

THE NONVIOLENT PRINCIPLES OF NATURE

BY SCOTT RILEY

The dominant human culture is currently organized around a “realist” worldview. This paradigm describes the universe as a collection of disconnected entities that share nothing intrinsically in common. This perspective has produced rampant problems. Environmental degradation, state-sponsored violence, terrorism, warfare, violence in schools, and unprecedented economic inequality are all clues that something is not in sync. Realism, both in theory and practice, does not seem to coordinate with the laws of nature. The concepts and practices of nonviolence present humankind with an alternative worldview—a worldview that considers the universe to be fundamentally interconnected. This paradigm seems to mimic nature much more accurately than realism. By examining a few of nature’s laws, we can see which perspective more wholly embodies the laws of nature.

First, let us consider the phenomenon of consciousness. Physicist Maxwell Planck eloquently states: “Consciousness, I regard, as fundamental. I regard matter as a derivative. Everything that exists postulates consciousness.” His definition of consciousness is a certain self-recognition. Thus, he implies that matter and energy arise from or in some way are undergirded by consciousness. Perhaps

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the most helpful aid in conceptualizing this insight is the science of quantum mechanics.

A key facet of quantum mechanics is wave-particle dualism, which professes that energy and matter exhibit characteristics of both waves and particles. This discovery, which was a logical assumption based on Einstein’s photoelectric effect, completely rewrote the physics books. Up until this point, matter and energy were considered to be completely separate. Matter was the car while energy was the gasoline, so to speak. Wave-particle dualism, however, blurred the line between matter and energy. Newtonian physics had no answer for this phenomenon and quickly collapsed, leaving a vacuum within the physics community. One of the fields that emerged out of this vacuum was quantum mechanics. Quantum mechanics asserts that at the essence of all matter and energy are interconnected quanta. These quanta are said to create a sort of membrane that undulates somewhat like a bed sheet blowing wildly in the wind—the difference being that quantum motion is three-dimensional.

This field recognizes two extremely powerful concepts of reality. First is the image that the physical universe is actually a sea of swirling, vibratory, and undifferentiated amorphous-ness. What we see as objects are, actually, just concentrated forms of this “quanta” that





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was in college, he participated in a ceremony commemorating Gandhi's death. King studied Gandhi, visited India, and led the Civil Rights Movement. Gandhi was prescient to explain that India would become a model for other nonviolent struggles.



vary in density and form. Secondly, quantum unity suggests the idea of non-locality. Environmentalist David Lorenz calls this the butterfly effect because it implies that "the flap of a butterfly's wings in Brazil can set off a tornado in Texas." Non-locality recognizes that everything in the universe—from the smallest to the largest scale—affects everything else.

At the core of nonviolence is the idea that Gandhi called heart unity. It claims that everyone and everything is united in the deepest and most intense sense of the term. It implies that our perception of separation is a delusion and, due to this, we should treat all beings as we would like to be treated ourselves. Implicit in this perspective is that heart unity practiced somewhere is heart unity practiced everywhere. Heart unity bridges the gap between the oppressor and the oppressed; it finds a common ground where they both can stand. This concept fits very nicely with quantum mechanics and non-locality. In this sense, non-locality can explain why Gandhi, who worked only in India, affected United States history. While Martin Luther King, Jr.

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They are not predestined for aggression; they simply do what they can to survive. Symbiosis is an example of a biological system illustrating that nature does not suppose only aggression.

It is a relationship in which all organisms help to support each other simultaneously. It is a natural reciprocity. Humans have the unique capability of tuning into the animal consciousness as well as the inclusive, heart unity consciousness. Nonviolence encourages a movement from the former to the latter. It asks individuals to leave the old, disconnected worldview and operate instead within the natural interconnection of the universe. Violence, meanwhile, rejects the idea of heart unity, choosing to ignore the principles that quantum mechanics illustrates.



This baby hippo seems to have taken to the old turtle as a replacement mother.

Another idea of interest is that of correspondence or naturally occurring patterns. At the core of the universe is an undifferentiated unity; however, as consciousness solidifies into energy and matter, patterns emerge. There are many types and they exist regardless of scale. Fractals are one way of conceptualizing this principle. They are illustrations that take an archetypal shape and reproduce that shape on various levels. Depending upon the number of iterations, the image can be very simple or extremely complex. Nature is an unimaginably intricate fractal. It is three-dimensional, operates on a scale that includes everything from atoms to galaxies, and has numerous archetypes. In fact, this amazing complexity increases to such a convoluted extent that it evaporates all distinctions and fades into the amorphous realm of unity that we have already discussed. Nevertheless, the complexity of nature's fractal is not our concern; instead, we must pay attention to the surprising simplicity of its archetypes. All of humans' power over nature is a product of the ability to recognize these patterns.

The first and most palpable pattern is that of cyclical energy. The seasons recur year after year; the sun rises uniformly; water evaporates, and then falls again as rain. As the saying goes, history repeats itself. Cycles illustrate the continual renewal of the ongoing process. Nonviolence also assumes no final goal. As Gandhi stated, "Means are everything." This is not a rhetorical statement—it is the reality of our situation. Nonviolence presumes means are inseparable from ends, aligning itself with this pattern. Violence, meanwhile, diverges from this pattern because it assumes that there is an end that is more important than the means. A bully punches another child in order to reach a goal—whether that is lunch money or a validation of his supremacy. In terms of the war in Iraq, U.S. leaders assume that by waging war, occupation, and torture, democracy and peace will flourish. News of

death squads and civil war illustrates that it is impossible to achieve peace by violent means.

Another pattern (in the phenomenal world, at least) is that of dualism. It exemplifies the fact that the phenomenal world operates in opposites. Black implies white just as in implies the existence of out. With the recollection that unity is at the core of the universe, we also see that all paradoxes can be reconciled. Even a vacuum is a part of the whole. As Gandhi stated, "Truth alone will endure; all the rest will be swept away by the tide of time." Both nonviolence and violence work within this pattern because they rely on firm, one-pointed stances. However, they differ in that nonviolence realizes that conflicts are basically superficial, while violence sees conflict as irreconcilable. Nonviolence attempts to find the part of the opponent that is genuine; it does not attempt to polarize the situation further. Nonviolence not only works with the pattern of dualism, but it also works above it. Violence, considering all conflicts

to be a winner-take-all fight, cannot see past this pattern.

The pattern of vibration is also very powerful. It embodies the recognition that everything is in motion. Our image of the quantum bed

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sheet is a way of understanding this law. If any particular subdivision of cloth is examined on the sheet, we will see that it is constantly in motion. Nothing physical is ever completely static. In accordance with this pattern, nonviolence does not fixate upon a concrete objective. Instead, it continually reexamines its methodology. Similarly, violence disagrees with this because it assumes that complete stability can be achieved. The bully believes that he can remain at the top of the food chain forever. If he did realize his essential flux, he might not go on fighting so hard.

All of these laws can also be combined. When we differentiate these patterns it is only for our own understanding. For example, the DNA molecule is a combination of all three of these patterns. If viewed from a bird's eye, the double helix appears as a circle; meanwhile, if viewed from the side, it appears as a wave. When these two patterns are combined into a three-dimensional object, the double helix is born. In nature, all these patterns are merely facets of a single, self-organizing image that perfectly embodies the whole. Realism does not fit within that whole. Perhaps, at one time, it did fit. But its faith in violence and separation has made it parasitic. Just as Newtonian science crumbled when challenged by Einstein's theories, the realist framework cannot stand against principled nonviolence. With its dedication to interconnection and flexibility, nonviolence can lay the groundwork for a new relationship between humans, the earth, animals and each other.