UNDERSTANDING NONVIOLENCE IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

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Keywords: nonviolence, movement, political action, negative peace, positive peace, revolution, humanity, typology, power, culture, *satyagraha*, *ahimsa*, quadrant, Anabaptist, dialogue, *agape*, *ubantu*, the other, Truth, reconciliation, revenge, *aloha*, *ho'oponopono*, *ohana*, inner light, Quakers, mechanisms of change, dependency, independence, great chain of nonviolence, repertoire

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Summary

This chapter examines the theory and dynamics of nonviolence by setting out four generic types. They are represented in quadrants formed out of two axes: an axis of public/personal and one of principled/pragmatic nonviolence. The quadrants are designed to make the concept and process of nonviolence more intelligible and meaningful to academics, students and public alike. Despite the expanding corpus of scholarship devoted to the subject, mainstream social science and the general public still display misconceptions about its meanings and processes. This comes at a time when an increasing level of political activity is being conducted in the area of nonviolence. One thinks of the nonviolent actions that have initiated policy changes in the environmental, racial, gender and indigenous fields. The downfall of many governments has been spearheaded by acts of nonviolent resistance, most recently in the Ukraine, Georgia, Serbia, South Africa, Eastern Europe, and the Philippines. With so many other conflicts caught in webs of upward spiralling violence, the time is long overdue to step back and probe deeply, in a systematic way, this more humane way of resolving our differences when the conventional channels of conducting politics appear to be blocked. Much excellent ground-breaking work has already been done by the doyen of the field, Gene Sharp, and his associates. However, their analysis, in my view, falls short in a couple of areas. Its focus is almost exclusively confined to nonviolence as a strategy and technique and as a binary power relationship between the ruler and his subjects. In my analysis I shall be exploring other dimensions of nonviolence (the principled/public, the principled/personal, and the pragmatic/personal domains, as well as Sharp's emphasis on the pragmatic/public). With regard to the latter, my investigation will look at the complexity of power relations—that is, the various spaces of power interactions that lie between the dichotomy of the ruler and the ruled—and suggest the need for some modification.

> *The belief in nonviolence, if it is ever to achieve its object, must seek*
> *a deeper anchorage than our fleeting convictions would allow it. It must*
> *begin, not with specific projects (although it must ultimately move to them)*
> *but with a profound inner revolution, a truly existential determination*
> *to seek one's fundamental, inherent humanity and to transform one's entire*
> *being.*
> (John M. Heffron, discussing the nonviolent philosophy of Daisaku Ikeda)

1. Introduction

There are many ways in which nonviolence has been conceived and practised. Scholars have constructed a number of different typologies to help clarify the distinctions. The best known belongs to that doyen of nonviolent scholars, Gene Sharp. He outlines six types: non-resistance, active reconciliation, moral resistance, selective nonviolence, *satyagraha*, and nonviolent revolution. Other scholars, whose classification systems are

occasionally cited, include Mulford Sibley, Theodore Paullin, Douglas G. Bond, Thomas Weber and Robert J. Burrowes, and again Burrowes with his later slightly modified scheme.

Why would I consider adding another typology to the mounting list? My reason is basically to explore an open-ended perspective that can make the concept and process of nonviolence more intelligible and meaningful to academics, students and public alike. Despite the expanding corpus of scholarship devoted to the subject, mainstream social science still displays misconceptions about its meanings and operations. As well, different logics are often invoked in evaluating the effectiveness of nonviolent and violent action. Nonviolence, it seems, has to meet higher standards and a greater number of conditions. This comes at a time when an increasing level of political activity is being conducted in the area of nonviolence. One thinks of the nonviolent actions that have initiated policy changes in the environmental, racial, gender and indigenous fields. The Cold War ended with predominantly nonviolent uprisings in all the Eastern European countries except Rumania where it started nonviolently but subsequently degenerated into violence. The apartheid regime in South Africa, after decades of racial oppression, yielded to a politics of nonviolence as both sides entered into a spirit of reconciliation. The Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 when a right wing coup was successfully countered nonviolently. Many other cases can be cited: two occurred in the Philippines, one against the dictatorial regime of President Ferdinand Marcos and the other against the corrupt regime of President Estrada; the highly autocratic regime of the Shah of Iran was overthrown in 1978 by a primarily nonviolent campaign; arguably the Palestinians' most effective resistance was staged during the largely nonviolent *intifada*; the brutal dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet in Chile succumbed to a coalition of nonviolent forces in 1988; and the downfall of President Slobodan Milosevic occurred in 2000 after a well-planned and executed nonviolent struggle. Even the Nazis were defeated on a number of occasions by imaginative and persistent acts of nonviolent defiance.

