

# NONVIOLENT THEORY ON COMMUNICATION: THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORIZING A NONVIOLENT RHETORIC

*by Ellen W. Gorsevski*

The interrelationship between nonviolence and rhetoric is examined. While we have studied the world of adversarial relationships, conflict, and difference of belief, rhetorical critics have not done as much to understand the practices of seeking mutual identification, cooperation, and learning how to live with diversity and adversity. Scholars and theorists of nonviolence (and peace and conflict studies) maintain that human beings can reach mutual understanding peacefully, through a process of nonviolent conversion that is accomplished through a wide range of linguistic and symbolic acts. Nonviolent theory shows rhetoricians that language and culture—our ways of creating and perpetuating our reality—can impose minimal aggression while maximizing the potential for peacemaking. Finally, the essay presents practical applications for a better understanding of the connection between rhetorical theory and nonviolence.

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*Let us be clear regarding the language we use and the thoughts we nurture.  
For what is language but the expression of thought? Let your thought be  
accurate and truthful, and you will hasten the advent of swaraj even if the  
whole world is against you.*

—Mohandas Gandhi

The dismantling of Irish Republican Army weapons units; the Middle East peace process inching forward; the commitment of scores of countries around the world to ban the use of land mines; the publication of findings of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission: what is the common denominator of all of these peace-oriented developments on the forefront of international politics? Tough negotiations, extended inquiries, complex, multiparty agreements, media pronouncements, yes, all of these things figure in—but there is something more. There is an unacknowledged and hidden star in all of these events. Who or what is this star? As we shall see in the following discussion, it is nonviolent rhetoric. Why does nonviolence as a

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concept and theory remain behind the scenes? In the analysis that follows, we will look at reasons why theories of nonviolence relate firmly to rhetoric. We will also examine some of the ways that theories of rhetoric largely ignore theories of nonviolence, positing that this gap exists to the detriment of rhetorical theory.<sup>1</sup>

Language, persuasion, and the symbols that constitute the realm of rhetoric have long been regarded as the repository of our worldly facades. From the way we relate to people on an interpersonal basis to the way we perceive the public speeches of our politicians, we are trained to be wary, cynical, disbelievers. But this is just one side of the story. There exist and have always existed people who, like Mohandas K. Gandhi or Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., have risked their lives to tell the truth, to use language and rhetoric for best interests of humankind. But the legacies of such people (and of historical figures such as Jesus or Socrates) have been skewed to fit an individualistic, facade-oriented view of language and rhetoric.<sup>2</sup>

In our contemporary culture, rhetoric is frequently synonymous with hollow, empty discourse. In scholarly treatises and journals, rhetoric is reduced to the study of symbols, tropes, or styles, or is associated with twisting language to perpetuate unjust power over people. All the power for social change and glory of human potential found in King's rhetoric is reduced to superficial labels, such as "Evangelical style." There is, however, another side to rhetoric that can be recuperated through an understanding of nonviolence in theory and practice.<sup>3</sup> Turning to the lesser-known texts of nonviolent theorists, we can dispel the fog of misperceptions and skepticism and recover a sense that communication can be used both idealistically and practically. From a nonviolent perspective, there is room for a renewed sense that rhetoric can be a force for hope and active social change; rhetoric can be a means to managing conflict without, or at least with minimal, violence.

In Thomas Merton's brilliant introductory essay, "Gandhi and the One-Eyed Giant," a preface to *Gandhi on Non-Violence*, Merton draws a clear boundary around the interrelationship between nonviolent action and persuasion. Merton discusses the classical notions of selfless political action, noting the centrality of words in creating a space for social change. "It is in the public and political realm that [one] shares *words* and deeds, thus contributing [one's] share of action and thought to the fabric of human affairs," Merton writes. "Now, the public and political realm is that where issues are decided in a way worthy of free [people]: *by persuasion and words, not by violence.*"<sup>4</sup> If we look to Aristotle's definition of rhetoric as a "faculty of observing [or discovering] in any given case [all] the available means of persuasion,"<sup>5</sup> or if we look to Kenneth Burke's theories of rhetoric, in which

humans are symbol using and abusing beings—beings who are characterized by traits such as cooperation, identification, and persuasion—we can recognize instantly that rhetoric figures into Merton’s definition of the ideal nonviolent political actor and action. For Merton, an agent of nonviolent change is someone who opts to use “persuasion and words” rather than “violence” to accomplish goals in society.

Still, it bears asking, can persuasion and motivated words as rhetoric escape the negative connotations that rhetoric deserves? An obvious example would be to acknowledge that Hitler’s rhetoric was part of a systematic program of violence. With regard to land mines, what are we to make of the military rhetoric that blandly calls them “antipersonnel devices”? Such rhetoric unethically obscures the violent reality of explosives that kill and maim thousands of innocent civilians (many of whom are children) every year all over the world. In contrast, we have the likes of popular figures such as the Dalai Lama or Thich Nhat Hanh, best-selling writers and jet-setting lecturers, whose nonviolent rhetoric advises us to incorporate nonviolent modes of behavior into our everyday lives in order to further world peace. What criteria enable us to distinguish rhetoric that aids violence from rhetoric that aids nonviolence? The question is vexing because we lack clear criteria for evaluating rhetoric in terms of nonviolence and an orientation toward peacemaking.

Much has been written in the field of rhetoric about violence, but precious little has been written about rhetoric vis à vis nonviolence. Indeed, rhetorical scholars such as Stephen Browne note that rhetoric itself has long been synonymous with brute violence.<sup>6</sup> The opposition of violence and nonviolence is, admittedly, an imperfect pairing.<sup>7</sup> Since this is, however, only one of a handful of pieces of extant research in which rhetorical theory has ever been examined in light of nonviolent theory and, to some extent, vice versa, this odd couple may nonetheless serve as a good place to start an inquiry that troubles our conventional ways of understanding rhetoric.<sup>8</sup> Even if we were to oppose rhetorics of violence to rhetorics of peace, the comparison remains unsatisfactory. All such comparisons are inherently lopsided, because only a tiny fraction of rhetorical theory is written on peace rhetoric whereas vast volumes of writing have been devoted to the topic of war rhetoric. Let us begin, then, to tip the scales, ever so slightly, back in the other direction—in the direction of peace and nonviolence.

The purpose of this essay is to investigate what scholars, activists, and thinkers in the social sciences have, under the rubric of nonviolent theory and action, said about language, communication, persuasion, symbolic action—in short, about rhetoric. I make no claims to furthering theory with grand and bold strokes. My aim is simply to open up a fruitful discussion that may,

indeed, eventually lead to such theoretical advances. The main point of this essay is to survey the literature and examine what key theorists of nonviolence in particular, but also scholars of rhetorical theory, have to say about rhetoric as a form of communication and as evidence of a fundamentally nonviolent humanity.

Clearly, an important component of nonviolent theory and activism, of the *satyagraha* (roughly translated as soul-force, Truth-force, and love-force) of Gandhi's practice, is persuasion. Thus the focus here will be the interrelationship between nonviolence and rhetoric. First, we will briefly look at what forms nonviolent persuasion takes. Next, we will look at the peace studies and nonviolent theorists' views on how and why persuasion, or rhetoric, can be nonviolent and peaceful when such rhetoric is performed in the spirit and context of true nonviolent action. Third, we will look at ways that a better understanding of the connection between rhetorical theory and the nonviolence and peace theories can be put to practical applications.

#### FORMS OF NONVIOLENT RHETORIC

In her important book, *Conquest of Violence: The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict*, Joan Bondurant cites as a fundamental rule of *satyagraha* in action the "propagation of the objectives. . . . Propaganda must be made an integral part of the movement. Education of the opponent, the public, and participants must continue apace."<sup>9</sup> Normally one might take issue with the use of propaganda as a coercive or violent form of persuasion, yet Bondurant is adamant that this form of persuasion is for the "education of the opponent, the public, and participants." The rhetorical intent of nonviolent propaganda is to promote awareness and understanding of the issues at hand, the problems that the activists have with the given opponent, and the strategies that the nonviolent activists will undertake to overturn the perceived injustices. In this context, propaganda can be seen as synonymous with softer terms, such as public relations, and even with classical notion of *agon* (debate in the public sphere), or critical thinking. Likewise, Rex Ambler states that "the opponent has to be helped to *read* our actions by generous *explanation* and by the *general tone* of the campaign."<sup>10</sup> Thus the nonviolent text as written, spoken, or enacted, is reflexive; the opponent, as audience, is also a *participant*, and must be instructed as to how to engage; the opponent must be trained, in a sense, to read the text, the discourse, or the actions as *rhetoric*.

