

THE BEAST¹
An Essay on Human Violence

*Not by might and not by power,
But by spirit alone,
Shall all men live in peace
The children sing, the children dream
And their tears may fall, but we'll hear them call
And another song will rise
(adapted from Zechariah 4:6)*

Approximately eighty years ago, a German Jewish writer named Jacob Wassermann wrote an essay entitled “The Beast.” In this essay he depicts the evolution of a mob arising from the interaction of a critical mass of human beings. The “Beast” is the mob. It takes on an identity, life, and will of its own – like a medieval golem called forth by its conjurer. Individual responsibility, volition, and values dissipate as the “Beast” within each person emerges and becomes one. This “Beast” is fearsome in its power, intensity, and potential to destroy human life.

Wassermann wrote this essay after the First World War. “The Beast” was an allegory about what was happening in Germany. Unlike many of his contemporaries, he saw the rise of anti-Semitism as a serious threat. Tragically, time and events proved him correct. Since six million Jews died in the Holocaust, additional millions of human beings died in many parts of the world such as Viet Nam, Laos, Cambodia, Algeria, Angola, Somalia, Bosnia, and Rwanda. This human tragedy does not always result in death, but the damage to the human spirit is incalculable.

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Although “The Beast” represents a mob, the dynamics and *pattern* of behavior Wassermann describes is similar to other forms of human social dynamics such as social movements, wars, and terrorism. The pattern can emerge more slowly – as it did in Germany – or more rapidly, as in the case of riots or terrorist activities. The consequences, however, are just as destructive and deadly. The same pattern can emerge at many levels: between individuals, in families, in the work place, in cities, and within and between nations. This essay explores human violence both personal and societal, its dynamics, how it escalates, and some strategies for intervention and prevention. Continued human existence may depend on our success in preventing or intervening in widespread violence. We have to base intervention and prevention strategies on an understanding of human behavior and human social dynamics. Accordingly, this essay divides into three sections: 1) the nature of human beings and human social dynamics, 2) the dynamics of violence escalation, and 3) strategies for intervening and preventing violence.

The Nature of Human Beings and Human Social Dynamics

Several propositions about the nature of human beings and human dynamics form part of the argument presented:

1. We are social animals. We continually affirm our identity through interaction with others. When we are exposed to social pressure (fear of rejection, ostracism, desire for acceptance) and other environmental stress (hunger, sleep deprivation, separation from other humans), we may behave in ways that violate our personal values and beliefs.
2. Dominance and subordination are important constituents of our relationships. There are leaders and followers. Dominance is not always

based on size or intelligence, it can be manifested by individuals who are more aggressive. Leaders can dominate through fear, strength, intellect, charisma, and other means. Not everyone is a leader or follower, some of us are more independent than others.

3. We can be inclusive and exclusive. We recognize “same” and “other.” “Same” can be same family, clan, neighborhood, nationality, religion, etc. “Other” becomes anyone who is not “same.” Behavior toward “other” can be different than behavior toward “same.” What is “same” and “other” can shift rapidly.
4. Our language is both social and cognitive. It facilitates relationships with others and influences emotion, thought, and action. Language is used to create “same” and “other.” Linguistic repetition is critical in reinforcing our beliefs.
5. We construct our reality – both individually and collectively – using language. We connect facts with assumptions and construct stories about the way things are including explanations about why things happen. When this process occurs with other people over time, patterns of belief emerge. Patterned behavior is a constituent of culture and society. These patterns become reinforced socially through myth and ritual (which can occur in non-religious as well as religious contexts). We use myths and rituals to motivate and justify our behavior.
6. Emotion is an integral part of human reason. We can rationalize irrational behavior – including the belief that thinking and feeling are separate functions. Social interaction can amplify rationalization and emotion. It can also reduce or remove individual inhibitions.
7. Touch and physical proximity is an important part of how we relate to our environment and to each other. The interrelation among eye, hand (with opposable thumb), brain, and language form part of the dynamics of human evolution. Touch is a critical component of brain development in children and a lifelong component – along with language – of human cognition. It is related to both affect and comprehension. In a sense, what we cannot touch, we do not completely comprehend intellectually or emotionally.
8. Our social systems consist of interrelated, mutually dependent institutions that form around basic human needs such as food, shelter, child rearing, social relations, safety, etc. To function effectively, these systems require a balance between continuity (stability) and change (adaptation to changing social and physical environments).