While the tradition of nonviolence can be traced back to ancient Taoist, Buddhist and Jewish scriptures, as well as the philosophy of the New Testament and some of the resistance movements to the imperial edicts of Rome, it is mainly in the past one-hundred years that it has become an integral force in shaping people's lives and the political directions of their societies. Arguably the single most important person and the campaign he led in highlighting the immense potential of nonviolence to effect personal and societal change were Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and the Indian independence movement. He and the success of the movement have inspired campaign after campaign. Albert Einstein, on hearing of Gandhi's death on 30 January 1948, paid him the following much-quoted tribute: "Generations to come, it may well be, will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth." Even some of his opponents were moved at times to express their unbounded admiration for his dedication to the pursuit of truth and nonviolence. Commented General Jan Christian Smuts of South Africa, the soldier/politician who had imprisoned Gandhi:

It was my fate to be the antagonist of a man for whom even then I had the highest respect. In prison, he had prepared for me a very useful pair of scandals which he

presented to me when he was set free. I had worn those sandals for many a summer since then, even though I feel I am not worthy to stand in the shoes of so great a man.

Not only was Gandhi highly esteemed by many of his contemporaries but subsequent generations of nonviolent votaries have seen his life and writings as the inspiration for their commitment. Needless to say, he features prominently in my description of the different dimensions of nonviolence because he was involved, probably more than any other individual, in all four of the quadrants of nonviolence outlined below.

2. Difference between Peace and Nonviolence

Before categorizing the four major types of nonviolence, it might be useful to explain how I see nonviolence differing from peace. The two terms are often used interchangeably, yet in my schema they represent the two sides of the same coin. Peace represents the ultimate goal—what one strives for. Peace can be seen as a quality, an ideal state of being, so that a society or person is at peace. But a society or person is never at nonviolence.

Nonviolence shows the way. It is the means, the method or the road that leads to the goal of peace which in its complete form equates with social justice. Johan Galtung, arguably the founder of modern peace research, says a society would realize its ideal of peace when every person was able to achieve their full physical and mental potential. That is, everyone's basic (ontological) needs would be met and nurtured. He lists these needs as survival/security, well being, identity and freedom. While the struggle to fulfil these needs is unending, the applied commitment to nonviolence moves the individual and society ever closer to their realization.

Depicting nonviolence as the way to peace does not necessarily reduce it to a mere technique or instrument of political expediency. Going down the nonviolent road can entail the embracing of a living philosophy, the pursuit of a life commitment that strives towards an ideal of peace, incorporating both the concepts of negative and positive peace. Negative peace refers to a state where violence is absent, while positive peace represents the outcome of successfully eliminating the potential for violence. The latter entails the reduction of the instruments of violence (eg, disarmament) and the realization of structures and values that enable people to experience the full range of their ontological needs, without impeding other people's capacities to do the same. Nonviolence, as a philosophy, provides a code of conduct by which a person can seek to structure their life, find their identity, give meaning to their existence, and help to build society in the direction of positive peace.

3. Different Roads to Peace

Instead of nonviolence, there are other roads to peace that people usually follow. The generic forms of these responses to conflict appear in Figure 1. The conventional sector of the sphere refers to the legal, constitutional, diplomatic, and officially endorsed dialogical means at people's disposal. It can include customs and habits of the society if these are part of the ruling group's consensus. In the conventional sector there is

