
PROGRESS AND PEACE: *ENLIGHTENMENT NOW FROM* BOTH SCIENCE AND RELIGION

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The article considers the “enlightenment” that Steven Pinker claims in his book *Enlightenment Now: the Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress*. A case for religion, trust, and spirituality is made to highlight the importance of human values that have not evolved at the pace of science. This uneven progress of science and values threatens human survival, and cannot be considered as achieved enlightenment. A core value in this article is “nonkilling.” Human killings throughout the world are in different forms through direct and indirect means. There can be no enlightenment without such spirituality and values integrated with scientific knowledge. Pinker’s definition of Enlightenment is too narrow. For true enlightenment to occur, nonkilling should be one of the basic values guiding science.

Steven Pinker’s *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress*¹ is getting wide attention because of its fantastic interpretation of data and its logical analysis of reasons for human progress. His reflections show stunning developments resulting from science in the last one hundred years. Yet, we wonder if it may be said that science has made our lives too convenient and pleasurable. Is this enlightenment? Or, contrary to Pinker, has science’s fascination with the material world created some impediments towards a full enlightenment which is not yet here? Are the promoters of religious faith, morality, and the environment, whom he considers to be

anti-reason and science, really an impediment to human progress?

There is no denying the fact that reason and science have contributed enormously, but reason has its own bottlenecks and limits. Can we have progress if we eject trust, faith, and humanism? The extreme conclusion that science and reason are all that we need is a distorted perspective, typically called “scientism,” which turns out to be a religious faith in science. This may be the case with Steven Pinker, even though his book, as far as it goes, illustrates *The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress*.

WHY WE NEED RELIGION, TRUST, AND SPIRITUALITY

Religion has served the development of trust, spirituality, self-control, and morality for masses of people since the dawn of civilisation. Karl Marx said,² “Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the

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people.”³ Though Marx believed that religion can be used for human deception and oppression, he also realized that it provided a form of relief to the people, one that provides reasons for suffering and the motivation to move forward. Marx defined religion as

“the self-consciousness and self-esteem of man who has either not yet won through to himself, or has already lost himself again.”⁴ In other words, it can be implied that religion was a source of uplifting human beings by giving them a framework for goals and behavior. However, the manipulation of religion by power holders in history has caused the very essence to be lost. Marx’s critiques of the evil uses of religion does not negate its positive and necessary value.

Religious scriptures like the *Bhagavad Gita* deal with the body, mind, and intellect. They speak about the meaning of life and useful practices to develop human consciousness: responsibilities, pilgrimages, fasting, meditation, worship, prayer, study of scriptures, and so on. In India, our religious texts provide an understanding of the importance of mind in the initiation and perpetuation of any event, including war. Rather than physically restraining individuals who would harm or kill others with devices

developed by science, religions take on the more difficult task teaching self-restraint and love, by enabling individuals to develop a consciousness of the value of everything, and a respect for it that drives people to serve the whole. Pinker missed this point when he wrote,

A major breakthrough of scientific revolution was to refute the intuition that the universe is saturated with purpose. In the primitive but ubiquitous understanding, everything happens for a reason.... And then there are disembodied forces like karma, fate, spiritual message, cosmic justice and other guarantors of the institution that “everything happens for a reason.”⁵

If the scientific revolution really had refuted this idea of purpose, perhaps it was contradicting itself. To say that everything happens for a reason is to imply that no phenomenon occurs in isolation; rather, there are factors involved in the development of those particular events or the phenomena. This is the idea of “cause and effect,” a cornerstone of scientific experimentation. When Pinker states that there are certain phenomena that do not need any explanation, we have to ask “Why”?

Pinker used a loose stereotype of the term *karma*, finding this stereotype unscientific. But, to have a better understanding of the concept, we want to point to Swami Vivekananda’s *Karm Yoga*, where the concept of karma is better explained:

The word Karma is derived from the Sanskrit Kri, to do; all action is Karm. He says karma also means the effect of actions.⁶

Vivekananda adds,

Scientific innovations are based on will, will is caused by character, and character is manufactured by karma.⁷

Religion is simply not about worshipping some idol or following some rituals or practice(s), it is about a faith, trust, and an optimistic consciousness that suppresses egotism and fosters actions that serve the whole. Rabindranath Tagore, referring to this said,

The individual man must exist for Man the great and must express him in disinterested works, in science and philosophy, in literature and arts, in service and worship. He knows and uses this world where it is endless

and thus attains greatness, but he realizes his own truth where it is perfect and thus finds his fulfilment.⁸

The overall thrust of both Vivekananda's teaching and Tagore's philosophy was to do disinterested work for the upliftment of the society. "Disinterested" work is like the fundamental axiom of science, which is to rule out biases from an experiment. The focus should be more on the means (proper actions, experimental methods) rather than on the result. For when the focus shifts on the end results, we often bias the working methods, becoming more selfish and egotistical. We see "scientists" fall into this trap when they accept grant money from a government or donor that would like to use science to promote a preconceived political or social end.

