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Learning the Language of Nonviolence

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Abstract
This article posits a number of theoretical pointers towards a conceptual clarification of the concept of non-violence, in particular in relation to notions of conflict, pact, mediation, compromise, strength, benevolence, and truth. It sets them against the concept of violence and the behaviours which are associated with it, and is based on the thought of M. K. Gandhi and E. Weil. Finally it presents some pointers towards a strategy for non-violence and explains the sense of the principle of non-cooperation.

On 27 June 2007, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted a Resolution establishing that 2 October of each year would be celebrated as the 'International Day of Non-Violence'. The date coincided in fact with the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi, who was born on 2 October 1869.

In its prefatory set of guiding principles, the Resolution reaffirmed 'the universal relevance of the principle of non-violence' and desired 'to secure a culture of peace, tolerance, understanding and non-violence'. The formula: 'the universal relevance of the principle of non-violence' is remarkable in its concision, clarity, and exactness. The Resolution 'invites all Member States, organizations of the United Nations system, regional and non-governmental organizations and individuals to commemorate the International Day of Non-Violence in an appropriate manner and to disseminate the message of non-violence, including through education and public awareness'.[1]

Asserting 'the universal relevance of the principle of non-violence' equates also to affirming the universal non-relevance of violence itself, that it, its total incapacity to bring a human solution to the inevitable conflicts which create divisions and opposition between individuals, communities, nations, and states.

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The need for conceptual clarification

Whereas the traditions which we have inherited have granted an important and significant place to the principle of violence, they have accorded practically none to that of non-violence, going so far in fact as to have no name for it. Non-violence is an idea that is still new in Europe and the rest of the world. In itself, the word 'non-violence' elicits multiple ambiguities, misunderstandings, and confusions. The initial difficulty with it is that it formally expresses an idea of opposition, negation, and refusal. In our societies dominated by the ideology of necessary, legitimate, and honourable violence, the term 'non-violence' carries numerous and often conflicting shades of meaning. To encompass the meaning of non-violence, we must firstly give consideration to that of violence. It is especially important to know exactly to what non-violence says 'no', to what it is in opposition, what it refuses. That said, this in itself will not be sufficient. We need to clearly establish what non-violence is pursuing, what it seeks to affirm, what it proposes, and what it wishes to build.

The word 'violence' is certainly one of the most used terms in the speeches and writings of many commentators. Nevertheless, if we attentively scrutinize the meaning which we give it, we will find that it possesses multiple accepted senses which differ quite distinctly among themselves. This linguistic confusion is the outward expression of confusion of thought. And this double confusion cannot but be a source of incomprehension in our debates and our attempts at dialogue. This incomprehension becomes even more marked when we venture to speak of non-violence. That is why, in order to establish the true meaning of violence, and consequently that of non-violence, a conceptual clarification must be sought which will allow us to distinguish between what we too often tend to associate under one idea: conflict, aggressiveness, contest, force, and ultimately what is properly termed violence.

Conflict

In the beginning was conflict. Our personality is constituted by and through our relations with others. I exist only in relation to the other. The human existence of mankind is not found in our being-in-the-world, but in our being-with-others. However, in the first instance, I often experience my encounter with the other as an adversarial situation, as confrontation. The other appears to me as one whose desires are in opposition to my desires, whose interests get in the way of my interests, whose ambitions stand against my ambitions, whose plans run counter to my plans, whose freedom threatens my freedom, whose rights impinge upon my rights.

The bursting of the other upon my presence is experienced as a profound disturbance. The other is an invader into the space of my tranquility; he snatches me from my repose. By his very existence, he looms up in the space that I had already appropriated for myself and hence in my eyes constitutes a threat. Inevitably I must allow him some room, and perhaps even yield him the space that I occupy. Conflict is always, in some manner, a rivalry for the conquest of one and the same territory. Each person is persuaded that the other wants to 'take his place'. From that perception, conflict cannot be overcome unless the two adversaries, having realized that 'there is room for two', decide to invent together a 'territorial arrangement' by which each is allowed to 'have his place'. It is a question of 'transforming' the conflict such that it departs from the register of confrontation between two adversaries which gave it its birth, to locate itself within that of cooperation between two partners where it can find its solution.