A fine example of such a "propaganda" text, which trains its audience in the principles of love, peace, and nonviolence, is Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Letter from a Birmingham Jail." Addressing the misconceptions and

misgivings that his adversaries hold regarding the progress of the civil rights movement, King educates them and the public about the strategies of nonviolent action (which often seem mysterious to the uninitiated). King boldly states his objectives: "I am in Birmingham because injustice is here." King clears the smoke away from the nonviolent tactics, informing his detractors, who refused to remove symbols and laws perpetuating racism from the city, that "we had no alternative except to prepare for direct action, whereby we would present our very bodies as a means of laying our case before the conscience of the local and the national community."<sup>11</sup> King draws up ethics and morals firmly on his side, invoking the democratic ideal of "human rights" while reminding his opponents that even the "Supreme Court's decision of 1954 outlawing segregation" has yet to have been fulfilled. Thus, through truth, through myriad examples of the courage of nonviolent activists in the face of intimidation and suffering, King reveals the injustices of those who opposed him, especially the members of the clergy whom he specifically addresses. In short, King's rhetoric trains and educates his audience how to read anew the events of recent history; it is a rhetorical lesson in nonviolence. It is propaganda in a campaign of nonviolence that exudes love and a fervent desire for mutual understanding.

Rhetoricians have, thus far, focused upon King's manifest stylistic elements; we have even trailed off into side discussions of whether or not, or how much, King plagiarized some of his messages of peace and love. These sidebars miss the point of nonviolence and rhetoric together. By focusing on such peripheral issues, we have diminished our ability to understand rhetoric and nonviolence as a cohesive whole. More than a masterpiece of style or superior argumentation, King's rhetoric in general, and this letter in particular, constitute the educational "propaganda" of Bondurant's nonviolent schema. Moreover, as we shall see, King's texts remain free from any of the pejorative connotations that the word "propaganda" normally carries in the context of rhetoric as supporting the ends of war and violence.

Written texts can provide powerful nonviolent rhetoric. As part of the "agitation" step in the *satyagraha* campaign, Bondurant cites "an active propaganda campaign together with such demonstrations as mass-meetings, parades, slogan-shouting."<sup>12</sup> Again, we see that this rhetoric is firmly contextualized in the nonviolent escalation of the conflict through public awareness and public relations gambits. In other instances, nonviolent activists are not the sole authors of the educational text written for the public. Cooperation with newspapers and other media figures importantly in educating the public about key issues of contention.<sup>13</sup> This method of joining with members of the media to foster an environment of critical thinking and debate is crucial to the success of

a nonviolent social movement. At the same time, relying upon the media to announce the message supports the notion that nonviolence requires certain preconditions for it to succeed. An open and relatively free media is one of those preconditions.

Recent examples of such a media-oriented form of agitation include the "Million Man March" and the "Million Woman March," which were covered by articles in major newspapers explaining the purposes of the marches to the public and quoting the speeches that were given at the culmination of the marches. Another kind of dramatic "text" is the symbolic act of marching peacefully under the watchful eye of the public and the authorities. This kind of symbolic action spurs media coverage, public policy debate, and, in the best of cases, legislation and other proactive social work to initiate positive changes redressing the grievances of those who are marching or enacting the other forms of nonviolent symbolic action.

Looking more closely at the various kinds of rhetoric that fall under Bondurant's general label of propaganda, we see that nonviolent action relies heavily upon *texts purveyed publicly*. Gene Sharp, one of the foremost scholars on nonviolent action today, lists these forms of nonviolent texts among "198 Methods of Nonviolent Action"<sup>14</sup> Sharp cites, for example, "formal statements," "communications with a wider audience," "group representations," "symbolic public acts," "processions," and "drama and music." Any rhetorical theorist would have to agree that these forms of nonviolent action all fall within the range of the rhetorical critic's research focus. Table 1 lists examples of each of the types of texts that lend themselves to nonviolent interpretation and rhetorical analysis.

From this representative selection of Sharp's examples of nonviolent action, we see that nonviolent theory and action are firmly planted in the realm of rhetoric. Rhetoricians tend to focus upon ways that humans use communication and persuasion to resist oppression, yet they routinely ignore the fact that nonviolent engagement in conflict is a *special mode of persuasion* with a distinct history of success. Critics are stuck in a rut of invoking social theories and theories of rhetoric that are heavily based in our understanding of violent representations of communication and human existence. When rhetoricians do examine nonviolent rhetorical acts, such as those of King, we may miss their meaning and foundation. Simply put, nonviolent action and rhetoric stems from a universal tradition and discourse of love that spans the globe and encompasses all major religious and philosophical traditions through time.

Much of rhetorical theory follows the skeptic's tradition and discourses, which tend to take the perspective of *que sera, sera*. In other words, our theory

is unduly influenced by the negative stereotype of humans as essentially aggressive and violent, à la Freud. Since people have always been at war, this reasoning goes, we always *will* be at war. Therefore, we may sometimes apply incommensurate or overly strict standards to measure the “logic” or “effectiveness” of a form of discourse that may operate on different planes of socially constructed reality. For instance, nonviolent rhetoric often operates on emotional, moral, or ethical levels of reasoning; indeed, it may, at times, exist beyond the bounds of traditional scientific conceptions of order and logic. We may dismiss nonviolence too hastily because nonviolence does not always fulfill the scientific requirement for perfect replicability in order to prove its success.

As science itself changes, however, so must our understanding of nonviolence. Harold Pepinsky believes that a nonviolent worldview may be more closely identified with formulations of chaos theory, which allow for, even call for, the “strange attractors” of unpredictable events,<sup>15</sup> as opposed to logical or

**TABLE 1**  
**Examples of Nonviolent Rhetoric**

Formal Statements	Public speeches; letters of opposition or support; declarations by organizations and institutions; signed public statements; declarations of indictment and intention; group or mass petitions.
Communications with a Wider Audience	Slogans, caricatures, and symbols; banners, posters, and displayed communications; leaflets, pamphlets, and books; newspapers and journals; records, radio, and television; skywriting and earthwriting.
Group Representations	Mock awards, group lobbying, picketing, mock elections.
Symbolic Public Acts	Displays of flags and symbolic colors; wearing of symbols; prayer and worship; delivering symbolic objects; protest disrobings; destruction of own property; symbolic lights; displays of portraits; paint as protest; new signs and names; symbolic sounds; symbolic reclamations; rude gestures.
Drama and Music	Humorous skits and pranks; performances of plays and music; singing.
Processions	Marches; parades; religious processions; pilgrimages; motorcades.

*Source:* Gene Sharp, “198 Methods of Nonviolent Action,” in *A Peace Reader: Essential Readings on World Order*, ed. Joseph Fahey and Richard Armstrong (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1972), 473–74.

rational strictures that our worldview, as descended from the Enlightenment, relies upon to judge texts and events. Pepinsky goes so far as to assert that "the fruit of our own peacemaking efforts lies beyond our power of empirical verification."<sup>16</sup> It is clear that rhetoric has traditionally been bound in tight strictures of logic and empiricism, starting from Aristotle himself, the originator of much of our tradition of rhetorical theory. As Pepinsky perceives, we need to acknowledge new perspectives that may not always fit our past methods of observing rhetorical situations.

Let us return to the examples with which we began this discussion. The peace processes in Northern Ireland or between the Israelis and Palestinians more closely resemble chaos theory. Two steps forward, one step back, to the side, or out altogether are moves that characterize the bumpy ride of these negotiations for peace settlements in highly volatile and historically violent regions of the world. Yet the operative peace and conflict theories that underpin the hard-hitting, complex negotiations have produced concrete results, which leave both the peoples and their leaders optimistic. At the same time, the worldview of the glum inevitability of human violence is challenged. The nonviolent rhetoric surrounding these events confirms that human beings, against the grain of the *que sera, sera* worldview, *will not* always be at war. At the forefront of all such talks is a propaganda of peace; the media receive hopeful statements and pronouncements from the participants of the negotiations; nonviolent rhetoric abounds. At the same time, the stratified process of communication in community becomes less ordered, and more fluid, like chaos theory.<sup>17</sup> In nonviolent theory, the rhetoric of a negotiator for peace can be seen as revealing a truth, the truth that the opponents with whom one is negotiating are just human beings like the rest of us. Rhetoric that obfuscates this fundamentally nonviolent perspective can, then, be seen to fall on the violent side of this crooked and imperfect conceptual divide between violence and nonviolence.

