Civil Resistance Works*, ed. Chenoweth and Stephan).

At the same time, nonviolence is a moral choice of rare individuals and communities. Human beings are divided on the subject of nonviolence, because many people and ethical systems have determined that it is actually unethical, for example, *not* to engage in violent self-defense when innocent lives are at stake.

That is why I named this APT and this direction of thinking *Less Violent*. I want this APT to be radically inclusive of anyone interested in how to make the world less violent, how to make their own corner of the universe less violent, *no matter where their starting point may*

be. If it is a policeman or a prison guard, for example, who wants to minimize the violence of his profession then he/she is welcome here, even if I wish that policing some day will become mostly nonviolent.

That is why in my book *To Make the Earth Whole* I have promoted the concept of “increments of positive change”, because the evidence will suggest that the world is getting less violent not due to philosophies of nonviolence that only the minority accept, but due to the positive increments of nonviolence being insinuated by millions of people of good will every day. These include teachers who introduce nonviolent forms of communication or generate empathy across cultural lines through the study of global literature, all the way to police protecting children from grievous harm at the hands of bad parents. There are millions of participants in the march toward a less violent planet. They need not embrace absolute principled nonviolence to become part of that exalted journey. “Less Violence” is a fundamentally positive form of social change in that it sees many participants, all contributing at least something positive to global nonviolent change.

Mapping a New World of Less Violence: the Diversity of Contributions to Less Violence

This APT will map and analyze the vast diversity of contributors to a world of less violence and more peace. In so doing, our aim is to demonstrate that the “team” of nonviolence is not an isolated group of progressive people, but a considerable number, tens of millions of human beings, who are all helping to change our minds, our thoughts, our feelings, our day-to-day behaviors and our policies in a direction that has made the planet far more peaceful than before. They have yet to recognize themselves as a powerful group of professionals and simple people across the planet, and that is what I hope to accomplish, a greater self-consciousness and intentionality that will give us a community of practitioners in every corner of the globe.

We have a long way to go in order to bring states, politicians, big business, and religious leaders further and further in the direction of a peaceful world where outsized military expenditures become a relic of the past. Just as today past cultural and religious commitments to torture and slavery are a hidden shame. Those are part of such an embarrassing past that its history is denied. We can do the same for the military industrial complex and for unregulated industries across the globe. We have far more allies among military people, businesspeople and policy makers than we realize. But we must reach out to each other, think, behave and plan, as a community of global change makers.