Establishing a pact

An individual cannot flee a conflict situation without renouncing his own legitimate rights. He must accept the confrontation, because it is through conflict that each person is enabled to be

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recognized by others. Certainly, conflict can be destructive, but it can also be constructive. The function of conflict is to establish a contract, a pact between adversaries, which will satisfy the respective rights of each and thus allow for the construction of relationships of equity and justice between individuals within the same community and between different communities. Conflict is thus a structural element of every relationship with others, and consequently of all social life. In the example of two children who are contesting the possession of the same toy, the mediation of an adult can allow them to resolve their conflict by concluding a pact between them, where either they decide to play with the toy together or to take turns at playing with it. They will gain thereby the experience of a constructive resolution of their conflict thanks to which they both emerge as winners.

All communal life is conflictual, even if only potentially so. Co-existence between individuals and between peoples, though ideally one which becomes peaceful, nevertheless will always remain conflictual. Peace is not, cannot be, and will never be the absence of conflict but the mastery, management, and resolution of conflicts by means other than those of destructive and murderous violence. Thus, the goal of political action must be to seek the non-violent 'resolution' (from the Latin *resolutio*, meaning 'an undoing') of conflicts.

The pacifist discourse, whether it be juridical or spiritual, is a mistaken one which strays into idealism when it stigmatizes conflict in favour of an exclusive apology of law, confidence, fraternity, reconciliation, forgiveness, and love. Pursuing such a discourse removes one from the realm of history to take refuge in that of utopia. It is thus that spiritual movements, whether of religious inspiration or not, have wished to preach love while ignoring conflict. Peace will not be founded on love but on strength.

Non-violence does not therefore presuppose a world without conflict. Its political project is not to construct a society where relationships between people are based simply on trust. This latter can be established only in relationships of proximity, it can only come about with one's immediate neighbour. As a general rule, within a social environment, any relationship with that which is remote, with the-other-whom-I-do-not-know, takes the form of a challenge, and it is appropriate to address it from a stance of initial distrust. Political endeavour must seek to arrange justice between all these remote polarities. That implies that institutions must be created and laws elaborated which envisage practical modalities for the social regulation of conflicts which may arise between individuals at any given moment.

Mediation

The practice of mediation in the different sectors of society – be it within a school, a family, a local area, a workplace – has the potential to become one of the principal methods of non-violent resolution of conflicts which arise between individuals and between groups. By avoiding recourse to the repressive means at the disposal of the state, and by allowing citizens to become directly involved in the management of the conflicts which pit them against other citizens, mediation fosters the self-regulation of societal violence.

Mediation involves the intervention of a third party, a third person who inserts himself or herself into the space between the protagonists of a conflict. That third person occupies a position between the two adversaries – two individuals, two communities, or two peoples – who are confronting each other. The aim of mediation is to convert the two protagonists from an adverse stance with respect to each other (from the Latin *adversari*: to be turned against) to conversation (from the Latin *conversari:* to be turned towards), that is to say, to bring each party to turn towards the other to establish dialogue, to foster mutual understanding and, if possible, to reach a compromise which opens the way to conciliation and ultimately to reconciliation. The mediator must therefore strive to be the

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creator of a peaceable environment. By her or his interposition between the conflicted parties, she or he breaks the binary relationship by which the two adversaries confronted each other without really seeing or hearing each other, to create a 'ternary' relationship via which they both may communicate through the channel of an intermediary. In any binary relationship between adversaries, there is confrontation between two distinct discourses, two reasonings, two logics, without any genuine communication which might permit a reciprocal recognition and a reciprocal understanding. It is a matter of passing from a logic of binary competition to a dynamic of ternary cooperation.

Formulating a compromise

Often it is the quest for a compromise which allows a constructive solution to a conflict to be formulated, a process which is already active when there is communication between the adversaries. The word 'compromise' comes from the Latin verb *compromittere* (formed from the prefix *cum,* together, and *promittere,* to send forth) and expresses the idea of a mutual engagement to respect an accord for resolving a difference.

