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Violence is Golden

By [Jack Donovan](#) On March 15, 2011 · [10 Comments](#)



A lot of people like to think they are “non-violent.” Generally, people claim to “abhor” the use of violence, and violence is viewed negatively by most folks. Many fail to differentiate between just and unjust violence. Some especially vain, self-righteous types like to think they have risen above the nasty, violent cultures of their ancestors. They say that “violence isn’t the answer.” They say that “violence doesn’t solve anything.”

They’re wrong. Every one of them relies on violence, every single day.

On election day, people from all walks of life line up to cast their ballots, and by doing so, they hope to influence *who* gets to wield the axe of authority. Those who want to end violence — as if that were possible or even desirable — often seek to disarm their fellow citizens. This does not actually end violence. It merely gives the state mob a monopoly on violence. This makes you “safer,” so long as you don’t piss off the boss.

All governments — left, right or other — are by their very nature coercive. They have to be.

Order demands violence.

A rule not ultimately backed by the threat of violence is merely a suggestion. States rely on laws enforced by men ready to do violence against lawbreakers. Every tax, every code and every licensing requirement demands an escalating progression of penalties that, in the end, must result in the forcible seizure of property or imprisonment by armed men prepared to do violence in the event of resistance or non-compliance. Every time a soccer mom stands up and demands harsher penalties for drunk driving, or selling cigarettes to minors, or owning a pit bull, or not recycling, she is petitioning the state to use *force* to impose her will. She is no longer asking nicely. The viability of every family law, gun law, zoning law, traffic law, immigration law, import law, export law and financial regulation depends on both the willingness and wherewithal of the group to exact order by force.

When an environmentalist demands that we “save the whales,” he or she is in effect making the argument that saving the whales is so important that it is worth doing harm to humans who harm whales. The peaceful environmentalist is petitioning the leviathan to authorize the use of violence in the interest of protecting leviathans. If state leaders were to agree and express that it was, indeed, important to “save the whales,” but then decline to penalize those who bring harm to whales, or decline to enforce those penalties under threat of violent police or military action, the expressed sentiment would be a meaningless gesture. Those who wanted to bring harm to whales would feel free to do so, as it is said, with impunity — without punishment.

Without action, words are just words. Without violence, laws are just words.

Violence isn't the only answer, but it is the final answer.

One can make moral arguments and ethical arguments and appeals to reason, emotion, aesthetics, and compassion. People are certainly moved by these arguments, and when sufficiently persuaded — providing of course that they are not excessively inconvenienced — people often choose to moderate or change their behaviors.

However, the willful submission of many inevitably creates a vulnerability waiting to be exploited by any one person who shrugs off social and ethical norms. If every man lays down his arms and refuses to pick them up, the first man to pick them up can do whatever he wants. Peace can only be maintained without violence so long as everyone sticks to the bargain, and to maintain peace every single person in every successive generation — even after war is long forgotten — must continue to agree to remain peaceful. Forever and ever. No delinquent or upstart may ever ask, “*Or Else What?*,” because in a truly non-violent society, the best available answer is “Or else we won't think you're a very nice person and we're not going to share with you.” Our troublemaker is free to reply, “I don't care. I'll *take* what I want.”

Violence is the final answer to the question, “*Or else what?*”

Violence is the gold standard, the reserve that guarantees order. In actuality, it is better than a gold standard, because violence has universal value. Violence transcends the quirks of philosophy, religion, technology and culture. People say that music is a universal language, but a punch in the face hurts the same no matter what language you speak or what kind of music you prefer. If you are trapped in a room with me and I grab a pipe and gesture to strike you with it, no matter who you are, your monkey brain will immediately understand “*or else what.*” And thereby, a certain order is achieved.



