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## Violence: Another Existential Crisis

Contribution to GTI Forum [Interrogating the Anthropocene: Truth and Fallacy](#)

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As I grasp the essence of the consensus emerging from this discussion of Paul Raskin's eloquent [essay](#), it is an acceptance of the Anthropocene as a dire warning that the human species is headed for disaster, if not extinction, if its ecological footprint is not greatly reduced in the relatively near future. The GTI perspective adds the indispensable insight that social evolution has many pathways to the future that can be instructively framed as a dramatic narrative enacted as a struggle between forces sustaining the destructive perishing patterns of the currently dominant modernist variants of civilization and those intent on achieving a variety of alternative civilizational constellations that incorporate what Paul calls for at the end of his conjectures: "expanded identity, solidarity, and citizenship." It is fair to assume that these enlargements move civilizational vectors toward greater appreciations of species destiny along with possibilities of nurturing satisfaction with the experience of human community on a global scale. Such futures imply living with a new contentment based on underlying commonalities while at the same time valuing gender, societal, ethnic, and generational differences and overcoming past abuses.

I regard the GTI community as an ideational vanguard that is carrying forward the work of restorative vision with respect to the organically connected ecological and societal challenges. The hopeful ontological premise is the existence of reservoirs of species potential to turn the negative impacts of human geological agency, which mostly explains the designation of our time as the Anthropocene, into positive forms of social behavior that incorporate ecological and humanistic ethics in ways capable of actualizing variants of the GTI project.

There is also the baffling question of transcendence, which opens the portals of freedom and discovery by uniquely privileging and burdening the human species with freedom, and hence

with responsibility to do the right thing. Individually and collectively, we can learn to see properly, and when we do, we have the freedom and responsibility to struggle for a better, and perhaps radically different, future. In this spirit, should the primary endeavor be to redesign capitalist dynamics to avoid destructive ecological effects and mitigate alienating and exploitative impacts on social relations, or should our ways of producing, consuming, and living be reframed to conform more closely to imaginaries of human flourishing? Due to the limited time to avoid irreversible or catastrophic damage, should GTI efforts prioritize “buying time” by settling for modest adjustments, assuming more fundamental change can emerge over longer periods? There exists a “Hegelian Trap” whereby an envisaged future gets confused with an attainable future. The teaching of the Anthropocene is that major ecological adjustments must be made soon—with the crucial sociological feedback being that the looming tragedy is not attributable to the human condition, but rather reflects a civilizational turn, sometimes associated with the turn from hunter-gathering civilizational ascendancy to agriculture and specialization, and reaching its climax by way of “modernity” as emanating from the Industrial Revolution.

Against this background, I find it useful to highlight the role of war, violence, and identity as carried to clarifying extremes by the United States. The US is the world’s leading source of arms sales, maintains black sites in foreign countries used to torture terrorist suspects, manages one of the largest per capita prison populations in the world, possesses the world’s only constitutionally grounded gun culture, and yet is less secure than ever before in its history. And to underscore this disturbing pattern, the most revered advocate of nonviolent struggle in the United States, Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated in 1968.

My sense of the socioeconomic side of predatory capitalism and ecological denialism is this pervasive delusion that weaponry and violence bring “security” to individuals, neighbors, and countries. Even the alarm bells set off by the use of atomic bombs in 1945 did not overcome the deeply entrenched roots of militarism at all levels of social interaction from gun culture to nuclear arsenals. With the passage of time, the possession of nuclear weapons was normalized for the states that prevailed in World War II, and global policy focused on keeping the weaponry away from other states by establishing an anti-proliferation regime, a system of nuclear apartheid that reflects the latest phase of geopolitical primacy as the fallacious basis of stability in world affairs. There are two points interwoven here: the pervasiveness of violence in human experience and the degree to which a nuclear war could

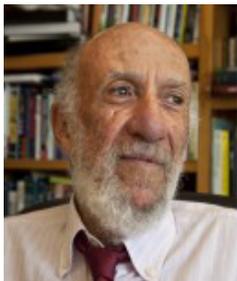
parallel eco-catastrophe, threatening the Gaia Equilibrium that led stratigraphers to pronounce our geological age as the Anthropocene.

When we consider the sorts of human futures that would transcend the maladies of the present historical circumstances, we cannot get very far without a radical turn against individual and collective forms of violence and warfare. It is relevant to take note of the degree to which violence in every shape and form infuses even entertainment in many civilizational spaces, including even most indigenous communities. China is far from nonviolent, yet its remarkable surge, overcoming the extreme poverty of at least 300,000,000 million Chinese, as well as its expansionist vision of the vast Belt and Road Initiative seems a better platform from which to hope for benign civilizational transcendence.

As earlier observed, there are also obstacles associated with the civilizational modalities that presently control the basic categories of time and space. There is a mismatch between the time horizons of ecological, economic, and security challenges and electoral cycles of accountability. Political, corporate, and financial leaders are viewed by their short-term performance records, and thus tend to under-react to medium- and longer-term threats. In relation to space, the vast differences in wealth and capabilities among states and regions produces inequalities perceived as unjust, and need to be defended and justified by ideologies that fragment of human identity and community. In terms of world order, the whole is less than the sum of its parts, and until that ratio can be inverted, Paul Raskin's imperative of expanded identity, solidarity, and citizenship will fall mostly on deaf ears. We live in a world in which the part is valued more than the whole, and such a political order might have persisted in a pre-Anthropocene worldview, but is now in deep jeopardy.

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## About the Author



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