The word 'compromise' is associated with the idea of a process of negotiation. The sought-after goal is the imagining of concessions which are acceptable to and by both adversaries such that each can consider that their essential rights have been recognized and respected, and so that a new way of 'living together' becomes possible. In the area of education, the search for a compromise takes on a strong pedagogical value. It allows the child to learn to conciliate his or her desires, interests, and needs with those of the other and to find with that other child an area of understanding that is made up of mutual recognition and respect.

But, in the final analysis, conflict should not be considered the norm of the relationship with the other. Conflict is endemic in human nature, but where this nature has not yet been transformed by the mark of the truly human. Conflict is primal, but it should not have the final word. It is made to be surmounted, transcended, and transformed. When face to face with another who opposes him, man should not adopt a stance of hostility but one of hospitality, where each is the guest of the other. It is significant that the terms hostility and hospitality have a common etymology: originally, the Latin words *hostes and hospes* both referred to a stranger. Such a person can in effect either be shut out as an enemy, or welcomed as a guest. To form a human community, people are called to establish and maintain with each other relationships of reciprocity founded on sharing and giving. And the place of hospitality is that of kindness, of being of one kind. Nietzsche is not to be believed when he asserts that kindness is but the impotence of the weak and where he thinks he should make the apology for war. 'You shall love peace as a means to new wars,' Zarathustra declares. 'War and courage have done more great things than charity' (Nietzsche 1999: 52). To the contrary, it is violence which is a weakness, whereas kindness is the power of the strong.

Strength[2]

It is important in this context to establish a clear distinction between 'strength' and 'violence'. In the moral sense, strength is the virtue of the man who has the courage to refuse to submit to the sway of violence. The strong man is not he who possesses the means of power and violence, but he who dominates his own emotions, who resists being swept along by collective passion and retains the mastery of his own destiny. Here, the opposite of strength is precisely the weakness of the person who cannot resist succumbing to the intoxication of violence.

This 'strength of mind', this spiritual strength cannot claim, of itself alone, to be sufficient effectively to oppose the force of injustice. The two are not situated on the same plane. In reality, only the strength and force of an organized action can be effective in combatting injustice and

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re-establishing the rule of law. It is thus a deception to wish to discredit force in the name of law since, in actuality, law can have no other foundation nor guarantee than force. It is the inherent nature of idealism to confer on law a special force capable of acting within history and of being the true foundation of progress. To the contrary, everything tends to indicate that such a force does not exist. In the same way, it is largely illusory to think that there exists a 'force of justice', a 'force of truth', and a 'force for love', which of themselves might be capable of forcing the powerful and the violent to recognize and respect the rights of the oppressed. To achieve their liberty, these must come together, mobilize, organize, and act.

Every struggle is a trial of strength. In any determined social, economic, or political context, every relationship with others is inscribed within a force relationship. Injustice results from an imbalance of forces by which the weaker are dominated and oppressed by the stronger. Struggle has as its function the creation of a new force relationship so as to establish a balance of forces to ensure that the rights of each are respected. From this perception, striving for justice means establishing (or re-establishing) the balance of forces, but this is possible only by exercising a strength which imposes a limit on the force which brought about the imbalance.

One cannot discredit violence if one has not first rehabilitated force by according it its full place and by recognizing its total legitimacy. It is also essential to reject at the same time the claimed realism which justifies violence as the very basis of action along with the claimed spiritual outlook which refuses to recognize force as being inherent in all action. And since force exists only through action, it is not possible to denounce and combat violence except by proposing a means of action which owes nothing to murderous violence but which is capable of establishing relationships of force (and strength) which guarantee law.

Goodwill towards all living things

It was Gandhi who brought to the world the word 'non-violence' in translating into English the Sanskrit term *Ahimsâ*, which is common in and to the texts of Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist literatures. This word is formed from the negative prefix *a-* and the noun *himsâ*, which signifies the desire to harm or do violence to a living creature. *Ahimsâ* is thus the recognition, taming, mastery, and transmutation of the will to violence which is within man and which leads him to wish to separate, exclude, eliminate, and grievously harm the other.

