

The Insanity of Violence

Why do humans act so violently? Is this what it takes to survive, let alone to flourish and to thrive? In the twenty-first century, how is possible that so many terrible conflicts still occur, that countless refugees have to run or swim for their lives, and that so many perish or suffer when deliberately targeted as the “other”? Does the human race possess an innate urge for self-destruction? Is patriarchy to blame? Why is it so difficult for us to understand that life is sacred?

Arthur Koestler writes: “the creativity and the pathology of the human mind are, after all, two sides of the same medal coined in the evolutionary mint. The first is responsible for the splendor of our cathedrals, the second for the gargoyles that decorate them to remind us that the world is full of monsters and devils...They reflect the streak of insanity which runs through the history of our species, and which indicates that somewhere along the line of its ascent to prominence something has gone wrong.”

So what is our responsibility in a world marked by violence? Some of us possess the choice to act, to counter what may have gone wrong. What do we choose? Some do not have a choice and live in constant risk and fear. It is a privilege to feel safe even in a time of “lock-downs” close to home and far from the terrorist savagery that we witness in more distant places. Is the violence of poverty, violence against women, the violence of racial enmity, or religious violence any less terrible than a nuclear holocaust would be? Have we internalized our fears to such an extent that we seem to embrace the metaphoric fires of violence? Is violence in any form normal or “natural”? Can we not seek to heal our selves and each other? Can we be the bystanders who become the actors who dare to make a change in how we live everyday?

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