Gandhi believed that secrets were an evil in society. "Truth," he said, "never damages a cause that is just."<sup>18</sup> In this way, we see that negotiations that expose oppressions such as ethnocentrism, violent ultranationalism, or racism, sexism, and homophobia not only confirm our "community" as human beings but also expose the secrets of the social order and the violent structures that are perpetuated within that order. The recent media exposés on the murder of Matthew Shepard in Wyoming and the nationwide outpouring of support for his family and friends confront the squeamish with the so-called "ugly truth" that a portion of the public is homosexual; by exposing this "secret" and celebrating it, the media forces right-wing opponents of homosexuality to face this fact and come to grips with it. The fundamental rehumanization,



through rhetoric, of a “fag” or a “bloody IRA soldier” or a “murderous Israeli” into human beings who have lives, histories, families, is part of the process of love and nonviolence. In Kenneth Burke’s terms, it is rhetorical consubstantiation *par excellence*.

Moreover, the fact that negotiations for peace and concomitant long-term media coverage occur shows the patience and long view that characterize the nonviolent perspectivist’s will to change the situation gradually yet steadily, and to reject any justification of violence in the name of expediency. Expediency and efficiency are typical and universal modern measures of effectiveness and success. Yet the nonviolentist’s perspective is more open to taking a long-range approach to problem solving and conflict resolution. As Pepinsky observes, “peacemaking takes a long, long time.” Pepinsky aptly remarks that “those who respond to violence with compassion may—as in the story of the life of Christ—appear to open themselves to further victimization.”<sup>19</sup> For the modern rhetorical theorist who applies traditional rules of style, logic, or effectiveness to speeches and symbolic action, the vulnerability of the subject and the painstaking slowness of the process expressed in nonviolent rhetoric appear counterproductive and, at times, illogical. Certainly, too, whereas King’s rhetoric is often analyzed solely for its style and the critic all but ignores its nonviolent message, it is just as common to find, as in some criticism of the Dalai Lama’s rhetoric, that nonviolent rhetoric is sometimes disparaged for being unstylized and too plain. These critical problems are easily surmounted if we begin to take a longer, more patient view, if we start to apply *different* measures of effectiveness, and if we look beyond stylistic tropes or a lack of them. By looking at rhetoric from a fresh perspective, nonviolent rhetoric and, perhaps, rhetorical theory as a whole can be expanded, better understood, and appreciated anew.

In the first part of this discussion we have looked at some examples of nonviolent action and its attendant rhetoric. We have highlighted the differences between how traditional, theory-oriented rhetorical scholars have viewed such action and rhetoric, and how we might view it differently in light of nonviolent theory. Let us next investigate the possibility for defining rhetoric anew as a legitimate form of nonviolent action and communication.

#### RHETORIC AS TRUE NONVIOLENT ACTION

Now we will look at how and why persuasion is not necessarily violent, or even coercive, when it is performed in the context of true nonviolent action. We will briefly survey nonviolent literature for potential redefinitions of rhetoric that are made possible through taking a nonviolent perspective.

Therefore, let us first determine what, exactly, *is* “true nonviolent action.” There are no fast and simple definitions. There are, however, easily identifiable characteristics in what Lloyd Bitzer referred to as the “rhetorical situation”—a scenario of conflict in which the people involved experience an “exigency” that they feel they need to act upon.

The elements of nonviolence in conflict scenarios include careful planning (often aimed at creating a rhetorical situation), self-sacrifice, risk, courage, honesty, willpower or energy, and “suffering without retaliation.”<sup>20</sup> The ability to risk receiving—and sometimes to suffer—the blows of one’s opponents (whether literal or figurative) with no aim for revenge is what truly distinguishes nonviolence in action from violence in action. The Buddha is characterized by being “tolerant with the intolerant, mild with the violent” and by being one “who utters true speech.”<sup>21</sup> Likewise, in his essay, “Ahimsa, or the Way of Nonviolence,” Gandhi wrote:

Suffering is the law of human beings; war is the law of the jungle. But suffering is infinitely more powerful than the law of the jungle for converting the opponent and opening his ears, which otherwise are shut, to the voice of reason . . . if you want something really important to be done you must not merely satisfy the reason, you must move the heart also. The appeal of reason is more to the head but the penetration of the heart comes from suffering. It opens up the inner understanding in man. Suffering is the badge of the human race, not the sword.<sup>22</sup>

Gandhi’s insight that “you must move the heart also” hearkens back to Aristotle’s call to use *pathos*, or emotional appeals, to move the passions in order to effect persuasion. Nonviolent rhetoric actively seeks to draw upon the chaotic, disorderly, emotional side of human beings. The nonviolent actor seeks to broach conflict, even sometimes to escalate it, but with minimal violence to people on all sides of the argument. The goal is not to hurt anyone or to use self-sacrifice with abandon, but rather to *educate* people to come to terms, and to negotiate with better understanding and a renewed sense of commonality and humanity. This educated connection to one’s adversary and rehumanizing propaganda we saw in our earlier example of the rhetoric that is the essence of King’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.”

Importantly, for the rhetorical critic and student of nonviolent theory, *risk* is one of the defining criteria of rhetoric in argumentation.<sup>23</sup> Henry Johnstone, in his essay, “Some Reflections on Argumentation,” explains how a violence of a sort occurs in dysfunctional argumentation. He makes the connection between rhetoric and humanity, thus confirming the rehumanizing effect that

is a trait of nonviolent rhetoric. Johnstone writes that when two parties are arguing a point (or, as in the case of negotiations as part of a peace process), “the person with the totally closed mind cuts himself off from the human race” while, in contrast, “the person willing to run the risks involved in listening to the arguments of others is open-minded” and therefore “human.” Johnstone maintains that a “tension” exists in the more humane arguer. This tension features nonviolent and peace-minded attributes such as “tolerance, intellectual generosity, or respect.” Johnstone believes that “the risk a person takes by listening to an argument is that he may have to change himself. It is the self, not any specific belief or mode of conduct, that the arguer’s respondent wishes to maintain.” Rhetoric, then, can be fundamentally nonviolent because the change is self-initiated, self-driven, according to these standards for a fair argument. Persuasion is not coercion of another, per se, but rather a consciously self-initiated change of mind. So King’s letter from jail, or the negotiations for peace, are scenarios that involve *educating* and then causing a *self-changing* in one’s opponent. Above all, from this perspective, arguing, as it exists in rhetoric, is fundamentally nonviolent: “argumentation,” writes Johnstone, “is a device for avoiding the need to resort to violence.”<sup>24</sup> When the educational argument from one side fosters the ability of the arguer on the other side to initiate self-imposed, self-driven change, and to invite, through ethical means, the risks of such a change, rhetoric can be said to carry the characteristics of nonviolence.

Nonviolent rhetoric operates on the emotional level to remind the adversary of our universal humanity. Evoking very human emotions can be as useful in offsetting violence as it is to incurring it. Conversely, using logic and discourse devoid of emotion can entail violence since logic often involves arbitrary or superficial groupings and systematic thinking.<sup>25</sup> The use of a grouping mindset has been shown to promote “deindividuation” that can lead to aggressive behavior. In short, the logical move to grouping often necessitates dehumanization. Aggressiveness occurs “because dehumanization makes the universal norm against harming other human beings seem irrelevant. If Other is less than human, the norm does not apply.”<sup>26</sup> Thus nonviolent rhetoric aims to reactivate norms that Pepinsky, among other nonviolent theorists, believes are inherent in humans, norms which he places under the rubric of “responsiveness,” meaning “compassion” and “enduring relations of mutuality and respect.”<sup>27</sup> Nonviolent rhetoric rehumanizes through un-grouping groups and aggregating humans as a global whole. Nonviolent rhetoric focuses and thrives upon visions of harmony and unity.

Gene Sharp concentrates on the human tendency toward cooperation as the font of the rhetorical power of nonviolence. In his essay, “The Techniques

of Nonviolent Action," he defines the process as opposite from the efficiency-oriented schemas of violent engagement in conflict. Sharp states that "non-violent action is based on a different approach: to deny the enemy the human assistance and cooperation which are necessary if he is to exercise control over the population. It is thus based on a more fundamental and sophisticated view of political power." A crucial means to exerting noncooperation with one's adversary is rhetoric; noncooperation is achieved through communicative persuasion, ranging from "purely verbal dissent" to carrying out "humorous pranks."<sup>28</sup> These tactics, if conducted with a sense of understanding, are effective because of the very chaos they invite.