For Gandhi, non-violence is not primarily a means of action, but an attitude, that is, it is essentially an outlook, one of goodwill and kindness towards the other fellow human, especially to the alien other, that is, the stranger, the foreigner, the misfit, the nuisance, the enemy. When he tries to define non-violence, Gandhi (1924: 286) begins with a negative enunciation of the concept: 'Perfect non-violence is the total absence of ill-will towards all that lives.' It is only subsequently that he affirms: 'In its active form, non-violence is expressed by *goodwill* with respect to all that lives.' The first imperative of non-violence is thus negative: it requires that one renounce all ill-will towards the human other. Formulated this way, this imperative recognizes that there indeed does exist within the nature of the human being an inclination to show malevolence towards one's fellows. For Kant, this is determined by man's egotism, that is, by the exclusive love of self. The concern for self leaves no room for a concern for the other. When one acts, 'everywhere one runs into the dear self, which is always thrusting itself forward' (Kant 2002: 23). Violence is thus the clash of two egotisms, the confrontation of two narcissisms combined with jealousy and the desire for superiority, where the individual never ceases assessing his own happiness by the yardstick of that which the other enjoys.

The principle of non-violence opposes a categorical 'no' to all violence and refuses it any legitimacy. Any accommodation of the conscience, any complicity of the intelligence, any rational

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justification already seals the victory of violence. Non-violence is not just a possible form of spirituality, it is *the* spirituality in which the humanity of man is grounded. It is that which constitutes the human in man. To misunderstand the imperative of non-violence is to renounce thinking of the humanity of man. The primordial requirement of this political philosophy is that it be universally applicable. And only non-violence allows philosophy to open itself to the universe.

The moral law can be respected only by restricting this natural inclination towards egotism. That is why 'the moral law was presented to mankind as a prohibition' (Kant 2013: 21). What characterizes the moral duty by which the human person is governed is the will to demonstrate goodwill towards the other even when his or her initial natural feelings incline them to ill-will.

By nature, humans are at the same time inclined to violence and disposed towards kindness. They therefore must decide between inhumanity and humanity. Expressed in conventional terms, which are over-simplified but which retain an essential significance, they have the choice of 'doing good' or 'doing evil'. It is for this reason that man is an essentially free being. If man did not have the capacity to do evil, he would be subject to the determinism of a nature which, no doubt, would oblige him to do good, but which above all would not allow him any liberty. Man is not violent by nature, but through liberty, just as man is not good by nature, but through liberty.

One of the potential foundations for universal wisdom is the Golden Rule as formulated by various spiritual traditions, which can be expressed thus: 'That which you do not wish others to do to you, do not you do to others.' Now, what I do not want, is that the other do violence to me, that he cause my death. From that perspective, the imperative of the Golden Rule becomes one with the universal commandment of the reasonable conscience: 'Thou shalt not kill.' Thus the principle of non-violence is the foundation for the universality of the moral law which persons of reason and conscience freely apply to themselves.

The truth of man

Non-violence is for Gandhi a principle: 'I believe,' he declared (1965: 265) 'in the principle of non-violence.' In his thinking it is the very principle of the search for truth, and he undeviatingly declares that it is the only path by which man may be led to the truth:

> Non-violence and truth, he wrote (1971: 59) are so tightly bound up together that it is practically impossible to unbind them and separate them one from the other. They are like the two sides of the same coin, or rather, of a smooth metal disc which bears no other mark. Who can tell which is the reverse and which is the obverse.

The evidence of history attests – and everyday experience confirms – that 'truth' becomes a vector for violence from the moment it is not grounded in the imperative of non-violence. For, if truth does not imply of itself the radical de-legitimation of violence, then there will always come a moment when violence will appear naturally as a legitimate means of defending truth. Only the recognition of the fundamental imperative of non-violence allows the rejection once and for all of the illusion, one which is conveyed by all ideologies, of the resort to violence to defend truth. Resorting to violence to defend truth is to have already denied and rejected truth.