theoretically little direct or physical violence, but there can be lots of psychological, structural and cultural violence.
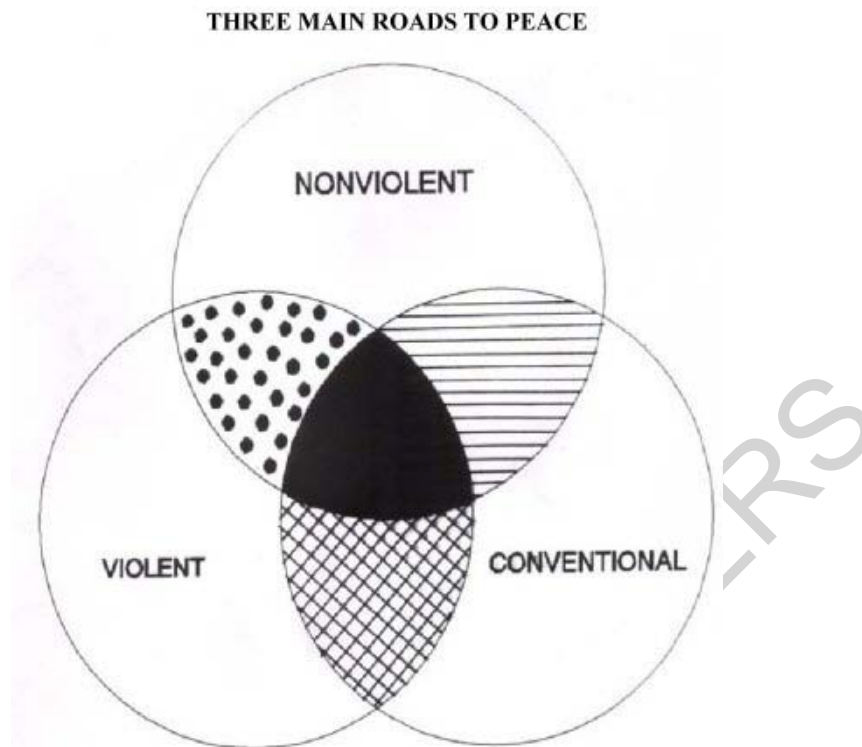
THREE MAIN ROADS TO PEACE

Figure. 1 Three Main Roads to Peace

When the conventional response to a conflict situation seems incapable of providing a satisfactory solution, people generally believe they have only two available options—to withdraw and accept defeat or resort to the sanction of violence. Various attempts through the ages have been made to 'civilize' violence by introducing such concepts as just war theory, international law and civil rights to constrain its use in the exercise of power. Nevertheless, codes of control have often been contemptuously overridden or quietly ignored. The last century and current one have seen a terrible escalation of violence. The twentieth century was the bloodiest on record—a calculation of over 100 million killed in armed conflict and another 170 million the victims of political murder. In the United States, alone, the number of homicides since the end of World War II, estimated to be 750,000, exceeded the mortalities suffered in all the nation's major wars up to the time of the Second Iraqi War (650,053). Even greater were the number of 'aggravated assaults' (916, 383 in 1999; 336.1 per 100,000). Violence and the counter violence that it engenders are seemingly becoming impossible to contain. The violence sector is siphoning off more of the world's intellectual and material resources and causing greater dislocation of societies and damage to the global environment than ever before in human history.

In the US, the projected fiscal budget for 2006 calls for military expenditures of $US419 billion plus an extra $US81 billion is expected in a supplemental budget to cover the anticipated costs of the Iraq and Afghanistan engagements, bringing the total to $US500 billion in an overall budget of 2.7 trillion. When one adds $US300 billion

continuing to be paid out for previous wars and $US35 billion for Homeland Security, the grand total of the defence bill comes to $US835 billion per annum or slightly over 32% of the entire federal budget. This contrasts with a foreign aid allocation of $US31.8 billion or about 1.2% of governmental projected outlays. The imbalance would suggest more violence in the offing.

4. Obstacles to Nonviolent Option

Despite this growing 'crisis of violence,' the nonviolence sector is seldom considered a viable alternative at any of the various levels of conflict. Whether the conflict is global, inter-state, intra-state, societal (patriarchy, misogyny, racism, workers' grievances, etc) or inter-personal, it is excluded from the so-called 'realistic' options. Why is this so? The first reason is probably ignorance. Nonviolence is often perceived as inaction, passive resistance, avoidance of conflict, submissiveness—turning the other cheek. While for a few nonviolent votaries who practise non-resistance this may be the case, for the sector as a whole the action displayed is exactly the opposite. Secondly, nonviolence is regarded as operating from a position of weakness. Such a view prevails in a discourse where the dominant paradigm depicts political relations as conflictual, and the way for an individual or society to survive and prosper is to exercise 'power over'—and ultimately that means using physical power against the opponent when other measures fail. Thirdly—and following on from the previous point—nonviolent action is generally seen as only effective up to a certain point, when vital interests and values are not at stake and when one is dealing with a relatively benign or reasonable opponent. But once an issue reaches a critical stage with a seemingly intractable and powerful opponent, the *ultima ratio* rests on violence as the way to avoid certain defeat.