Sharp's research indicates that nonviolence, often through its element of surprise, can "counter . . . violence in such a way that [opponents] are thrown politically off balance in a kind of political *jiu-jitsu*." The purpose of this creative disorder "is to demonstrate that repression is incapable of cowering the populace, and to deprive the opponent of . . . support, thereby undermining his ability or will to continue with the repression."<sup>29</sup> For these goals to be achieved, communication must take place. For example, in the past South Africa was a communications crossroads for the world; American and European investors were continually reminded of its shameful apartheid system by calls for divestment from investors and other constituents. With the repressions and injustices of the apartheid regime continually splashed across news headlines, the old, structurally violent system could not hold. Nelson Mandela, once a "criminal" under apartheid, became, through an at least partially nonviolent process, the president of a newly nonracial nation. The release of the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), led by the famous nonviolent leader, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, is witness to the nonviolent spirit with which the country moved, however painfully and slowly, out of a period of violence. Even the TRC's last-minute concession to exclude its findings about the complicity of former president F. W. DeKlerk in human rights abuses is a nonviolent text, a speaking symbol. The censored text about DeKlerk exists in the form of a large, black square covering a page in the volume. That black square is a symbol of the hatred and violence that is past; it becomes, quite literally, a page in history. Even though it is shrouded in mystery, the reader knows the spot means complicity. Even without words, the truth is out. The reader is called on to forgive but never to forget; the reader is invited to move forward in the name of nonviolence, peace, and humanity. Truth, forgiveness, patiently forging ahead—this is the stuff of nonviolent rhetoric.

Meanwhile, the rhetoric of nonviolent movements that exist in more repressive, totalitarian states, such as Burma (Myanmar) or China, where

communications are closely monitored and limited by the authorities, is more easily suppressed. Nonviolent campaigns and rhetoric are more successful when certain supports are present, including freedom of the press and free speech. Here in the United States, too, as communication networks become increasingly centralized, freedom of information becomes curtailed.<sup>30</sup> At the same time, however, the chaos of technological advances can help spread nonviolent rhetoric. As developing nations move into computer-based networks of commerce and communications, and as advances in technology in industrialized nations improve every citizen's access to information, possibilities are appearing on the horizon for nonviolent action and rhetoric to transcend the structurally violent systems of repression that occur in places where political or economic constraints limit freedom of expression.

This brief overview shows us how rhetoric can be conceived of as a part of both nonviolent theory and action. We have looked at the ways that nonviolent rhetoric arises, several examples of the forms it takes, and the contextual requirements for nonviolent rhetoric to flourish. Next, we will examine what may, perhaps, be the greatest obstacle that prevents rhetorical theorists and other social critics from acknowledging and integrating nonviolent theory into our theoretical paradigms.

#### DEBUNKING THE PREVAILING RHETORIC OF "INNATE DEPRAVITY"

One reason why critics of nonviolence dismiss it is that they presume that human beings are basically violent animals, and that we mirror a vicious, harsh natural environment. In the nineteenth century, Leo Tolstoy began to debunk this view by calling human violence "the product of public opinion" rather than some natural state of being. Tolstoy argued that our "consciousness" was responsible for "the present order of society based on violence," and we could change our minds and thereby change society.<sup>31</sup> Tolstoy pointed to the structural violence of the wealthy and powerful stealing from the poor.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, he drew attention to the rhetoric that perpetuated the violence, the "sculpture . . . poetry . . . jubilees" that glamorize the myths that humans are unequal and violent. Tolstoy had reason to hope for social change because he saw that "public opinion condemns violence more and more." In revealing the power structures hidden in the roles of government, church, and military, Tolstoy shows us that rhetoric resides in roles that people play and the discourses they engage in. He envisioned the ultimate transcendence of the truth that violence arises from the interplay between and among people, their roles, and the unjust power structures they engage in through their

discourses. Tolstoy believed that "a time is coming, and will inevitably come, when all institutions based on violence will disappear because it has become obvious to everyone that they are useless, stupid, and even wrong."<sup>33</sup> Judging from the past two decades of world history, which feature nonviolent change in South Africa, the Philippines, and Eastern Europe, to name a few examples, one can only hope that Tolstoy's prophecy is coming to fruition.

Often, the government, the military, and other key institutions and systems thrive on a rhetoric of aggression. Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* recounts the many ways oppressive power is enacted through rhetoric. Foucault traces the existence of state and social power and its juridical, economic, scientific, and political ramifications from systems of punishment and social control in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries up to the present time. From the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries in particular, power in its disciplinary form shifted from public display to private and interpersonal modes. Disciplinary power was exerted and diffused through the institutions of the factories, schools, military, sanitariums, hospitals, and prisons, which resemble each other both architecturally and organizationally. By the very subtle nature of the organization of each of these into tableaux mapped out in grids, with people reduced to case studies that are recorded, tracked, and supervised, the options for resistance become gravely diminished. Foucault notes that this kind of organized control over "malicious minutiae" operates so as to stop any unregulated movement of people within the system.<sup>34</sup> In a disciplinary institution or society, people and power circulate in a more or less orderly fashion.

But cracks appear in this system of power when "compact groupings of individuals wander about the country in unpredictable ways." Foucault acknowledges that "counter-power" consists in "agitations, revolts, spontaneous organizations, coalitions—anything that may establish horizontal conjunctions." Thus we see the opportunity for nonviolent action and rhetoric to manifest itself. On the whole, though, he maintains that the result of institutions and their methods is the "normalizing" of the repressive forces of power. The process occurs through the intense "pressure to conform to the same model," through analysis, standardization and objectification of everything under the sun, especially human beings. According to Foucault, power disciplines and punishes us through its "visible" yet "unverifiable" presence.<sup>35</sup>

The final option for resistance exists in Foucault's ironic and paradoxical demand that "we must hear the distant roar of battle" in the very words and "discourses that are in themselves elements" of the "strategy" of much that exemplifies scientific discipline. He believes that discourses "produce" oppressive power;<sup>36</sup> therefore, perhaps, so too can some kind of alternative,

anti-institutional discourses create counter-power. I posit that nonviolent rhetoric represents precisely this sort of counter-power.

Ashley Montagu, an anthropologist, has noted the role that rhetoric has played in promoting the worldview that human beings are naturally “aggressive” and characterized by “innate depravity.” Montagu states that literature such as Darwin’s *The Origin of Species*, William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*, or even a seemingly innocuous stage play such as *West Side Story* operates so as to “supply [people] with an easy ‘explanation’” for the world’s ills.<sup>37</sup> Another way that rhetoric has been used to shape and perpetuate violent systems equally points the way for a rhetoric that can reform those same systems so they function nonviolently. Christine Sylvester, a political scientist, observes that businesslike rules for speaking, such as *Robert’s Rules of Parliamentary Procedure*, set up “intricate barriers to communication” instead of allowing for an equally possible, nonviolent, and free form mode of speech that is “usefully disorderly.”<sup>38</sup> These examples further confirm Foucault’s idea that systems of control, hierarchy, and violent power thrive by suppressing creative and “useful disorder.” Moving toward nonviolence that is a counter to hegemonic power, Hocker and Willmot affirm that an important step in conflict management is sometimes to ignore rules of etiquette. “Raising one’s voice,” they say, “may not be as great a sin as stifling it.”<sup>39</sup> People can become nonviolent, and circumvent violence, through our very creativeness, inventiveness, and sense of community and spontaneity. Finding and expressing one’s voice is an important part of fostering a community that values peacemaking and strives, however imperfectly, toward achieving a sense of harmony.

From the nonviolent theorist’s perspective, achieving harmony in community is not as utopian and improbable an ideal as we have been led to believe. Montagu believes, for example, that “everything points to the nonviolence of the greater part of early man’s life, to the contribution made by the increasing development of cooperative activities” and, importantly, he notes “the invention of speech” as a crucial factor that defines humans and their communication as fundamentally being *nonviolent*. In short, Montagu’s research leads him to posit that much of modern society, a society of Foucault’s discipline/punish paradigm, has used rhetoric to train us to feel that we should be absolved of our societal sins (such as crime or socioeconomic inequality) “by shifting the responsibility for [such problems] to our ‘natural inheritance,’ our ‘innate aggressiveness.’” Montagu believes that our institutions and communication systems ought to tell the truth about the real causes of social problems and violence, “namely, the many false and contradictory values by which, in an overcrowded, highly competitive, dehumanized, threatening world, [humans] so disoperatively

attempt to live."<sup>40</sup> Montagu's theory exposes how rhetoric of a discipline/punish schema fosters "false" violent social structures.<sup>41</sup> His perspective also recuperates a nonviolent sense of rhetoric because it points the way to truth, to regaining a sense of humanity at our core, which is characterized by "amiability."<sup>42</sup>

Breaking away from the kind of science that Foucault calls discipline/punish, prominent scientists have decried the power of language and culture to promote war. *The Seville Statement on Violence*, originally published in 1986 and reprinted in 1990, is a sorely overlooked rhetorical document that is of note to rhetorical theorists and peace scholars alike. Written by world-renowned scientists, it affirms that "warfare is a peculiarly human phenomenon and does not occur in other animals." The scientists maintain that language and culture, not our "natural" biological makeup, are the reasons for war. "Warfare . . . is a product of culture. Its biological connection is primarily through language. . . ." Consequently, they note that culture can be ameliorated to a nonviolent equilibrium, as evidenced by the "cultures which have not engaged in war for centuries" or only in certain epochs.<sup>43</sup> Theorists of peace and conflict studies and of rhetoric would do well to examine further how this role of language in culture—in short, rhetoric—figures importantly in our perceptions of war, peace, and nonviolence.