9. We have various relationships that form networks which cross-cut formal institutions, organizations, governments, and nations. These relationships and networks are greatly facilitated by communications technology.
10. We cannot easily survive without the help of others.² We create systems of reciprocity to address our needs. Reciprocity forms the basis of our economic, social, and political systems. We take care to appear worthy of support. Thus our presentation of self and our credibility is related directly to our survival.

The Dynamics of Violence Escalation

The process to be described, ultimately connects demonizing, discrimination, and dehumanization with death. It emerges out of the nature and interaction of human beings.

To begin with, some type of **stress** is usually present. In the case of Germany, harsh reparations imposed by the Allies and rampant inflation resulted in economic hardship and a loss of national pride for many Germans. The declining economy, political disintegration of Yugoslavia, and attendant decline in the political popularity of Slobodan Milosevic, was part of the context within which the slaughter of thousands of humans occurred.

The combination of increasing scarcities and **highly unequal distributions of wealth and access to resources** often triggers violent conflict among groups. A tragic example of this is occurring in the State of Bihar in India where land reform failed over a generation ago. Over half the agricultural land is owned by upper and middle class

² Frank Schweigert suggested this concept.

castes. Landless laborers live in great poverty. The contrast in lifestyles is stark. In the incredible heat of an Indian summer:

The wealthy avoided going outside, staying near their air conditioners and fans, often powered by private generators. The poor lay on the sides of the streets in any scrap of shade they could find cast by a tree or building. Many didn't have shoes to protect their feet from the blistering pavement...³

Conflicts among these groups became increasingly violent. Thirty years ago, bands of Maoist insurgents, "Naxalites" began attacking members of the landowning castes. The cycle of violence – attack, revenge, and counterattack – continues to the present day. Whole villages have been destroyed. The result is that everyone lives in fear, much of the land lies fallow, and poverty continues. Worse yet, the continued violence and instability makes it impossible for institutions that contribute to human well-being – such as "effective government, well-functioning markets, high-quality public education, and good roads, sewers, and water pipelines" – to develop and prosper.⁴ Ultimately, everyone – rich and poor – loses.

This pattern is repeated in the African nation of Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesia). At the time of independence, it appeared there would be land reform. As in Bihar, the natural resource base is the rich and productive soil. The British were willing to subsidize the purchase of farms for those not having the resources to pay the full price. The United States was prepared to supply seed kits for the new farmers. Instead, the political leadership (as in Bihar) used their influence to retain land ownership in a few wealthy hands. Today in Zimbabwe there is violence and the land lies fallow.

³ Homer-Dixon, Thomas. The Ingenuity Gap, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 2000, 366.

⁴ Ibid., 369, 371.

Hunger, fear, and other physical deprivations resulting from economic, political, and civil disintegration make people susceptible to simplistic interpretations and actions proposed by **formal or informal leaders**. As Saul Alinsky notes:

The simple fact is that in any community, regardless of how poor, people may have serious problems – but they do not have issues, they have a bad scene. **An issue is something you can do something about, but as long as you feel powerless and unable to do something about it, all you have is a bad scene... Through action, persuasion, and communication, the organizer makes it clear that organization will give them the power, the ability, the strength to do something about these particular problems.** It is then that a bad scene begins to break up into specific issues, because now the people can do something about it. What the organizer does is convert the plight into a problem⁵ (my emphasis).

The leader promises quick, easy solutions to frustrating and complex issues.

Scapegoating is one example of a simplistic problem definition and solution – blaming a variety of ills on a particular group of people. The solution can become violence against and finally elimination of those people.

Language can be a precursor to action. It is instrumental in the escalation process.

Observers of genocide in Bosnia and Rwanda quoted people as saying, “First we talked about killing people and then we killed people.” Speaking the unspeakable can be a step toward death.