THE ROLE OF MEANS AND ENDS

Means are as important as the ends. The objective of life is not just to have personal pleasure and conveniences, but a good life is also about becoming a better person—one loved, admired, and trusted by others. This concept is so poignantly encapsulated by Mohandas K. Gandhi in his description of the seven sins:⁹

1. Wealth without work.
2. Pleasure without conscience.
3. Knowledge without character.
4. Commerce without morality.
5. Science without humanity.
6. Worship without sacrifice.
7. Politics without principle.

In the above list, if we pursue only the former goal, ignoring the latter counterpart, the result is much chaos and anarchy in society. Science is a tool to measure and create new things and therefore is helpful in giving us a good life. But the internal counterpart has human values in the form of belief, and traditional faith can help us to become the type of person that will produce the end, whether it is warlike or peaceful. Human values and science are both necessary to achieve the ultimate goals of happiness,

prosperity, and peace. The harmony between these two means is imperative.

The 19th and 20th centuries are the age of the first and second industrial revolutions which brought about dynamic changes that occurred in the world at large. However, if we look at the concerns conveyed by Victorian era poets, we find that human relations were becoming strained and the working conditions of the poor becoming worse during this era. Scientific progress led to population growth, and one consequence was greater unemployment rates.¹⁰ Human values were in decline while science was rapidly progressing, looking like a savior. If society really believed that science and technology are all that is necessary to bring happiness, prosperity, and peace, why would we need to set up humanitarian service institutions and world organizations, or even need nation states?

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When the means become corrupt, the ends also become corrupt. Means and ends go hand in hand, i.e., the path of humanism as ultimate goal should be trod by humanistic methods. Eastern spirituality teaches that the middle path is important to keep the connection between the two. We have the civilization we live in today largely because of theism. We can't simply rule this connection out. Mahatma Gandhi¹¹ and Martin Luther King¹² specifically spoke about the connection between means and ends, but yet we, as a society, fail to understand the connection between them. The reason Gandhi and King advocated nonviolence to be used as a tool to achieve freedom was because they knew that if they used wrong or immoral acts their cause would turn corrupt.

THE VALUE OF NONKILLING

The foremost value that needs to be embedded in all humans is the value of nonkilling. Glenn D. Paige developed this concept. He envisioned a nonkilling society as "a society from local to global where there exists no killings, where there are no threats to kill, no weapons designed to kill, and no justification for using them."¹³ We understand the right to life as

being the right not to be killed, but also as everyone's responsibility not to kill. The right to life is not, and should not be, limited to physical security alone. Human lives are nourished through physical as well as emotional securities. A society that allows any form of discrimination such as that based on gender, religion, race, caste, or class can be accused of not providing emotional securities and thereby poses a threat to the life of the marginalized section of the society. What Pinker has written in his book is mostly about the physical securities (GDP, poverty status, sex ratio) which we also consider as an important aspect in protecting human lives, but that alone is not sufficient to bring about enlightenment.

Paige raised the question of the feasibility of a nonkilling society. The question was consistently and traditionally answered in the negative by political scientists across the globe on the basis of three arguments: first, humans are killers by nature, second, competition for scarce resources makes people kill, and third, the possibility of rape requires men to be ready to kill other men in order to defend related females.¹⁴ Paige also emphasized that the traditional political thoughts of both west and east that have supported lethality and violence to maintain the integrity of the state and security of citizens.