The practical understanding of violence is as basic to human life and human order as is the idea that fire is hot. You can use it, but you must respect it. You can act against it, and you can sometimes control it, but you can't just wish it away. Like wildfire, sometimes it is overwhelming and you won't know it is coming until it is too late. Sometimes it is bigger than you. Ask the Cherokee, the Inca, the Romanovs, the Jews, the Confederates, the barbarians and the Romans. They all know "*Or else what.*"

The basic acknowledgement that order demands violence is not a revelation, but to some it may seem like one. The very notion may make some people apoplectic, and some will furiously attempt to dispute it with all sorts of convoluted and hypothetical arguments, because it doesn't sound very "nice." But something doesn't need to be "nice" in order for it to be true. Reality doesn't bend over to accommodate fantasy or sentimentality.

Our complex society relies on proxy violence to the extent that many average people in the private sector can wander through life without really having to understand or think deeply about violence, because we are removed from it. We can afford to perceive it as a distant, abstract problem to be solved through high-minded strategy and social programming. When violence comes knocking, we simply make a call, and the police come to "stop" the violence. Few civilians really take the time to think that what we are essentially doing is paying an armed band protection money to come and do orderly violence on our behalf. When those who would do violence to us are taken peacefully, most of us don't really make the connection, we don't even *assert to ourselves* that the reason a perpetrator allows himself to be arrested is because of the gun the officer's hip or the implicit understanding that he will eventually be hunted down by more officers who have the authority to kill him if his is deemed a threat. That is, if he is deemed a threat to *order*.

There are something like two and a half million people incarcerated in the United States. Over ninety percent of them are men. Most of them did not turn themselves in. Most of them don't try to escape at night because there is someone in a guard tower ready to shoot them. Many are "non-violent" offenders. Soccer moms, accountants, celebrity activists and free range vegans all send in their tax dollars, and by proxy spend billions and billions to feed an armed government that maintains order through violence.

It is when our *ordered violence* gives way to *disordered violence*, as in the aftermath of a natural disaster, that we are forced to see how much we rely on those who maintain order through violence. People loot because they can, and kill because they think they'll get away with it. Dealing with violence and finding violent men who will protect you from other violent men suddenly becomes a real and pressing concern.

A pal once told me a story about an incident recounted by a family friend who was a cop, and I think it gets the point across. A few teenagers were at the mall hanging out, outside a bookstore. They were goofing around and talking with some cops who were hanging around. The cop was a relatively big guy, not someone who you would want to mess around with. One of the kids told the cop that he didn't see why society needed police.

The cop leaned over and said to the spindly kid, "do you have any doubt in your mind about whether or not I could break your arms and take that book away from you if I felt like it?"

The teenager, obviously shaken by the brutality of the statement, said, "No."

"That's why you need cops, kid."

George Orwell wrote in his "[Notes on Nationalism](#)" that, for the pacifist, the truth that, "Those who 'abjure' violence can only do so because others are committing violence on their behalf," is obvious but impossible to accept. Much unreason flows from the inability to accept our passive reliance on violence for protection. Escapist fantasies of the John Lennon "Imagine" variety corrupt our ability to see the world as it is, and be honest with ourselves about the naturalness of violence to the human animal. There is no evidence to support the idea that man is an inherently peaceful creature. There is substantial evidence to support the notion that violence has always been a part of human life. [Every day, archeologists unearth another primitive skull with damage from weapons or blunt force trauma.](#) The [very first legal codes were shockingly grisly](#). If we feel less threatened today, if we feel as though we live in a non-violent society, it is only because we have ceded so much power over our daily lives to the state. Some call this reason, but we might just as well call it laziness. A dangerous laziness, it would seem, given how little most people say they trust politicians.

Violence doesn't come from movies or video games or music. Violence comes from people. It's about time people woke up from their 1960s haze and started being honest about violence again. People are violent, and that's OK. You can't legislate it away or talk your way around it. Based on the available evidence, there's no reason to believe that world peace will ever be achieved, or that violence can ever be "stopped."

It's time to quit worrying and learn to love the battle axe. History teaches us that if we don't, someone else will.

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