The leader uses language to shape both problem definition and solution. The seven devices of Nazi propaganda illustrate the persuasive power of language. Today, product

⁵ Alinsky, Saul D. Rules for Radicals. New York, Vintage Books, 1971: 119-20.

advertising and political campaigns make liberal use of these devices to motivate and mobilize people. These techniques include:

1. “*Name Calling*” – the use of loaded and unflattering terms to describe a particular person or group of people.
2. “*Card Stacking*” – presenting only one side of the argument or only information to justify one’s own position and/or action.
3. “*Testimonial*” – using a famous and admired person to endorse the idea, cause, etc.
4. “*Flag waving*” – using the emotional appeal of patriotism to support a position or action.
5. “*Band Wagon*” – everyone else is doing it, why not you? Get with the program!
6. “*Transfer*” – connecting the issue/action to something that is valued, esteemed, etc. – even though there is no logical or causal relationship.
7. “*Glittering Generalities*” – using words that sound imposing, but mean nothing.

Not everyone follows the leader. Some people protest and speak out at great personal risk. However in Stanley Milgram’s famous experiment, obedience to authority won out over personal conscience for a majority of people.

...Milgram, a psychologist at Yale University, conducted a study focusing on the conflict between obedience to authority and personal conscience. He examined justifications for acts of genocide offered by those accused at the World War II Nuremberg War Criminal trials. Their defense often was based on ‘obedience’ – that they were just following orders of their superiors.

In the experiment, so-called ‘teachers’ (who were actually the unknowing subjects of the experiment) were recruited by Milgram. They were asked [to] administer an electric shock of increasing intensity to a ‘learner’ for each mistake he made during the experiment. The fictitious story given to those ‘teachers’ was that the experiment was exploring effects of punishment (for incorrect responses) on learning behavior. The ‘teacher’ was not aware that the ‘learner’ in the study was actually an actor—merely indicating discomfort as the ‘teacher’ increased the electric shocks.

When the ‘teacher’ asked whether increased shocks should be given he/she was verbally encouraged to continue. **Sixty percent of the ‘teachers’ obeyed orders to punish the learner to the very end of the 450-volt scale! No subject stopped before reaching 300 volts!**

At times, the worried ‘teachers’ questioned the experimenter, asking who was responsible for any harmful effects resulting from shocking the learner at such a high level. Upon receiving the answer that the experimenter assumed full responsibility, teachers seemed to accept the response and continue shocking, even though some were obviously extremely uncomfortable in doing so.⁶

Behavior is also shaped by means of **stories, myths, and rituals**. Often stories will develop about some incident. The incident may or may not have happened. Even if the incident happened, the stories may not be accurate. Urban myths are relatively benign examples of this. More elaborate myths and rituals develop to reinforce the superiority of one’s own group and the inferiority of the “other.” Events can be interpreted through the filter of such myths. A powerful example of this is the Aryan mythology the Nazis perpetrated which provides the theme for “Triumph of the Will,” Leni Riefenstahl’s film about the 1936 Olympiad in Hitler’s Germany. The film’s title evokes The Will to Power a book cobbled together from “jottings, scribbles, and notes” of Friedrich Nietzsche after his death by his sister Elizabeth Förster-Nietzsche.⁷ Elizabeth, according to Nietzsche’s biographer Walter Kaufmann, was a “chauvinist racist,” and greatly distorted her brother’s philosophy. Unfortunately, The Will to Power provided the rationale for the Nazi ideology of “racial purity” and the “superman.”

Suppressing any information that is contrary to stories, myths, and information presented by the leader solidifies “group think.” This includes **eliminating political opposition**,

⁶ Stanley Milgram’s Experiment, “Obedience and Individual Responsibility.” College of Business Administration, University of Rhode Island (<http://www.cba.uri.edu/Faculty/dellabitta/mr415s98/EthicEtcLinks/Milgram.htm>).

prohibiting open political dialogue (as in free elections), and **dispensing with multiple sources of news and information** other than the “official” media. This was most notable in Bosnia where Sarajevo radio and TV transmitters were shot out early in the civil war so that the only news available came from Belgrade.

Introducing **discriminatory practices** toward the “other” reinforces and justifies the myths and provides a visible target for violence and oppression. It also reinforces myths of superiority and inferiority. Discrimination sets up a closed feedback system in which the victim’s reactions are then used to rationalize further discrimination and “validate” the erroneous beliefs on which it is based. Treatment of Native Americans, African Americans, and Japanese Americans in the United States are sorry examples of this behavior. Discrimination separates people physically, socially, intellectually, and emotionally within themselves and from others. It provides fertile ground for violence. The frightening part of this process is how fast it can occur. In both Bosnia and Rwanda, neighbors, colleagues, and friends started killing each other within a short time.