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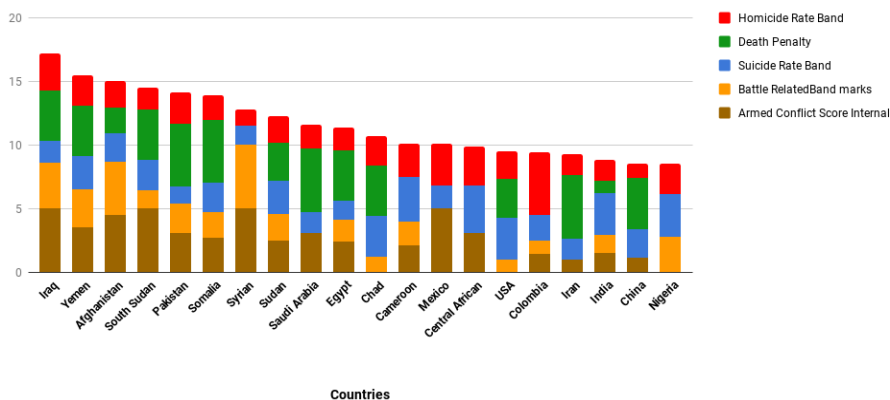
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In order to foster a nonkilling society, it is imperative to realize that peace needs to be cultivated and nurtured in the human mind as was stated in the Seville statement that "human culture gives us the ability to shape and change our nature from one generation to another."¹⁵ So, by evolving our culture we have a greater chance of turning human minds toward nonkilling and evolving into a nonkilling society.

Human nature is not fixed. It is neither as pessimistic as presumed by Hobbes,¹⁶ nor is it as extremely optimistic as perceived by the anarchists.¹⁷ Human nature not only varies from person to person but also varies according to time, place, and cultural understandings. Politically or socially unstable countries face more killings than those that have cultural values stabilized. The Global Nonkilling Index¹⁸ (GNI) shows how societies rank with respect to nonkilling. The chart of the GNI below shows that the top

20 nations that experience most of the killings in the world are politically violent in the sense that either there is a war situation or high death penalty.

Top 20 Nations With High Killing Score- 2015



Countries affected by high homicide and suicide are Colombia and India respectively. Despite great economic development in USA and China, the alarmingly high death penalty rate reflects some form of political or social instability.

That humans are not killers by nature has been proven by scientists¹⁹ yet humans have pursued killing in the past primarily because their focus was always on the short-term goals such as taking resources and power and, if in this pursuit human lives were being lost, it was not considered a significant matter. Now, with the advancements in science and technology, the threat, efficiency, and the pace of killing has drastically multiplied. Whether killing is an innate human quality or an acquired quality is not the primary question. The main question is, can we stop it?

Violence and killings, whether intrinsic or extrinsic, were once considered as a necessary evil to eliminate those who were perceived to be undesirable for civilizational progress.

Even if unwittingly, the ideas of war, violence, and killing portrayed by mythology, history, culture, society, cinema, and the media create a psychological environment and condition, causing humans to become more violent or to accept more violence. For instance, the psychological and cultural environments in countries before World War I and World War

It were conducive for warfare and justified support for the wars to take place. There were group and state politics at world level where a suspicion of others and a lack of transparency fostered an environment of fear and blame that resulted in war. Fear was created and nurtured by means of mythology, history, culture, society, media, and cinema so as to justify and perpetuate war.

It is, therefore, important to observe the kind of emotions being promoted by these social and cultural institutions, for it is these emotions upon which the societal peace and harmony depends. Scholars argue that nonviolence is innate²⁰ however; anger and fear are instinctual human emotions that have evolved for survival.

There are many factors that can instigate anger and fear. But, more significant is how humans respond to these factors. Some might lash out to a threat instinctively with violence, while others may seek more constructive and non-violent ways to resolve a threat.

There are many factors that can instigate such emotions as anger and fear. But, more significant is how humans respond to these factors. Responses are not uniform in all humans. They vary according to person and circumstances. Some might lash out to a threat instinctively with violence, while others may control their reaction and seek more constructive and non-violent ways to resolve a threat. This nonviolence cannot be called innate,

as it is the psycho-sociological conditioning shaped in ones upbringing and reinforced in culture that affects our behavior and destiny as social beings. More often than not, premeditated killings are based on logic and not by emotions. While anger is an emotion, compassion is also an emotion, and it is needed to temper logic. Righteousness, honor, retaliation, and justice are all terms that use logic to convince people with a reason to justify killing. However, compassion for all humans and seeing others from a perspective that transcends our own instincts can provide us with reasons not to justify killing.

LEARNING AND TEACHING NONKILLING

The important questions are: Can “nonkilling” be taught? Can it be learned?