Fourthly, certain irrefutable truths are ingrained in our thinking, sometimes so deeply that we are unaware of their existence. For example, how many people (if honest with themselves) find lying and cheating acceptable as long as one does not get caught, or that national security (militarily conceived) must take priority over all other considerations. Critical to the acceptance of violence as the ultimate form of conflict resolution is the view that human beings are innately violent. However, recent advances in neuroscience and anthropology empirically demonstrate that such a view is indefensible—that our palaeolithic ancestors (true ancestors in terms of neurological mechanisms) did not exercise, as Piero Giorgi explains, violence against each other, either individually or in an organised manner similar to war. The best evidence in support of our nonviolent prehistory is the general lack of man-to-man direct violence in Palaeolithic art and the nonviolent social organisation of hunter-gatherers who were studied before being physically eliminated or acculturated.

Despite the accumulating evidence that our violence is a learned behaviour, the assumption of a genetically driven violent aggression continues to lie at the root of what we think. We accept uncritically the famous maxim of the Roman General Vegetius, "If you want peace, prepare for war." We seldom challenge the doctrines of deterrence and balance of power, or the slogan "peace through military strength", or the assertion of the US Airforce that "Peace is Our Business". These sayings are so pervasive as to blend unconsciously into our reality. They represent the way things simply are, so that they exist beyond the scope of any questioning.

Finally, nonviolence requires a change in not only what we think but how we think. Alan Richards lists a number of features associated with the violent mind-set, which, if eliminated, would hold the prospect of opening humankind to the nonviolent path. They include the way we tend to frame conflict in the essentialist terms of good and evil, ignore the importance of history, are unable to cope with paradox, and assume that for every problem there is a solution—what Richards calls the "engineering mind." When one objectifies the 'other,' sees him/her as a dehumanized evil force instead of another complex human being like oneself with a mixture of faults and saving graces, nonviolence will not be entertained. If, as Alexander Solzhenitsyn has written, "the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being," the first question for the would-be exponent of counter violence to pose is, "What might I have done to help create the conflict?" That question paves the way for still deploring the deed without denouncing the perpetrator and cutting off the chances of a peaceful resolution.

Nonviolence requires an understanding of the background to a conflict. A failure to delve into the history of where the opponent is coming from is a sure recipe for violence. As the novelist William Faulkner has rightly said: "The past is not dead. It is not even past." It is a part of the present, so that an enduring resolution of a conflict will not be achieved by ignoring history. Another obstacle to the acceptance of nonviolence stems from an inability to accept paradox—that it might just be possible for two contradictory stories of the same event to each be true. Without recognizing that different truths can exist as two sides of the same coin, it is easy to slip into the dichotomy of my righteousness vs. your venality and deceive oneself into thinking that violence is the way to eradicate the 'other's' corrupt position. A definite solution, mirroring the engineer's technological precision, is seen for every human problem when in reality there may be a raft of responses, each offering only the prospect, to a greater or lesser degree, of possible success.

A reality of incertitude—one encased in nuances and contradictions—describes the world of no easy fixes to which all human beings are consigned. It is a reality that nonviolence can serve much better than violence. Indeed, in my opinion, if humankind expects to survive the 21st century, it must be open to considering and nurturing some of the nonviolent paths depicted in the sections that follow.