“Differences” can be inherently visual such as eye color or created artificially by wearing a yellow star. Once the difference is visible, differential behavior can be instigated. The “Blue Eyes/Brown Eyes” experiment illustrates how rapidly this can occur and how profound the impact on the human psyche. Jane Elliott was an elementary school teacher in 1968. The day after Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination, she divided her students into groups on the basis of their eye color. The blue-eyed group of students

⁷ Kaufmann, Walter. Nietzsche Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist. Princeton, New Jersey; Princeton University Press, 1974, 6.

had the “wrong” eye color. They were identified as bad. Children who belonged to the brown-eyed group were given special privileges while the blue-eyed group was denied privileges. It was startling how quickly the children became both victims and persecutors. What is also very disturbing is that artificial rules promoting discrimination, *not* deprivation (e.g., a struggle for scarce resources), triggered this behavior in “ordinary” children.

What is distressing about these experiments is that they illustrate our (not “their”) potential to seriously hurt and mistreat one another. These potentialities can be predictably triggered by certain conditions. After the shock of September 11, 2001, many people were ready to retaliate. It didn’t take long for an “enemy” to be identified and public opinion (and troops) mobilized. In this environment, those opposing violent retaliation are accused of being unpatriotic.

Strategies for Intervening and Preventing Violence

As human systems become increasingly complex and interconnected, both the promise and the peril of this connectivity is becoming apparent. The promise is contained in the wonder of humans walking on the moon and the Astronaut Edgar Mitchell’s sense of universal connectedness as he returned to Earth (with humans on Earth momentarily united by their sense of wonder). The ability, due to communications technology, to share information and solutions to problems around the world in seconds is an incredible advance in human culture. The peril is represented by the combination of sophisticated

technology available to insurgent and terrorist groups and the vulnerability of financial, communication, and security systems dependent on technology. The Internet and the Web are used by these groups for organizing, spreading propaganda, conducting financial transactions, and obtaining the latest military technology. Technology also increases the speed of these transactions and hence the rapidity at which groups spread their influence. Because of this connectivity and the technology that facilitates it, the potential for relatively small but strategic acts of violence to destabilize entire social, political, and economic systems is growing along with our vulnerability.

The war carried on in Sri Lanka by the Tamil separatist organization LTTE is an example of the wedding of technology and terrorism. Funding flows to the organization through complex financial transactions, weaponry is obtained through arms bazaars that are part of world-wide networks. This violence has “profoundly polarized and embittered Sri Lankan society, severely reduced opportunities for democratic dialogue, and brought the process of real institutional and political reform ...to a halt.”⁸ Sri Lanka has lost more than a fifth of its GDP due to this war.⁹

Specialists also see unsettling evidence that a new kind of terrorist has emerged. Now free-floating, independently funded terrorist networks are appearing, networks that express only vague political goals – often little more than a deep hatred of current institutions and authorities. ‘New terrorism...is often just a cacophonous cry of protest against the West in general, and American government in particular...Its perpetrators may be religious fanatics, or simply diehard opponents of the federal government, who might come from inside, as well as outside American territory.’ Such groups are magnets for fanatical and violent individuals who have been alienated by our societies’ rapid social and economic changes.¹⁰

⁸ Ibid, 357-358.

⁹ Ibid, 356.

Governments and bureaucracies are not flexible enough to handle multinational terrorist networks. Furthermore, violent responses provoke more violence and the cycle of violence escalates creating a lethal dialectic. In fact, terrorism feeds and grows from the reaction of “the opposition.” Thus terrorists become martyrs rather than murderers.

Given the massive entanglement of our current economic, political, social, and technological systems, even small incidents, as previously noted, may have a massive impact on these larger systems. Changing circumstances require that we change our strategies and tactics to deal with violence and the timing and intensity of intervention. The dynamics of human violence are iterative – each action building on previous actions – creating new possibilities for violence. Thus our best hope for de-escalating violence is to intervene before people start killing each other – before civil wars and terrorism becomes endemic. At all points, our intervention strategies must be based on human dynamics. We know that strategies based on linear cause and affect assumptions are too simplistic. This suggests multiple strategies – many of which may initially seem counterintuitive, e.g., not reacting to violence with more violence. Using violence to react to violence may have the unintended consequence of discrediting moderate voices on both sides, polarizing people, and diminishing the chance for a reduction in hostilities. Providing the conditions for new organization – hopefully more positive – to emerge may be the best we can hope for. Though we cannot predict or produce specified results, we can promote conditions that lead to self-organization. Glenda Eoyang¹¹ in her work with

¹⁰ Homer-Dixon, Thomas, *Ibid*, 362.