We would like to argue that in fact nonkilling, nonviolence, peace, happiness and other such values are and have been taught in the religious scriptures and teachings of various communities. But with time the focus of religious communities shifted from these values to rituals and dogmas that justify institutional power. In India, the Hindu religion values of nonkilling and nonviolence are found everywhere. The overall teaching of *Mahabharata*²¹ is *Ahimsa Parmo Dharma* (*Mahabharata*, 12.257.6): “Nonviolence is the supreme religion.”²² The *Smritis*²³

and *Puranas*,²⁴ explained by Pradeep Dhakal were written with the aim to evoke religious devotion, but the mis-interpretation can turn the emotion of devotion into a justification for animal sacrifices and sometimes even human sacrifices. In opposition to this many reform movements among the Hindus arose to discourage the cruelty and violence of animal sacrifice. The strongest was written in the *Upanishads*.²⁵ Other movements were the *Arya Samaj*,²⁶

Brahmo Samaj,²⁷ that likewise gave birth to the vision of nonkilling, non-violence, and peace in the modern era. These examples show that it is not right to just say that religion has always been a hurdle to human progress.

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The Role of Mythology and Culture

Mythology is a source of inspiration for most of the people throughout the world. Mythology has been described as traditionally shaped stories that concern gods, kings, and heroes.²⁸ But the purpose with which mythologies are written can be defeated by our perceptions and interpretations that have the power to change the whole idea being conveyed to us. For example, we cite from Indian mythology, as the *Mahabharata* was written with the purpose to show how emotions, when manipulated by ego, greed, and jealousy, can turn so dangerous that they can make humans devoid of all their normal senses, and that when people take actions in such a state of mind, they cause more human errors at the cost of human dignity and

life. When this error is not realized and people, instead of being apologetic, people justify these emotions, death and destruction is bound to occur. But rather than focussing on the results of such actions, people often focus on the actions of the characters in the myth and justify them, bringing about the devastation and war the *Mahabharata* was written to prevent. People focus on the skills and technology of war and on the valor of the characters in the stories and miss the suppression of the ego, greed, and jealousy that leads to death and devastation. A reference to *Mahabharata* can be made where Lord Sri Krishna said to Arjuna (*Bhagvad Gita* iv; 8) that “He incarnates in every age to restore Dharma by resetting all negative forces or having triumph over them.”²⁹ In our view, resetting the negative forces or having triumph over them implies changing the world order so as to ensure peace and justice. But why should we wait for someone else to do that when we also possess the same kind of power?

From a mythological standpoint for most Hindus, Lord Buddha is considered the next incarnate of Krishna, who is known to have professed and practiced nonviolence and nonkilling. But here we focus on nonkilling primarily because it is comparatively measurable. Also, if nonkilling is taken out from the definition of nonviolence, then there is nothing substantial left in the philosophy. How can there be peace and nonviolence when there is no check and control on killings?

In Greek mythology,³⁰ the Iliad and the Odyssey also portray the wrath of wars. The bloodshed wars caused and the gloominess that prevailed as a consequence of them have been well depicted. An important feature common to these mythologies is that they all worshiped nature and cosmic forces by personifying them as certain gods. Nature nurtures creation, but when that creation endangers nature itself, then nature also turns destructive, which is described as the wrath of gods manifested through natural disasters like floods, cyclones, and earthquakes.

Cultures have their base in mythologies, in fact, mythologies are said to have played a key role in civilization and cultural movements throughout history.³¹ Buddhism was developed in response to the corruption and rigidities that had entered into Hinduism and that were undermining human life. Nonkilling was one of the moral doctrines in Buddhist ethics.³² Later, Swami Vivekananda became instrumental for a social and cultural awakening in India. By reinterpreting the meaning of the *Bhagvad Gita*, *Vedas*, and

Upanishads, he revived the Indian spirit which had been suppressed by the prolonged foreign invasions and occupation by foreign rulers. Vivekananda's interpretation revolved around human life, dignity, peace, and nonviolence.

Prominent cultural change in the West was brought by Martin Luther King, Jr.³³ who, by means of reinterpreting the Bible, advocated the idea of liberty, freedom, and equality and connected these principles with peaceful means. He appealed to the people through the scriptures of the Bible and not through political constructs. This was the underlying reason of his popularity. People connect with the human elements in mythology and cultural teachings more easily than they do with political and legal constructs created by academicians and politicians.

The Role of History and Philosophy

A nonkilling society can be feasible only when we conceive it as based on the characteristics of nonkilling social-psychology. There are different ways that nonkilling can be taught, and we may discover better approaches to make nonkilling a core element in culture once we recognize it as an imperative for human development. Perceptions of the people can change through factual analysis and more advanced approaches to interpreting history, mythology, political philosophies, and culture so as to focus on respect and reverence for life as a universal practice.