On a more middle theoretical ground than the authors just mentioned, William James allows that humans do have aggressive tendencies, but he believes these tendencies can simply be channeled to constructive pursuits rather than to violence and war.<sup>44</sup> Pepinsky supports this view, noting our human "drive to be responsive" and "compassionate" rather than being exclusively aggressive.<sup>45</sup> James does agree that the rhetoric of history, and literature such as the *Iliad*, perpetuate the prevalence of violence in society by rationalizing its very "irrationality" and rendering it "fascinating." James argues that notions of "peace" have been subverted to mean "competitive preparation for war."<sup>46</sup> Jacques Ellul's *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Minds* (1965) and Michael Sherry's *In the Shadow of War: The United States Since the 1930s* (1995) recount in great detail how the meaning of peace, through the manifest institutions of contemporary society, becomes subverted to mean war.<sup>47</sup> Here again, scholars both in rhetoric and peace studies would benefit from better understanding the sociolinguistic processes by and through which true peace is stunted and thwarted.

Importantly, James also demonstrates the difficult, and seemingly inferior, rhetorical position in which the pacifist or nonviolentist is placed because we must argue for a "negative," the absence of war. This pacifistic lack, this void of imagery, pales in its allure compared to the thrilling "positive," the



visible, tangible “horror” of war that our culture amplifies and condones. James recommends that, to offset this problem, pacifists “enter more deeply into the aesthetical and ethical point of view of their opponents,” in other words, create a positive and known quantity, “a moral equivalent of war” that will replace the perceived void. James believes that military values such as “intrepidity, contempt of softness, surrender of private interest, obedience to command” can all be accommodated through nonviolent programs of public works.<sup>48</sup> Konrad Lorenz, by the same token, believed that human overflows of energy (in the form of aggression or otherwise) could be channeled into the positive realms of art, science, and medicine.<sup>49</sup> Today, the rhetorical legacies of figures such as John F. Kennedy (“Ask not what your country can do for you, but ask what you can do for your country”) and nonviolent programs such as the Peace Corps and Habitat for Humanity show the plausibility of James’s and Lorenz’s arguments for finding positive, tangible, and rewarding substitutes for warmaking and violence.

Finally, let us return to Johnstone’s point about the relationship between rhetoric, risk-taking, argumentation, and humanity. The rhetorician’s perspective tends to confirm that humans are not fundamentally violent, but non-violent and peaceful. In response to the claim that argumentation is merely “a device for avoiding the need to resort to violence,” Johnstone maintains:

This is a cynical view of human nature, since it regards [our human] capacity for argument as no more than the product of a transient enlightenment—an unstable victory over the irrational forces that define [us]—and it regards argument itself as no more than an expedient. If argument is in fact a mere expedient to avoid violence, then we ought to consider as most successful that argument which has the greatest soporific effect. More fundamentally, the standard view is in direct contradiction to the history of human hostility. Throughout recorded time, [people] have always based their conflicts upon arguments. Every war has been preceded by the search for an excuse for fighting. To find examples of violence not based upon argument, we must look to the annals of psychopathology. This fact shows that normal human violence already presupposes argument.<sup>50</sup>

Thus Johnstone’s perspective as a rhetorical scholar supports the positions of the social theorists we have just looked at, who question the durability of the position that humans are fundamentally depraved, violent, and warlike. Johnstone goes on to say that “argument is a defining feature of the human situation. . . . It is . . . to introduce the arguer into a situation of risk in which

open-mindedness and tolerance are possible.” Johnstone calls for students of rhetoric to engage in philosophical inquiry that invites counter-arguments and looks beyond the mere “facts” at hand. To exist in our “human milieu,” says Johnstone, we must first and foremost engage “values.” Questioning the truth of innate depravity, through the mere engagement of one’s interlocutor, begins a process that, in the words of Johnstone, is “an attempt to expand and consolidate the world into which the escape has been made.”<sup>51</sup> I reiterate here, then, that my purpose in this essay is to “expand and consolidate” both the project of nonviolent theory and the vital relationship that rhetorical theory has to the practice of nonviolence. This is our “escape,” in the nonviolent mode, to a discursive world where peace is possible. Through the expansion of the discursive realm, of the word, of all things rhetorical, expansion of culture becomes possible. If we can nurture our cultural orientation toward peace and nonviolence, then, according to the theories of the scientists in the *Seville Statement*, the reality of peace is inevitable.

We have looked at ways in which rhetoric can be seen as a form of nonviolent action and, conversely, how nonviolent action is rhetorical. Nonviolence is a form of persuasion and communication that aims to minimize the violence found in conflict situations. Nonviolentists strive stubbornly to attain social justice through revealing the truth and through subverting disciplinary and oppressive institutional forms of power. We have also indicated how history and rhetoric serve to perpetuate the myth that humans are naturally “aggressive” beings, rather than beings who are fundamentally cooperative and “amiable.” Now we will explore the practical applications that critics and theorists of rhetoric can undertake when they have attained a useful, working knowledge, understanding—and, perhaps most importantly, an appreciation—of nonviolent theory.

#### PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS FOR RHETORICAL THEORY IN LIGHT OF NONVIOLENT THEORY

This section of the essay offers rhetorical scholars a window of opportunity for revitalizing a rhetorical theory that has become encumbered by the contradictions of classical, feminist, postmodern, and poststructural definitions of rhetoric. Various theorists of rhetoric seek to use rhetorical theory for the same goal: to expose oppression and social injustice and to praise rhetorical efforts at fostering justice. Our views, however, are frequently at odds and seem to speak at cross-purposes. We also tend to analyze discourses that are perfectly contained (such as a single nineteenth-century speech), rather than texts that are messy and open-ended. Unfortunately, this quest for the “perfect

text” to analyze often excludes critiques of nonviolent rhetoric—a rhetoric which is usually convoluted and open-ended.<sup>52</sup> If only we understood nonviolent theory better, perhaps our mission of using scholarship to subvert oppression could be better served. Nonviolent theories offer a means to engage in a unified discourse (rather than an academic, jargon-laden, and therefore exclusionary discourse) that fights oppression because many interdisciplinary views implicitly invoke nonviolent tenets unwittingly.

Bondurant writes that “throughout Gandhi’s writings runs the quiet insistence that individual will and reason can effect social and political change.”<sup>53</sup> Rhetoric is invoked implicitly here because rhetoric is a powerful means to expressing one’s will. Willpower, risk-taking, openness to self-change, and tolerance are characteristics of the nonviolentist. Nonviolent power comes from this very human energy; such compassionate energy is the antidote to that institutionalized, disciplinary power Foucault describes.

A nonviolent rhetoric seeks to channel one’s energies and passions into positive, peace-yielding activities (such as those listed in Table 1). Returning to early theories of rhetoric, especially in Aristotle’s sense of rhetoric as “an offshoot of ethics,” we may uncover areas where nonviolent theory and rhetoric overlap. Through comparing different traditions of reasoning and social action, we can refresh our sense of rhetoric as a nonviolent means to creating positive social change.

In addition to an ethical use of energy and willpower, rhetoric, like nonviolence, is invested in notions of time. Classical Greek theories of rhetoric were concerned with timing in a good speech, calling that particular knack of knowing the right thing to say (or do) at a particular moment in time *kairos*. Nonviolent theory has an interesting way of looking at time. Unlike modern culture’s obsession with time and efficiency, the nonviolent perspective values fluidity and flexibility as well as a long-term approach to problem solving. Tolstoy, Gandhi, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., saw the value in taking the long view; time is not seen with the impatience that our speed-oriented culture takes. Criticism of Archbishop Tutu’s work with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa often centers on how time-consuming the process of fact-finding and reconciliation has been, and also on how many of the cases that were investigated remain open-ended and unresolved. Such criticism is typical of our modern obsession with perfect efficiency in terms of both time and results. It ignores the substantial success the process has had in consciousness-raising; for peace to be achieved, it may take longer than the span of one lifetime. The fact that the process of healing is terribly slow does not preclude it from being ultimately successful.

In his essay, "The Kingdom of God Is Within You," Tolstoy emphasizes the need for us to learn not to be impatient, but to work for peace and to adopt a long-range perspective. "You need only free yourself from falsehood and your situation will inevitably change of itself." There is a recursive quality to nonviolence. Tolstoy says that "to recognize truth as a truth and avoid lying about it is a thing you can always do."<sup>54</sup> This notion of "always," or the "inevitability" of truth coming forth through effort, alters the rhetorical requirements for "urgency" and "exigency." Therefore, standard measures of success expand and become more forgiving of small mistakes made along the way; self-forgiveness and healing entail making mistakes, trying and sometimes failing. Gandhi called his life's mission his "experiments" with nonviolence.