¹¹ Eoyang, Glenda H. *Coping with Chaos Seven Simple Tools*. Cheyenne, Lagumo Corp., 1997.
Olson Edwin E. and Glenda H. Eoyang. *Facilitating Organization Change Lessons From Complexity Science*. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer, 2001.

these complex human systems identifies three dynamics that promote self-organization. These dynamics operate at multiple levels from nation-states to social networks and personal interactions. They can provide a framework for developing strategies to de-escalate violence:

Containers – these are what focus or contain the action. They can be individuals (e.g., leaders), boundaries (e.g., geographical barriers), or affinities (e.g., common interests). For some types of violence, such as terrorism, the Earth is the container. *Container strategies include increasing or decreasing the container size to slow down or speed up the pace of change and intervening with leadership. Containers can be redefined by changing the “differences that make a difference.”*

Differences – these are “the differences that make a difference.” They create boundaries and define “self” and “other” and “same” and “different.” *Difference strategies include emphasizing certain differences, de-emphasizing others. This reframes who is in and who is out – who is “same” and who is “different,” who is “us” and who is “them.”*

Exchanges – these are the feedback loops – that can amplify or dampen response. They are part of the dialectic. *Exchange strategies include increasing or decreasing the response to a stimulus, depending on what is desired, e.g., “more of” or “less of.”*

Containers or places where violence ignites, often have great disparities of wealth and influence, especially people’s access to the basic necessities of life. Critical elements include people’s *perceptions* of inequalities, facilitated by the presence of leadership, as well as large numbers of people who are disenfranchised and dispossessed of land and/or nation. People who see no future for themselves in the societies in which they live, have no stake in their continued existence. They literally have nothing to lose. Under the influence of a leader they may discover common cause or affinity. This is fertile ground for violence where, like Jason and the Argonauts of Greek Legend, dragon’s teeth are

sown in the fields and armed men spring forth from the earth. Jason no sooner defeats one opponent than a new one emerges.

It is in the self-interest of the United States and other relatively stable and prosperous nations to prevent violence and intervene in these violent situations:

Rich countries don't benefit if significant chunks of the world become more violent and decrepit. Zones of anarchy are not only dead weights on the world's economy, they can also become sites of major humanitarian crises that demand external intervention (as in Somalia, Rwanda, and the Balkans), generators of waves of outward migration, and havens for transnational terrorist and criminal networks that target rich countries.¹²

Our goal should be to develop policies and actions that promote stable and civil societies. Such societies require quality leaders, effective governance structures, functional legal and judicial systems that include adequate civil and criminal codes, good educational systems, well-functioning markets, and adequate infrastructure such as roads, pipelines, and sewers. Economic investment and economic development depend upon social stability and social capacity. In order for all to prosper, wealthier people must be willing to share resources such as land and provide support through their taxes for critical services such as education and infrastructure.

Social networks are a type of container. They are characteristic of organizations that promote violence (as well as an increasing characteristic of modern life). Money, information (including strategies and tactics), connection with other groups, recruitment, and propaganda all flow through these networks. This is facilitated, as we have seen, by modern communications technology (satellites, cell phones, laptops, PDAs – Personal

Data Assistants, GPS – Global Positioning Systems, etc.). We can also use this same technology to trace and intervene in these connections – e.g., efforts by the United States to cut off Al Qaida’s access to financial support.

The question of *who* should intervene is a strategic one and may set the pattern for years to come. Should the United States act unilaterally or in partnership with other nations? Should the United Nations be empowered and supported to initiate and implement action or transnational NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations)? Are there other alternatives?