When Gandhi declares (1971: 90) that 'truth and non-violence are one and the same reality', he is not taking a position in the realm of ideology but in that of philosophy, that is to say, of spirituality, of thought and wisdom. But while affirming that non-violence is the truth of man, Gandhi is at pains to make it clear that no one can claim to 'possess' it. 'As long as we are flesh-and-blood creatures,' he declared (1960: 119), 'perfect non-violence remains just a theory, like that of a point or the Euclidian straight line, but we owe it to ourselves to strive to come close to it at every

moment of our lives.' That was why Gandhi always presented himself as simply 'a seeker after truth'.

In social and political conflicts, truth must be translated by action. The power of the truth opens a way through the power of true action, that is, of action that is just, both in its ends and in its means. The power to bring about change can only be the fruit of action, and the effectiveness of action is always conditional, uncertain, limited, and relative. Nevertheless, even when the effectiveness of non-violent action reaches its limits, violence does not as a result regain its rights, and the imperative of non-violence remains true. Even if violence appears necessary, it does not for all that become legitimate again. Necessity does not mean legitimacy.

Choosing non-violence

It would be disastrous should human beings be divided into two groups: on the one hand, those who claim to devote their lives to following the imperatives of spirituality while taking care not to sully themselves with the 'dirty work' of politics, and on the other, those whose ambitions are political and who, under the pretext of embracing realism, exempt themselves from lending any attention to spiritual demands. An unacceptable disjuncture which leads to pure idealists on the one hand, and total cynics on the other. As long as such a fracture persists, the 'affairs of the world' will not cease sliding towards catastrophe. We must once and for all banish the idea that spiritual realization passes via the renunciation of action. How can man achieve his spirituality if he does not venture out onto the public spaces of cities, if he does not pursue an encounter with the other? Political action is not a mere pastime. It is a privileged moment where spiritual authenticity is put to the test. The dignity of action is found in a nobility of spirit. Any separation between the political and the spiritual can only engender the misdirection of both. Neither can be independently free nor win out over the other. The spiritual and the political must come together but without ever losing their separate identities. In both the East and the West, too many false gurus claim to teach a spirituality which stands beyond conflict, on the margins of history, serenely removed from political dispute and struggle, sheltered from the rumours and frenzies of the world.

The spirituality of non-violence invites people to act, with focus and effectiveness, in the crucible of the world. The genius of Gandhi was, through the implementation of a strategy of non-violent action, to reconcile the commands of the spiritual life with the constraints of political action, to unite 'the morality of conviction' with the 'morality of responsibility'. As a spiritual imperative, non-violence is also a practical imperative. The principle of non-violence does not simply demand that one should abstain from resorting to violence against another, it equally implies struggling against the injustice which grievously afflicts the other. Non-violence is a means of action which offers us practical methods for effectively struggling against injustice.

Choosing between reason and violence

According to Eric Weil, the fear felt by the philosopher, by the seeker of truth and wisdom, is the fear of violence: not the violence that he or she may personally be subject to, but the violence that they themselves can exercise. That violence which philosophers discover within themselves and which leads them towards attitudes which are beyond the realm of reason, creates obstacles to the realization of their own humanity.

Humans are capable of both reason and violence, but they must opt for one or the other: 'Freedom provides the choice between reason and violence' (Weil 1992: 47). But the philosophical

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imperative leads man to privilege reason over violence. 'Violence violently felt,' Weil states categorically (1974: 75), 'must be set aside once and for all.' Herein is found 'the secret of philosophy':

> The philosopher wants violence gone from the world. He recognizes the need, he admits the desire, he accepts that man remains animal while yet being capable of reason: what is important is the elimination of violence. (Weil 1974: 20)

Because reason is a constitutive element of the humanity of man, of the whole of man and of all human beings, 'it is the principal duty of [the moral man] to respect that reason in every human, and to respect it in himself by respecting it in others' (Weil 1984: 31). And that means above all that he must prohibit himself from doing violence to anyone else.

However, violence always remains an alternate possibility for him who has chosen reason, the universal, and hence non-violence. Hence, the philosopher will never have concluded his self-transformation by informing himself through reason. And especially where one chooses reason in a world where others have chosen violence. The philosopher must therefore strive to educate those others to embrace reason and so transform the world in order to put an end, as far as such can be done, to the reign of violence.