Through patience and a long-range perspective, we reduce the need for violence. As Johnstone has noted about our human tendency to make "excuses" so we can go to war, violence is ever the expedient in a conflict situation. The urgency of the situation must be channeled into what Gandhi called "feverish activity." This activity is the positive energy to which I have referred; this is the humanizing willpower that challenges disciplinary power; this is Johnstone's tolerant, humane, risk-taking arguer. Such self-motivated energy fosters our opting for the right way, the nonviolent way, of handling conflict situations.

The term "passive resistance" has often been misconstrued by rhetorical critics and others to mean a certain cowering weakness. Rhetorical scholars and students of nonviolent persuasion would do well to understand that there is nothing "passive" about resisting without resorting to violence. By no means does nonviolence invoke a sense of passivity, or mere waiting. Rather, nonviolent activity orients one's energies in the present into specific, concrete actions that will facilitate the conversion of the opponent to one's views. Such work is done so that the opponent will see the "truth."

Observers of pure nonviolent social movements may misconstrue the patient laying of the groundwork of the truth as "buying time" for the adversary. Dr. King was, and Aung San Suu Kyi of Myanmar (Burma) is, often criticized by those who misunderstand the necessarily slow pace with which nonviolent change occurs. Nonviolent actors realize that using violence to topple systems often results in begetting violence anew. Nonviolent rhetoric operates by penetrating the thought and belief systems, the attitudes, and the (im)morals of oppressive or totalitarian systems and disciplinary structures. Nonviolent rhetoric helps clear the way for a renewed and honest public opinion and debate to take place within social and political systems. If language and rhetoric are understood as significant shapers of the way we

perceive “reality,” then they can also be seen as a means to alter that reality. Rhetoric is at the heart of cultural change. Cultural change can occur to foster peace, just as much as Sherry has documented that it occurred in the United States to foster war.

In a sense, present time must be used for the best interests not just of those who live today but also of those who will live in the future.<sup>55</sup> From the nonviolent perspective, for example, the decision of whether or not to transform a wetland into a shopping mall or a neighborhood must involve factors beyond mere short-term profit or gain. It is much more difficult to step back, remain calm, and seek truth so as to gain the “inevitable” reward, that is, making the wisest (as opposed to the most financially expedient) decision, or resolving or managing conflicts better. By using the persistent and thorough approach of seeking a truth that is timeless and not bound by the here and now, much violence can be prevented.

The nonviolent approach, however, does not mean that patience and a long view toward time can be equated with a “future time” approach which, in Huxley’s view, speciously supports committing violent actions “as a means to that end.”<sup>56</sup> Gandhi, King, and Aung San Suu Kyi all struggled over their respective social movements’ sacrifices of life, and never undertook nonviolent tactics without agonizing over the impacts of such actions on life in the present. As April Carter has noted, “one central tenet in the theory of nonviolence is that there must be congruence between ends and means. Means that are ignoble or destructive . . . will corrupt the ends. . . . The belief that a just society could only be attained by good means was at the heart of Gandhi’s philosophy and is maintained by later theorists of nonviolent struggle.”<sup>57</sup> Nigel Young vouches for Carter’s position, stating that “the removal of an elite by coup no more guarantees real change of structure than the assassination of one member of that elite; too often the methods of the opponent are imitated—and its structures reproduced. . . .”<sup>58</sup> There is a very practical rationale behind the nonviolentist’s need to speak and behave nonviolently: to do so will help ensure peace in the long run.

The “practice what you preach” dictum is central to the nonviolent activist who uses speech and symbolic acts. Huxley quotes the Edict of Asoka: “the root of [the matter] is restraint of speech, to wit, a [person] must not do reverence to his own sect or disparage that of another without reason.”<sup>59</sup> The work of Archbishop Desmond Tutu in South Africa with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission embodies this very principle. Tutu recognized that the country could not move forward without understanding and forgiveness for all of the atrocities that took place during the long reign of apartheid. Tutu knew that the means to creating a peaceful new South Africa

must be nonviolent. Of the work of the Commission to grant pardons to the evil-doers as a means to creating a process of healing and forgiveness, Tutu states: "It is not enough to say let bygones be bygones. Indeed, just saying that ensures it will not be so. Reconciliation does not come easy. Believing it does will ensure that it will never be. We have to work and look the beast firmly in the eyes. Ultimately you discover that without forgiveness, there is no future."<sup>60</sup> Forgiveness takes time. Thus the Commission's work, ongoing since the fall of apartheid, needs to be lauded for its long-term view, not criticized by those of us so entrenched in modern ways that the clock is deemed the utmost measure of aptness or efficacy. Nonviolence operates on a *kairos* of its own. Thus we see how a long-term philosophy of time, combined with the nonviolent values of risk-taking, forgiveness, patience, and a redefined sense of reason, can all be associated with definitions of rhetoric. These perspectives point the way toward envisioning a space for a specifically nonviolent rhetoric.

The rhetorical notion of humans as beings who are conceived through language also points the way to nonviolence. Language structures not only our interactions with others but also our sense of self-identity. Johnstone, a rhetorical scholar, believes this occurs through the risk factor that occurs in the process of reasoned and fair argumentation.<sup>61</sup> Johan Galtung, a peace studies scholar, emphasizes that structural violence is embedded in our very language structures and that violence as internalized in one's self-identity must therefore be exposed. Galtung explains that we usually think of violence as being "personal" or as the "subject" of some "drama." Galtung notes that simple and identifiable "subject-verb-object" relationships seen in most Indo-European languages serve to keep the focus on individual persons, when the source of even greater violence is hidden and "built into structures."<sup>62</sup> This hidden violence is not so easily expressed in language, and if it cannot be expressed, it is more difficult to protest.

Just as Foucault examines the spatial rhetoric of disciplinary institutions, so the spatial rhetoric of social experience as practiced *en masse* needs to be reexamined. Galtung explains that interpersonal violence (which he calls personal violence) is more easily protested, whereas institutional, disciplinary, impersonal violence (which he calls structural violence) is more difficult to pinpoint and express. The diffuseness of structural violence is a difficult property to address, but it is one that nonviolence can aid in aggregating, identifying, and decrying. For example, "when one husband beats his wife there is a clear sense of personal violence, but when one million husbands keep one million wives in ignorance there is structural violence. Correspondingly, in a society where life expectancy is twice as high in the upper as in the

lower classes, violence is exercised even if there are no concrete actors one can point to as directly attacking others, as when one person kills another.” Galtung argues that because “personal violence shows,” whereas structural violence is more difficult to observe, analyze, and articulate, we in the academy should realize that “a research emphasis on the reduction of personal violence at the expense of a tacit or open neglect of research on structural violence leads, very easily, to acceptance of ‘law and order’ societies.” This is an important reason why rhetorical scholars’ inquiry should not be limited to speeches and rhetorical artifacts that decry only personal violence. Instead, inquiry should, in Johnstone’s words, “expand and consolidate” to expose the diffuse texts of structural violence, while shifting our focus toward making our permanent “escape” into the realm of peacemaking.<sup>63</sup>

Let’s look at some examples of potential areas of inquiry for rhetorical critics. Pepinsky’s research supports the notion that structural violence is easily dismissed in “law and order” societies such as ours. He says that “the acceptance of class distinctions is a sign of violence.” He gives the example of how we distinguish between the knife cutting in a barroom brawl versus the knife cutting in a surgeon’s operating room. The cut that takes place in the barroom is immediately characterized as a “stabbing” and thus takes on criminal connotations, while the surgeon’s slice, even if it constitutes malpractice, is still called “operating.” Pepinsky states that these persuasive linguistic “distinctions . . . give people in privileged positions the benefit of the doubt.”<sup>64</sup> Pepinsky, though trained as a criminologist, has actually exposed in this case of semantics the kind of structural violence that rhetorical critics, we who are trained as linguistic sleuths, could be uncovering.