Terrorists manipulate **differences** to enhance their position among the people in the regions and countries where they operate. They present their goals as the same as those of the people whose support they require. Having an opposition, being attacked, helps to cement this “coupling.” To “uncouple” this relationship, we have to demonstrate that these goals not only differ, but they may be in conflict. One way to reframe a situation and change the significant differences would have been to declare the terrorist attacks of September 11 “criminal acts,” use the legal and judicial system, and try the case in the World Court. Another would be to uncouple the religious rhetoric of some terrorist groups from their other goals and the goals of their supporters.

Exchanges or feedback interventions require some introspection. Those of us living in the United States are quick to react to actions such as September 11 that impact on us. We are less aware of our impact on people and nations. First of all, acts of terrorism, civil wars, and violence have been occurring all over the world for decades. Generally,

¹² Homer-Dixon, *Ibid.*, 359.

those of us in the United States did not pay much attention – what happens elsewhere was not our concern. After September 11, it is clear that we are impacted by what is happening all over the world – something many other nations have realized for a long time. How accurate and representative are the messages we send other nations about ourselves through our media – particularly films, television, CDs? What about our own actions toward other nations? How much violence do we export – through media, actions, involvement in the international arms markets, and our role in the international drug trade that funds arms purchases? The messages we send, the actions we take, and how we react need to be carefully considered – they can amplify or dampen the feedback we receive from nations, groups, and individuals.

The power of feedback to alter behavior, perception, and emotion should not be discounted. Groups of people can be affected, such as the Jonestown Massacre in 1978 as well as individuals like the suicide bombers among current terrorist groups. These feedback techniques have been used in brainwashing prisoners of war, in hostage situations, and with cults. Contrary to popular belief, it is not just people who are alienated or who have mental health issues that are susceptible. We are all susceptible under certain conditions. Flo Conway and Jim Siegelman in their book Snapping describe the process by which this occurs. Individuals or groups of individuals are isolated from family and friends. They are subjected to stress in the form of hunger, work, and sleep deprivation. They are often barraged with words, drumming, and chanting:

This all-encompassing verbal and nonverbal assault, charged with challenging new beliefs, suggestions, and commands, may build up

profound and often conflicting feelings – feelings of fear, guilt, hatred, anger, humiliation, embarrassment and alienation – which may prompt the individual to seek release from a troubled past or from more immediate and pressing problems. Then, often in a sensuous seductive, or totally foreign environment, or surrounded by an atmosphere of love, warmth, acceptance, openness, honesty, and community, the individual may yield to some call, either from within or without, to surrender, to let go, to stop questioning, to relinquish all hold upon the will. And more than anything else it is this act of capitulation that sets off the explosion we call snapping.¹³

A brief summary of some system intervention and prevention strategies:

- Reduce inequities
- Follow the money and cut off the flow.
- Disrupt communication systems of violent groups.
- Reduce the availability of arms.
- Use various forms of media to uncouple violence and terrorism from people's aspirations and hopes for a better life.
- Criminalize acts of terror and violence.
- Intervene when violence first begins.
- Be intentional about our messages, actions, and reactions.

In concert with these system strategies, there are a variety of techniques that are used to de-escalate violence and resolve conflicts. These include: ADR (Alternative Dispute Resolution) including interest-based negotiation developed by the Harvard Negotiation Project; Restorative Justice and Peace Circles, the Alternatives to Violence Project – de-escalating violence in prison – developed by Friends for a Non-Violent World; and the work of Dr. Bob Roberts with parolees and violence, developed at Angola Prison in

¹³ Conway, Flo, and Jim Siegelman. Snapping. New York, Dell Publishing Co., Inc.; March, 1980 (second

Louisiana, to mention a few. The point is that whether we use these or other tools, we have a lot of experience dealing with violence. Military action isn't the only option and may not be the most effective in a number of situations.

At the personal level, as part of our intervention and prevention strategies we need to:

1. Provide opportunities for various groups of people to be together. Humans respond emotionally to touch and proximity. Anthropologists say that people who eat and sleep together, don't make war with each other. Also, we find it difficult to shoot one another when we are close enough to look into each other's eyes. It is easier to drop a bomb (more impersonal) than to shoot people right in front of us. On the battlefield, men often shot their rifles, but did not aim at other men. "People's faces," as Thomas Homer-Dixon notes, "are critical connection points among us in our increasingly fluid, atomized, and dehumanized world." They "can help us translate crowds into community, and selfishness and egocentrism into empathy and generosity."¹⁴

2. Change the language we use when speaking about each other. Make language more inclusive – less categorical, break down "we" and "they" to "us." Avoid language that implies violent action toward a defined "them." We need to emphasize common experiences, hopes, emotions, and humanity and develop stories and rituals that positively reinforce inclusiveness.

edition), 135.