Thus, Eric Weil is no less categorical than Gandhi when he declares that violence can only distance man from truth. 'The opposite of truth,' he wrote (1974: 65), 'is not error, but violence.' In other words, error is violence, and consequently error is any doctrine which would justify violence by making violence a human right.

Violence is not a human right

It is often said that the word 'non-violence', because it is negative, was badly chosen and entertains of itself numerous ambiguities. In reality, the very negativity of the term 'non-violence' is decisive, for it enables in and of itself the de-legitimization of violence. It is the most accurate, exact and rigorous term to express what it wishes to signify: the refusal of any process of legitimation which would make violence a human right. Opting for non-violence means actualizing in our own being the universal commandment of the reasonable conscience which is expressed by the imperative, also totally negative in form, that: 'Thou shalt not kill'. This prohibition of murder is essential, because the desire to kill is found in each of us. Murder is prohibited because it is always possible and because that possibility is inhuman.

Man is a being governed by coherent law, that is, he has need of reason to justify, in his eyes and in the eyes of others, his attitudes, behaviour and action. But man is also a creature of violence and he will wish to convince himself that violence is a right that belongs to him. Animals are only violent from the human point of view, because they are incapable of mentally conceiving their 'violence'. Granted, big fish eat little fish, and the wolf devours the lamb. But animals are not responsible for these types of 'violence'. These aspects of their nature blindly obey the laws of necessity. Only man is capable of freedom. Only man, because he is a creature of conscience and reason, is responsible for his acts, and hence his acts of violence. That is because reason is proper to man, and violence is equally proper to man. Only he can put his reason at the service of his violence. Violence does not arise from animality, but from inhumanity, which is much worse.

Granted, the culture which predominates in our societies propounds a rhetoric which denigrates violence, but at the same time, it fosters it. It constantly insinuates in the minds of individuals that, faced by conflicts, the only choice they have is between cowardice and violence. This violence culture thus offers the individual any number of ideological constructs allowing him to justify his violence once he can claim to be defending a just cause.

The strategy of non-violent action

It is important to distinguish, not to separate them so much as not to confuse them, between non-violence as a philosophy, which is the search for the meaning of existence and history, and non-violence as a strategy towards an end, which is the search for an action which is effective in achieving that end. Philosophy is, as its name suggests, the love of wisdom. It implies a choice, an option, a personal decision. But even then it is necessary that the individual make this choice in the full awareness of his options. For this to apply, such awareness must be brought to him within a framework of instruction. This must indeed be the object of all education. But it is one of the deficiencies of our societies that our education systems do not offer our children any instruction relating to the philosophy of non-violence. What moments are there, what opportunities are there offered to our children to enable them to reflect on non-violence? Education no longer offers our young anything other than a technological knowledge which aims at making them competitive in the world of economic rivalry with which they will soon be confronted. And this form of training risks not allowing them to chance to reflect on the very sense of their own existence and to build strong personal convictions by which they may face the future. There is certainly a great need to rethink education along these lines.

The wisdom of non-violence should not lead us to withdraw from the world to cultivate our own interior gardens. To the contrary, it should incite us to engage in those conflicts in the world which pursue justice and liberty. Demonstrating goodwill towards those who suffer from a situation of injustice is to demonstrate our solidarity with them, it is to be ready to engage action in their favour, and, if need be, to conduct a struggle alongside them for the recognition of their rights.

In January 1942, when Gandhi was defending his political strategy before the Indian Congress, it was by emphasizing its effectiveness that he justified the choice of non-violence as a strategy for achieving independence:

> For me personally non-violence is a credo, it is the breath of my life. But I have never proposed it as a credo for India, or indeed for anyone except, on occasion, in informal conversations. I have proposed it to the Congress as a political method which is intended to resolve political problems. It could well be that it is a new method, but it does not for all that depart from its political character. […] As a political method, it can always be changed, modified, transformed, or even abandoned in favour of another. If I therefore tell you that our political direction should not be abandoned today, I am speaking political wisdom to you. That is political perspicacity. It has served us in the past, it has enabled us to achieve numerous steps towards independence, and it is as a politician that I am warning you that it would be a serious mistake to envisage giving it up. If I have carried the Congress with me over all these years, it is in my quality as a politician. (Gandhi 1979: 220).