Adolf Antony wrote *Peace: A World History*³⁴ with the purpose of describing the history of the world with the perspective of the practice of peace. He does not ignore the periods of turmoil in either Indian history, Roman history, Japanese history, Greek history or Chinese history, but rather tries to explore the periods of peace in each of these civilizations in comparison to the intervening periods of war. In his study, he finds that the periods of peace in each of these civilizations was much longer than the brief periods of war. Thus, he believes that the idea that primitive humans were more prone to wars and killings would be a wrong notion.

However, since war and killings have been the prominent themes and often justified in history, and political philosophies, all kinds of people have accepted its importance and inevitability. Stories of the Russian revolution (1917), the French revolution (1789-1799), and the Indian struggle for freedom (1857) all emphasize the high purposes of achieving freedom,

equality, and liberty as worth the price of killing. The nonkilling periods of human history in *Peace: A World History* do not find much space in our school syllabi compared to the periods of wars that have been emphasized. Europe in the early Middle Ages (8th- 9th century) witnessed the rise of the idea of peace as political harmony, and the Church spearheaded important movements to spread peace.³⁵ In India, at the same time, around the 7th century, a new movement appeared known as the *Bhakti*³⁶ movement that later spread to South Asia. It sought to elevate the people by evolving their consciousness. Novetzke stated that the “*bhakti* movement entered into the history of India through the social world of caste, labour, media,

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market outside home and the heart of an individual.”³⁷ This means that the peaceful movements were prevalent in all spheres of life, despite India’s history teachers emphasizing the brutal violence of Turko-Afghan invasions in the 11th century.

The political philosophies of Aristotle, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Machiavelli, and other major philosophers are taught with an emphasis on the ideas of liberty, justice, natural rights, and power, while downplaying protection and promotion of human life. Political economy is popularly explained only through the myopic perspectives of communism and capitalism, both of which sacrifice universal reverence for human life and happiness. Philosophical works related to spiritual emancipation and consciousness evolution that can be found in the works by Rabindranath Tagore,³⁸ Swami Vivekananda,³⁹ Immanuel Kant,⁴⁰ and others reveals that philosophy related to human mind and human life had been done quite extensively. In more recent times, other studies that sought to examine the role of emotions in conflicts have come to surface.⁴¹ Conflicts have their roots in emotions, often disconnected from reason and, when philosophies dispassionately discuss them, they can be put into a nonviolent framework.

The Role of Media and Journalism

The media and journalism also have a great impact on human thought, for what they see and report gets imprinted on the minds of readers and viewers. Movies, video games, and news that glorifies violence can especially affect the youth who are forming their adult consciousness. If violence can be learned this way, why can't nonviolence be propagated through the same means? For such a conducive environment to evolve, media would have to promote creativity over lethality.

A number of studies have linked violent video games to the increase of youth violence. In fact, youth violence is a leading cause of injury and death for young people aged 15 to 24 years in the US.⁴² Researchers have found that "first person killing video game playing is associated with increased risk for violent behavior, but not all the time."⁴³ The 1998 National Television Violence Study found that while 61 percent of US television programming contained violence, only 4 percent had anti-violence themes."⁴⁴ When news and fiction is served to the people that feed only violent imageries, it tends to produce a negative impact on viewer's minds. Just like consumption of liquor and tobacco affects health, exposure to violent media affects the mind gradually.

Literary works, art works, audio-visual themes, and productions, in the print and digital media, can have a the socio-psychological impact on collective human consciousness that promotes nonkilling.

ADVOCATING AFFIRMATIVE NONKILLING

An idea of affirmative nonkilling has been put forward that is positive and structural in nature.⁴⁵ It can be developed through "promoting education, learning, and advocacy against killing."⁴⁶ Literary works, art works, audio-visual themes, and productions in the print and digital media, can have the socio-psychological impact on collective human consciousness that promotes nonkilling. Some universities that have devoted themselves to nonkilling approaches, including the Gandhigram Rural University in Tamil Nadu, The Albert Einstein Group of Cambridge, Massachusetts, the Center

for Nonviolence through the Arts, Ahmedabad, Amnesty International, Greenpeace and many other social organizations operate explicitly on non-killing principles.⁴⁷ However, these efforts are not yet adequate to make the concept of nonkilling commonplace and the instances of killing continue to prevail in the society in different forms.