5. Typology of Nonviolence (4 'P's)

The components of nonviolence can more clearly be understood in terms of their meaning and function by constructing the quadrants of a circle divided by a vertical axis of Principled/Pragmatic and a horizontal axis of Personal/Public (See Figure 2). These two axes of 'Ps' not only form the quadrants that help us to see how different types of nonviolence are conceived and practised but they also suggest an overview of how the parts might be integrated into an organic whole for grappling with today's problems. Despite each of the quadrants being analysed separately, most of the practitioners of nonviolence operate in at least two, and sometimes the more dedicated votaries in all four categories. Thus, as with most typologies, it is important not to categorize people as this or that type, but to openly acknowledge that there might be an overlap and that people also change, moving in and out of the quadrants as well as leaving the nonviolent sector altogether.
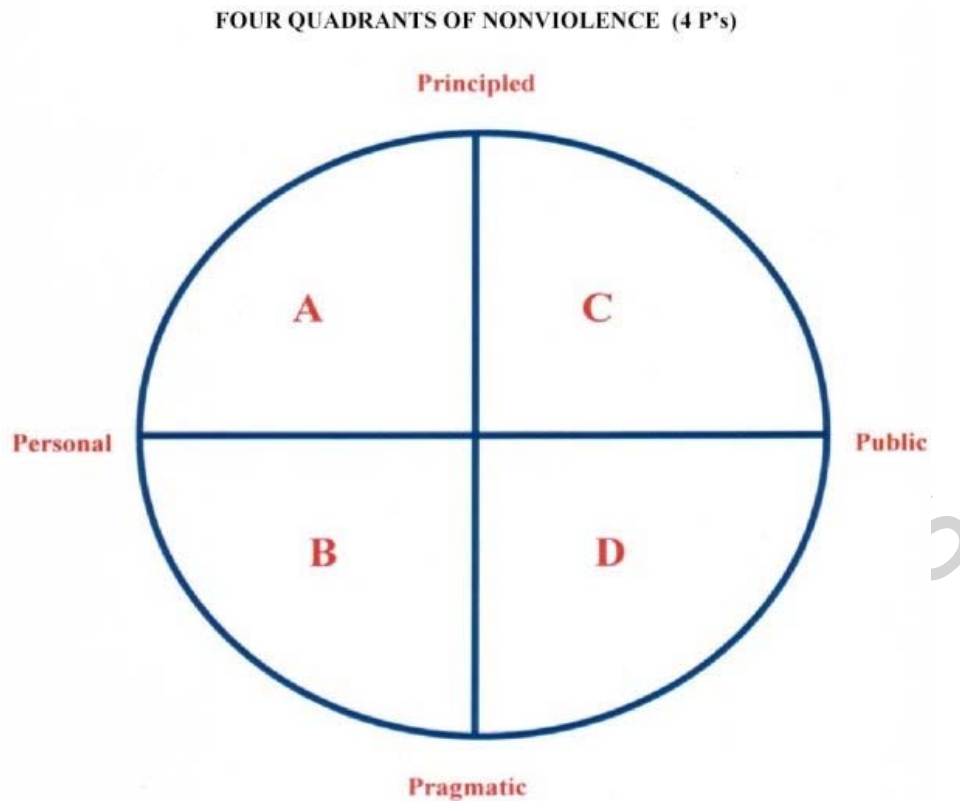
FOUR QUADRANTS OF NONVIOLENCE (4 P's)

Figure 2. Typology of Nonviolence

6. Quadrant A: Principled/Personal

This quadrant represents an inward-looking nonviolence that focuses on the purity of one's own thoughts, words and deeds. It can be religious based or derived from a secular code of morality. All of the major religions have traditions within them that concentrate solely on the salvation of the individual and/or carrying out the will of a superior cosmic force. Worldly existence is a constant struggle for the individual to be in harmony with a greater whole. Nonviolence assumes the quality of an intrinsic good, central to the way all personal (and sometimes in-group) issues are framed and need to be resolved.

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Biographical Sketch

Ralph Summy is an adjunct professor at the Australian Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Queensland where he engages in research and guest lecturing. He has taught at the University of Queensland and University of Hawai'i, and been a visiting professor at many universities around the world. He has authored books and articles on the theory and dynamics of nonviolent political action, history of peace movements, peace education, and related topics. For a number of years he has been actively involved in the affairs of the International Peace Research Association, and currently is a co-convener of its Nonviolence Commission. In 1977, he helped to found the journal *Social Alternatives* and continues to serve on its editorial collective.