This text is crucial, because it clearly shows that if for Gandhi non-violence is what he calls a ‘credo’, that is, an existential choice which gives meaning to life, being the very principle of truth, he is nevertheless proposing the strategy of non-violent action even to those who have not made this choice.

The non-cooperation principle

One of the fundamental principles of the non-violent action strategy is to seek means which are coherent with the end pursued. One must reject once and for all the old adage by which ‘the end justifies the means’, which comes down to saying that a just end justifies unjust means. It is the opposite which is true: unjust means pervert a just end. ‘The means,’ Gandhi declared (1938: 71), ‘can be compared to a seed and the end to a tree; the same intangible relationship exists between the means and the end as between the seed and the tree.’

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Another proverb better expresses the wisdom of nations: 'he who intends the end intends the means', as long as we interpret this adage correctly, being: 'he who intends a just end must intend just means'. The real question is that of the means. The twentieth century was dominated by ideologies all claiming with one voice that violence provided the necessary, legitimate, and honourable means for acting within history. But we must well recognize today the utter failure of these ideologies.

The essential principle for the strategy of non-violent action is that of non-cooperation. It is based on the following analysis: in a society, what gives strength to the injustices of the established order is complicity with them, that is, the passive cooperation, whether voluntary or forced, of the silent majority of the citizens. Non-violent resistance aims at breaching this complicity through the organization of collective actions of non-cooperation with the institutions, laws, ideologies, regimes, and state systems which infringe the liberties and rights of the human person. The objective aimed at is the paralysis of the essential workings of the various mechanisms of exploitation or oppression with the goal of re-establishing the rule of justice.

In reality, in the face of injustice, individuals are much more tempted to resign themselves to collaboration than to resort to violence to oppose it. The word 'collaboration' usually implies the attitude of those who make accommodation with the enemy, but it is important to give it a much broader sense: collaboration is the attitude of all those who accommodate the injustice of the established disorder. Thus, it is not so much a matter of pitting non-violence against the violence of a minority as pitting non-violence against the collaboration of the majority.

In the first instance, citizen non-cooperation can be organized within the very framework of legality. This involves exhausting all the possibilities open to legal procedures within the normal functioning of the democratic institutions of the society. But when those institutions no longer offer the means to effectively combat the injustice, then non-violent resistance does not hesitate to engage in actions of social disobedience.

Hope should always be considered as applying to the present, whereas we are always tempted to project it out to the future. Thus, the promise that violence offers is always a future projection. Violence promises us sunny tomorrows, but it offers us only todays of gloom. Albert Camus (1951: 365) declared: 'True generosity towards the future consists of giving everything to the present.' Non-violence conceives justice, liberty, and dignity as belonging to the present. It does not wish to use only means which already, by themselves, realize the end. And the victory of non-violence is already present in the non-violent action itself. For itself gives sense to the present.

Refusing our resemblances

We have adopted the habit of crediting the various manifestations of violence which we condemn to the account of extremist movements and ideologies. But the extremisms which we refuse are possible only because of the orthodoxies which we accept. By assembling doctrines of legitimate violence and just war, by justifying the 'reasonable' use of violence, orthodox ideologies are already justifying the abuses of the extremists. For violence is not reasonable, it is an abuse. To combat the violence of extremisms, we must track it down and expose it in the dens where it takes shelter in the heart of orthodox political systems.

In the clash of cultures which takes place everywhere on earth and in each of our societies, the message of non-violence which Gandhi wanted to give to the world may be essential. To assert their identity, individuals and peoples refer constantly to the values on which their own culture and civilization are founded. Each affirms that these values correspond to the most profound needs of humanity and thus claims that they should be universally recognized. But out of these contradictory claims come antagonisms, opposition, and clashes. Past and present history shows us that

these conflicts can easily become bloody and murderous. For each, in the name or his own values, is tempted to wage a battle against the others.