In order to make affirmative nonkilling more effective, core human values are needed to be cultivated in the socialization of people right from their infancy. Schools and colleges are primary factors of psycho-sociological development and what they teach has a wide impact on socialization. Rather than simply promoting value relativism and human rights, they would contribute to human life and well-being by affirmatively promoting nonkilling and respect for life. Other social institutions like print media and electronic media also influence values developed by youth. Government, which has

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a role of preventing harm to people, should find ways to check the spread of violence in culture. Freedom of speech and other fundamental rights cannot be considered good when the the dignity and rights of others is violated.

Our education systems today focus on human rights, but fail to teach about how the aspects of communication, interrelationship, dignity, and emotions play a vital role in every person's life. Teachers tend

to blame dictators for creating violence and oppression in the society, but when one digs deeper into their lives, it is found that the dictators like Lenin,⁴⁸ Hitler,⁴⁹ and Mao,⁵⁰ did not grow up in an environment conducive to nonkilling and often suppressed their own feelings of humanity while acting with cruelty. To understand the practice of affirmative nonkilling, we need to understand motives for such carnage that existed in the past, and why many people still accept such practices today. Then we can successfully advocate and teach affirmative nonkilling in schools.

NO ENLIGHTENMENT YET

We began this article by looking at the scientific worldview promoted in Steven Pinker's book *Enlightenment Now*. Pinker wrote,

Occasionally, as on September 11, 2001, a team of clever and disciplined terrorists get lucky, but most successful plots are low tech attacks on target rich gatherings and kill very few people. Indeed, I venture that the proportion of brilliant terrorists in a population is even smaller than the proportion of terrorists multiplied by the proportion of brilliant people.⁵¹

We cannot treat human lives just as numbers. Even if only a small portion of human life suffers from terrorism it is too much when nonkilling is affirmed as a universal value. Statistics can help us put reality into perspective, and show us progress towards human goals, but they do not establish our goals and values. Those come to us through our culture and socialization. In the past this came through mythology and scripture and today modern media and educational institutions shape cultural consciousness. It is not full enlightenment to simply know the statistics.

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Most of the political ideologies such as capitalism, communism, existentialism, and utilitarianism are built on the principle that ends are justified by means, despite the differences between them. But, using violence and killing to reach these ends results in the next dissatisfied group using violence. So, like after the French Revolution, those who used violence to achieve their end were, in turn, beheaded by the next group that wanted power. The philosophies of Gandhi and King teach the opposite and do not isolate ends and means while fighting for any goal. This is what makes their understanding of Enlightenment more complete. In the words of Rabindranath Tagore:

an education system that addresses the heart of the individuals rather than the mind is more essential for better development of the civilization.⁵²

Based on our literature review, we feel that an educational revolution is needed. The Enlightenment of the scientific revolution is not full enlightenment. Science and technology have contributed by bringing revolution in their area, but they also contributed to massive killing in wars between nation-states. Enlightenment now should bring about a revolution in values. It is right to abandon old values that justified violence as a means to an end and we should not eject the universal human values like nonkilling promoted by religions in earlier civilizations. Science can help us reframe these values in 21st century culture. And, especially our educational system can be revamped to include human values like nonkilling so that violence, suicide, and all other forms of killing reduced.

In Canada, a bill to establish a Department of Peace that would look into the changes required in education to bring about affirmative nonkilling has been promoted by Bill Bhaneja.⁵³ This is something that could be adopted by every nation state. This bill would be instrumental in bringing dynamic changes in social consciousness through the educational system that would be a real “Enlightenment Now.”

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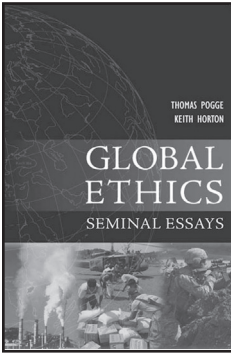


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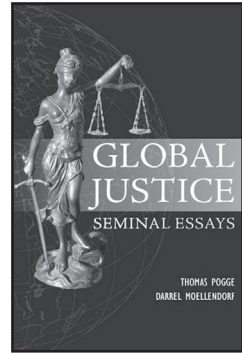
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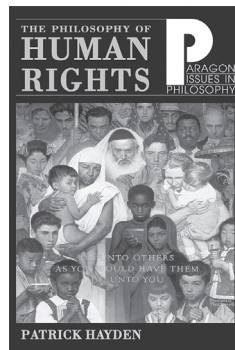
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