So we see that Galtung’s apt call to read the hidden social texts, and Pepinsky’s illustration of inequalities buried in language, both show how rhetoric serves to obscure violence by hiding it in silences or terminologies of hierarchy and respect. The research of these nonviolent scholars paves the way for rhetorical scholars to question the institutional language of authority and discipline. Beyond rhetorical criticism of great oratory lies the potential for nonviolent rhetorical analysis of reports from myriad sources, ranging from the rhetorical products of disciplinary institutions (an elementary school report card; a hospital bill; a traffic ticket) to cultural practices (weddings; the practices of female genital mutilation and male circumcision). By understanding the “hidden” language of structural violence, rhetoricians can use their analyses as a tool to fight such “silent” oppressions as those revealed in deadly statistics or courtroom rhetoric. The eloquence of Jonathan Harr’s *A Civil Action* (1995), a haunting, nonfiction book, and now a major motion picture, describing the failure of the American justice system, is a testament

to the fact that inquiry into structural violence can make for gripping rhetorical analysis.<sup>65</sup> These are just a few examples of how rhetorical scholars can benefit from understanding nonviolent theory and perspectives.

## CONCLUSION

This has been an introductory exploration into the theories of both historical and contemporary nonviolent scholars. The goal of this essay has been to observe and integrate what these great thinkers have had to say about language, communication, and rhetoric in light of nonviolent theory. The spotlight in this essay has been on the interrelationship between nonviolence and rhetoric. First, we saw what forms nonviolent persuasion takes. Second, while debunking the myth that humans are somehow inherently or exclusively aggressive, we summarized the peace studies and nonviolent theorists' views on how and why human behavior and persuasion is not necessarily violent when it is performed in the context of true nonviolent action. Finally, we looked at ways that a better understanding of the connection between rhetorical theory and the nonviolent theories can be put to practical applications.

By surveying this literature, we see that nonviolent theory challenges, agrees with, and sometimes contradicts rhetorical theory on many levels. While rhetorical critics have studied the world of adversarial relationships, conflict, and difference of belief, we have not done as well with understanding the practices of seeking for mutual identification, cooperation, and learning how to live with diversity and adversity.<sup>66</sup> Nonviolent theory offers insights into the conduct of debate over public policy, political activism, and communication forms that support or decry the authoritarian structures of society. Nonviolent theory espouses democratic visions for the public and debate in openly mediated channels. Nonviolent theory challenges the history<sup>67</sup> and traditional views that often characterize rhetoric as inherently "power over" people by showing that rhetoric can, and often does, mean "power with" people.

In this discussion, we have surveyed how nonviolent theory supports the notion that humans can argue fairly and arrive at mutual truth through a risky process of tolerance and self-conversion. Nonviolent theory shows that rhetoric can be recuperated into the classical, Isocratean ideal of *paideia*: nonviolent rhetoric can be an educational tool to achieve (to paraphrase Gandhi) the uplift of all human beings. King's educational rhetoric shows the rhetorical power of using *satyagraha* (soul-force, truth-force) to create a healthy environment to make social change and equality possible. Nonviolent theory shows rhetoricians that language and culture—in a sense, our way of creating



and perpetuating our reality—can be devoid of, or impose minimal, aggression. Indeed, human beings are shown to be inherently “amiable,” or at least to possess far less aggression than traditionally thought. Further still, any aggressive energies, when channeled, can create peaceful communities and nonviolent means of handling conflict situations. From the research of nonviolent theorists, we learn how we are creatures schooled in violence. We can just as well be schooled in *non*violence. As Johnstone advises, we need not take a “cynical view of human nature.”<sup>68</sup> I close this discussion by directing attention to the possibilities and responsibilities of each of us, as researchers, scholars, and critical servants. As the *Seville Statement* confirms:

biology does not condemn humanity to war, and . . . humanity can be freed from the bondage of biological pessimism and empowered with the confidence to undertake the transformative tasks needed . . . in the years to come. Although these tasks are mainly institutional and collective, they also rest upon the consciousness of individual participants for whom pessimism and optimism are crucial factors. Just as “wars begin in the minds of men,” peace also begins in our minds. The same species who invented war is capable of inventing peace. The responsibility lies with each of us.<sup>69</sup>

Reasoning and ascertaining social truths are what we do every day. Yet mustering the will to make social change is the infinitely more difficult task of the nonviolent theorist. Scholars such as Pepinsky underscore the interrelationship between our scholarly work and its implications for social activism. In the nonviolent mode, Pepinsky calls on us to practice what we preach through “personal cultivation.” He reiterates Brock-Utne’s point that:

one does not know how to make peace among nations who does not treat one’s own children or spouse or colleagues with respect and dignity. How does a teacher understand democracy who does not understand how to share power with students? How does an expert on due process understand who gives orders to employees, students, or children without hearing an explanation? What message does an “authority” convey who preaches one standard and behaves otherwise? Think of how much more credible and powerful university departments would become if they applied their knowledge first and foremost to governing themselves.<sup>70</sup>

Pepinsky and Brock-Utne, like Johnstone, reveal the risks involved in undertaking a nonviolent orientation to our work. Nonviolent theory provides new insights into our uses of communication. The implications for theorizing a nonviolent rhetoric are made manifest. With the positive energy of willpower, scholarship can be put to good use. The scholarly pursuit of theories of rhetoric must be more than words; it must be the action of the theorists, too.

## NOTES

1. This succinct summary of the crux of the problem, which this essay investigates, is gratefully attributed to an anonymous reviewer, *Peace & Change*, 1998.

2. See Leo Tolstoy, "The Kingdom of God Is Within You," in *Philosophical Perspectives on Peace: An Anthology of Classical and Modern Sources*, ed. Howard P. Kainz (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1987), 177–95, and Aldous Huxley, "Time and Eternity," also in *Philosophical Perspectives on Peace*, ed. Kainz, 195–203.

3. Robert L. Holmes, *Nonviolence in Theory and Practice* (Belmont, Ca.: Wadsworth, 1990).

4. Thomas Merton, "Gandhi and the One-Eyed Giant," preface to Mohandas K. Gandhi, *Gandhi on Nonviolence* (New York: New Directions, 1965), 7 (emphasis added).

5. Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts (New York: Modern Library, 1954), 24.

6. Stephen Browne, "Encountering Angelina Grimke: Violence, Identity, and the Creation of Radical Community," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 82 (1996): 55–73.

7. I would like to thank another anonymous reviewer for *Peace & Change* for this insight.

8. See, for example, Sheila Murphy, "The Rhetoric of Nonviolent Conflict Resolution: Toward a Philosophy of Peace as a Social Construct," (Ph.D. diss., University of South Carolina, 1996); Robert Allen Bode, "Mohandas K. Gandhi's Rhetorical Theory: Implications for Communication Ethics," (Ph.D. diss., University of Oregon, 1987).

9. Joan V. Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence: The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1958, 1988), 38.

10. Rex Ambler, "Gandhian Peacemaking," in *A Reader in Peace Studies*, ed. Paul Smoker et al. (Oxford: Pergamon, 1990), 200.

11. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," in James M. Washington, ed., *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986), 69.

12. Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence*, 40.
13. Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence*, 52.
14. Gene Sharp, "198 Methods of Nonviolent Action," in *A Peace Reader: Essential Readings on War, Justice, Non-Violence, and World Order*, ed. Joseph Fahey and Richard Armstrong (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1992), 476–79.
15. Harold Pepinsky, *The Geometry of Violence and Democracy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 44–49.
16. Pepinsky, *Geometry of Violence*, 60.
17. Pepinsky, *Geometry of Violence*, 4.
18. Of secrets, Gandhi wrote: "No secret organization, however big, could do any good. Secrecy aims at building a wall of protection around you. *Ahimsa* disdains all such protection. It functions in the open in the face of odds, the heaviest conceivable. We have to organize for action a vast people that have been crushed under the heel of unspeakable tyranny for centuries. They cannot be organized by other than open, truthful means. I have grown up from youth to seventy-six years in abhorrence of secrecy. There must be no watering down of the ideal." (Mohandas K. Gandhi, *Gandhi on Nonviolence*, 40, 33.) Within this perspective the rationalization and *raison d'être* of organizations such as the CIA or the FBI come under doubt. While a Burkean perspective views such groups as inevitable in the social hierarchy, a nonviolent perspective like Gandhi's views them as an abomination to the spirit of humanity and its growth toward fullness and equality (*swaraj*).
19. Pepinsky, *Geometry of Violence*, 59.
20. Gandhi, *Gandhi on Nonviolence*, 46.
21. Buddha, "From 'The Dhammapada: Chapter XXVI. The Brahmin Buddha,'" in *Peace Reader*, ed. Fahey and Armstrong, 461.
22. Mohandas K. Gandhi, "Ahimsa, or the Way of Nonviolence," in *Peace Reader*, ed. Fahey and Armstrong, 174.
23. Stephen Browne of Pennsylvania State University pointed this out to me and recommended the Johnstone article. I would also like to thank James E. Burnside for the reminder that courage and the willingness to undergo suffering are key features of nonviolence.
24. Henry Johnstone, "Some Reflections on Argumentation," in *Philosophy, Rhetoric, and Argumentation*, ed. Maurice Natanson and Henry Johnstone (University Park, Pa.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1965), 1–9; quotations from pp. 3, 5, 4, 6.
25. The classic syllogism is an example of this. For example:  
 Major premise: All men are mortal.  
 Minor premise: Socrates is a man.  
 Conclusion: Socrates is mortal.