To mitigate these conflicts and lay down the basis for a peaceful co-existence between communities and peoples, we have adopted the habit of calling for tolerance with respect to other cultures. We put out that if we make the effort to better get to know them and better understand them, we will discover that each enshrines a greatness and nobility of spirit. And we affirm that, to live in peace with each other, we must accept our differences.

This is indeed true, but only partially so. For in reality, is it not rather our resemblances which engender our disputes, our conflicts, and our battles? Is it not because we imitate each other's faults and errors that we find ourselves so often at war with one another? More exactly, is it not because all our civilizations are similarly impregnated with the culture of violence that we are continually on the point of wounding and grievously damaging one another?

In reality, the ideology of necessary, legitimate, and honourable violence which dominates all cultures tends to erase all differences and brings out terrifying similarities. Given this perception, to construct a future of peace, the urgency is not so much to accept our differences as to refuse that in which we resemble each other.

It is contradictory and somewhat dishonest to be surprised that we are the targets of violence after we have cultivated it. To cultivate violence is to make of it a fatal inevitability, but it is an inevitability entirely crafted by the hands of men. That is why we are put to the challenge of cultivating non-violence. If we cannot achieve that, we must fear that we will be incapable of teaching hope to our children.

Tearing down the walls and building bridges

Violence is capable only of destroying bridges and erecting walls. Non-violence invites us to tear down the walls and build bridges. Unfortunately, it is more difficult to build a bridge than a wall. The architecture of walls demands no imagination: one has only to respect the law of mass. The architecture of bridges requires infinitely more intelligence: one must overcome the forces of mass and gravity.

The most visible walls separating people are the walls of concrete which scar the landscape and divide the land which should be shared.

But there also exist walls in the hearts and minds of men. These are the walls of ideology, prejudice, contempt for the other, stigmatization, rancour, resentment, fear. The most dramatic consequence of violence is that is erects walls of hate. Only those who, in whatever camp they find themselves, have the lucidity, intelligence, and courage to dismantle these walls and to construct bridges which will allow individuals, communities, and peoples to come together, to recognize each other, to enter into dialogue and begin to understand each other, only they can safeguard the hope which will give direction and meaning to the coming future of humanity.

Towards a culture of non-violence

The wisdom of non-violence which Gandhi wished to put into practice both in daily life as in political life invites each of us to revisit our own culture and to discern in it, on the one hand, everything which legitimates and honours violence against the other and, on the other hand, everything which commands that the other be respected and loved. This double discernment will reveal a double necessity. A necessity to break with all the elements of an ideology which justifies killing as soon as it claims to be serving a 'just cause', and a necessity to remain faithful to the 'values' which confer dignity, great-heartedness, and nobility on human beings. Of themselves, these values serve

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to contradict the claim of violence to govern the life of people and societies. It is by fidelity to these values that each of us will be able to discover in our own cultures the foundations of the wisdom of non-violence.

In this way, each of our cultures is invited to discover this imperative of non-violence which has been covered over by the slag heaps of the ideology of violence. Each of our cultures is invited to construct a philosophy of non-violence and to enter into dialogue with all other cultures to reach a common expression of the universality of what constitutes true human life. Each of our cultures will contribute its own colour to its philosophy, which will come to blend into the providential rainbow of non-violence which, amidst the darkness into which our worlds are plunged, will announce the coming of a new dawn.

Translated from the French by Colin Anderson

Notes

1. A/RES/61/271, adopted 27 June 2007.
2. Translator's note: the French title for this section is 'La force', which can variously be translated into English as either 'force' or 'strength'. Both connotations are present in the author's discussion of this notion in this passage, but neither of the English variants is adequate in itself to convey both of these connotations. I have therefore used 'strength' when the context predominantly refers to the moral quality, and less frequently the social, economic, or political power, that this word implies in human beings, and 'force' for the assertive or coercive power that this latter term normally connotes in English. Readers should be aware, however, that both these terms render variously the single French term 'force', and that there may be as well elements of the other connotation within each usage of the specific English term chosen.

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