¹⁴ Homer-Dixon, *Ibid.*, 354.

3. Prevent discrimination based on various attributes – linguistic, social, physical, religious, political, etc. Emphasize respect and dignity for all of us. Uncouple “different” and “bad.” Provide opportunities for equal status contact.

4. Provide a multiple perspectives of people and events. Media that allows for free expression of diverse opinions is essential. Provide free and open forums for the discussion and dissemination of information on any given topic. Prevent the consolidation and integration of media into a few powerful corporate entities that control what is read, heard, and seen.

5. Insure that all of us have enough to eat, a place to sleep, employment, a constructive release for strong emotions (particularly anger), and social connections. The old chemical dependency treatment acronym HALT applies: people make poor choices when they are too hungry, angry, lonely, and tired.

6. Teach critical thinking – how to distinguish data from assumptions, facts from propaganda. Teach problem solving skills – how to approach complex issues and a process for resolving them.

7. Agree on “rules of engagement” – how we will listen, talk, and behave toward each other. How to be respectful and civil to one another.

At the heart of violence is the inability to confront differences constructively. This occurs both at a societal and a personal level. There are many types of differences: values, personality, wealth, religion, ethnicity, among others. There are three parts to accommodating differences: 1) acknowledging differences without judging, 2) constructively confronting differences, 3) learning to live with differences that won't go away. In Western culture, we often have two extreme reactions to conflict: we deny its existence or we react aggressively. When we deny or suppress conflict, gossip, innuendo, projection and/or passive aggressive behavior often ensues. When we react aggressively it is often with verbal or physical violence.

Underlying our traditional approach to differences is a belief that in order to get along we have to reach complete agreement, like, and possibly love each other. We need a middle ground where civility and respect are exercised. This does not imply agreement or personal affection. Liking and loving are on the far end of a continuum involving "self" and "other" that includes first acknowledging the presence of the other, second, recognition of the humanity of the other, and third, respecting the other.¹⁵ Until we have a relationship, "other" becomes the monster of mythology and fairy tales. Touching the other, as in "The Frog Prince" and "Beauty and the Beast" becomes transformative and the monster becomes the prince.¹⁶ We have to find a way to touch each other before we kill each other.

¹⁵ Kenyari Bellfield suggested this concept.

¹⁶ Mary Lynn Kittelson suggested this concept.

This essay on human violence started with a description of the negative energy released by a mob of angry, frustrated people – creating “The Beast.” There are always more people than leaders – even guerilla leaders. There is tremendous positive energy as well as negative energy in all of us. Positive energy is released when we recognize other humans in need and respond with our emotions and our assistance. We relate to individual faces, not to the collective mass of people. One of the most powerful pictures of the Viet Nam war, was the photo of a man being shot at point blank range by a South Vietnamese soldier. For many people, weary of the war that picture catalyzed their opposition to continued killing. Leaders try to capitalize on this human energy and direct it to their own ends. Sometimes this is positive and sometimes not. We The People, need to recognize this, access our own wisdom, re-direct our energy toward positive ends, and exercise our own personal responsibility in our democracy. We need to say, **“Stop the violence now, stop the killing now!”** We need to begin with our own transformation.

As Nelson Mandela observed in his Inaugural Speech:

...as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.

None of us can discern the complexity of human dynamics in its entirety. The amount and complexity of knowledge is beyond the capacity of the individual human brain to process. We cannot predict with certainty the outcome of all our choices. Sometimes the best we can do is to navigate our reality. Yet, a lesson we need to remember from another Greek myth is that when Pandora opened the box and let out all the misfortune into the world, hope still remained in the box. Over a hundred years ago an astute

observer of the beginnings of our modern era, the sociologist Max Weber, noted in his essay “Politics as a Vocation”:

What is possible would never have been achieved if, in this world, people had not repeatedly reached for the impossible.

And the “Beast” will dissipate...

And another song will rise...

About the Author

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