This kind of reasoning abounds in current theories of rhetoric. What this kind of reasoning ignores is the connotative baggage that terms often carry, which skews our perceptions, and hence, skews our conclusions. Look, for instance, at the “logic” of the following syllogism:

Major premise: Almost all women (aged 14–45) are biologically equipped to have children.

Minor premise: Sarah is a woman.

Conclusion: Sarah is likely to be able to have children.

In this situation, we are using logic that impugns a woman’s motives for her life, and which affects her career, and her economic status, among other things. By modern logic, the syllogism makes sense. But from a nonviolent perspective, the rhetoric of this kind of “logic” itself is damaging; it is violent because it attributes, through categorization and systematic grouping, the life course of a person. The predetermination of a life’s course, irrespective of that life’s human potentiality—in this case, to have or not to have children—is what Johan Galtung could call an instance of structural violence.

26. Jeffrey Z. Rubin, Dean Pruitt, and Sung Kim, *Social Conflict: Escalation, Stalemate, and Settlement* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 89–90, 90.

27. Pepinsky, *Geometry of Violence*, 48

28. Gene Sharp, “The Techniques of Nonviolent Action,” in *Peace Reader*, ed. Fahey and Armstrong, 224–25, 226.

29. Sharp, “Techniques of Nonviolent Action,” 228.

30. For example, the Disney megacorporation now owns what was once a stand-alone entity, the American Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). Since that take-over, there has been a marked increase in advertising plugs for Disney movies and products, especially on ABC’s popular morning and evening programs, such as “Good Morning America” or “Live with Regis and Kathy Lee,” and “ABC World News With Peter Jennings.”

31. Leo Tolstoy, “From ‘My Religion,’” in *Peace Reader*, ed. Fahey and Armstrong, 178, 178–79.

32. According to Tolstoy, the theft occurs because wealthy business magnates “fleece the laborers” through low wages and deceit (Tolstoy, “My Religion,” 194). The current trend of moving American factories overseas is an example. Americans lose their jobs here and products such as Nike athletic shoes are made in Asia for a fraction of the cost; myriad reports show that Asian workers in such factories only earn a tiny fraction of what American factory workers earn. We, as consumers and wearers of Nike shoes, participate in the violent process because we are buying the product at the expense of a politically and economically disenfranchised person in both Asia and America.

33. Tolstoy, “My Religion,” 180, 185, 186.

34. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 226.

35. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 219, 219, 183, 82, 184, 187, 201. The rhetoric of Dr. Christiane Northrop (*Women's Bodies, Women's Choices*, 70 min., JWA Video, videocassette) is an example of a nonviolent rhetoric of medicine that goes against the corporatized and patterned, one-size-fits-all traditions of standard medical practices. Thus it is not science or institutions per se that are problematic, but rather the frequently inhumane way in which the science is activated or the institutions are operated that constitute the fundamental problem of science.

36. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 308, 194.

37. Ashley Montagu, "The New Litany of 'Innate Depravity,' or Original Sin Revisited," in *Peace Reader*, ed. Fahey and Armstrong, 5, 9.

38. Christine Sylvester, "Patriarchy, Peace and Women Warrior," in *Peace Reader*, ed. Fahey and Armstrong, 37–38.

39. Joyce L. Hocker and William W. Wilmot, *Interpersonal Conflict*, 2nd ed. (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown, 1985), 64. Hocker and Wilmot note that etiquette can constrain creative conflict interaction. They maintain that while it "may be appropriate to 'respect your elders' when you are eight years old, overgeneralizing that rule to include not bringing up situations that might cause conflict with respected elders when you are an adult can be much less appropriate. Learning to seek permission to speak might be fine for behavior in the third grade, but waiting for permission to speak in a bargaining session, whether formal or informal, may well assure that you will never be heard. Using polite forms may foster accommodation; overusing parliamentary procedure sometimes stifles debate. Rules of etiquette must be tempered with the exigencies of conflict behavior" (Hocker and Wilmot, 64). This perspective is in direct opposition to Mark Kingwell's argument in *A Civil Tongue* that politeness and civility need to be emphasized in today's political environment. Kingwell's view reduces the chance for nonviolence to prevail. Politeness and etiquette can serve to mask and perpetuate oppression, which is precisely what nonviolent rhetoric seeks to unmask and subvert. Mark Kingwell, *A Civil Tongue* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 92–95.

40. Montagu, "'Innate Depravity,'" 8, 11, 17.

41. Montagu goes on to cite many examples of this peculiar rhetoric of "innate depravity," which he maintains perpetuates social conflict by making it an easy excuse for doing nothing to correct the problem. "The myth of early man's aggressiveness belongs in the same class as the myth of 'the beast,' that is, the belief that most if not all 'wild' animals are ferocious killers. In the same class belongs the myth of 'the jungle,' 'the wild,' 'the warfare of Nature,' and, of course, the myth of 'innate depravity' or 'original sin.' These myths represent the projection of our acquired deplorabilities upon the screen of 'Nature.' What we are unwilling to acknowledge as essentially of

our own making, the consequences of our own disordering in the [hu]man-made environment, we saddle upon 'Nature,' upon 'phylogenetically programmed' or 'innate' factors (Montagu, "Innate Depravity," 17). Thus Montagu shows the power that this myth, and our special terminologies, or rhetorics, of this myth, give us to rationalize violence a means of dealing with conflict.

42. Montagu, "Innate Depravity," 14.

43. David Adams et al., "The Seville Statement on Violence," in *Reader in Peace Studies*, ed. Smoker, 221, 222.

44. William James, "The Moral Equivalent of War," in *Philosophical Perspectives on Peace*, ed. Kainz, 213.

45. Pepinsky, *Geometry of Violence*, 48.

46. James, "Moral Equivalent of War," 215, 217.

47. Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Minds* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965); Michael Sherry, *In the Shadow of War: The United States Since the 1930s* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995).

48. James, "Moral Equivalent of War," 220, 220, 222.

49. Konrad Lorenz, "On Aggression," in *Philosophical Perspectives on Peace*, ed. Kainz, 236.

50. Johnstone, "Reflections on Argumentation," in *Philosophy, Rhetoric, and Argumentation*, ed. Natanson and Johnstone, 7.

51. Johnstone, "Reflections on Argumentation," in *Philosophy, Rhetoric, and Argumentation*, ed. Natanson and Johnstone, 7, 8.

52. Johan Galtung, "Nonviolence and Deep Culture: Some Hidden Obstacles," *Peace Research* 27 (1995): 21-37.

53. Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence*, 35.

54. Leo Tolstoy, "The Kingdom of God Is Within You," in *Philosophical Perspectives on Peace*, ed. Kainz, 193.

55. Huxley, "Time and Eternity," in *Philosophical Perspectives on Peace*, ed. Kainz, 203.

56. Huxley, "Time and Eternity," in *Philosophical Perspectives on Peace*, ed. Kainz, 203.

57. April Carter, "Non-Violence as a Strategy for Change," in *Reader in Peace Studies*, ed. Smoker, 214.

58. Nigel Young, "Nonviolence and Social Change," in *Reader in Peace Studies*, ed. Smoker, 218.

59. Huxley, "Time and Eternity," in *Philosophical Perspectives on Peace*, ed. Kainz, 202.

60. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, quoted in Colin Greer, "The World Is Hungry for Goodness: Without Memory, There Is No Healing. Without Forgiveness, There Is No Future," *Parade Magazine*, 11 January 1998, 4.

61. Johnstone, "Reflections on Argumentation," in *Philosophy, Rhetoric, and Argumentation*, ed. Natanson and Johnstone, 9.
62. Galtung, "Nonviolence and Deep Culture," 10–14, 11.
63. Galtung, "Nonviolence and Deep Culture," 11, 121, 13, 8–9.
64. Pepinsky, *Geometry of Violence*, 24, 22–234, 25.
65. Jonathan Harr, *A Civil Action* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).
66. I thank Richard B. Gregg, of the Department of Speech Communication at Pennsylvania State University, for helping me to articulate the problem clearly.
67. Or "his-story," as distinct from what some feminists refer to as "herstory."
68. Johnstone, "Reflections on Argumentation," in *Philosophy, Rhetoric, and Argumentation*, ed. Natanson and Johnstone, 6.
69. David Adams et al., "The Seville Statement on Violence," in *Reader in Peace Studies*, ed. Smoker, 221–22.
70. Pepinsky, *Geometry of Violence*, 58.