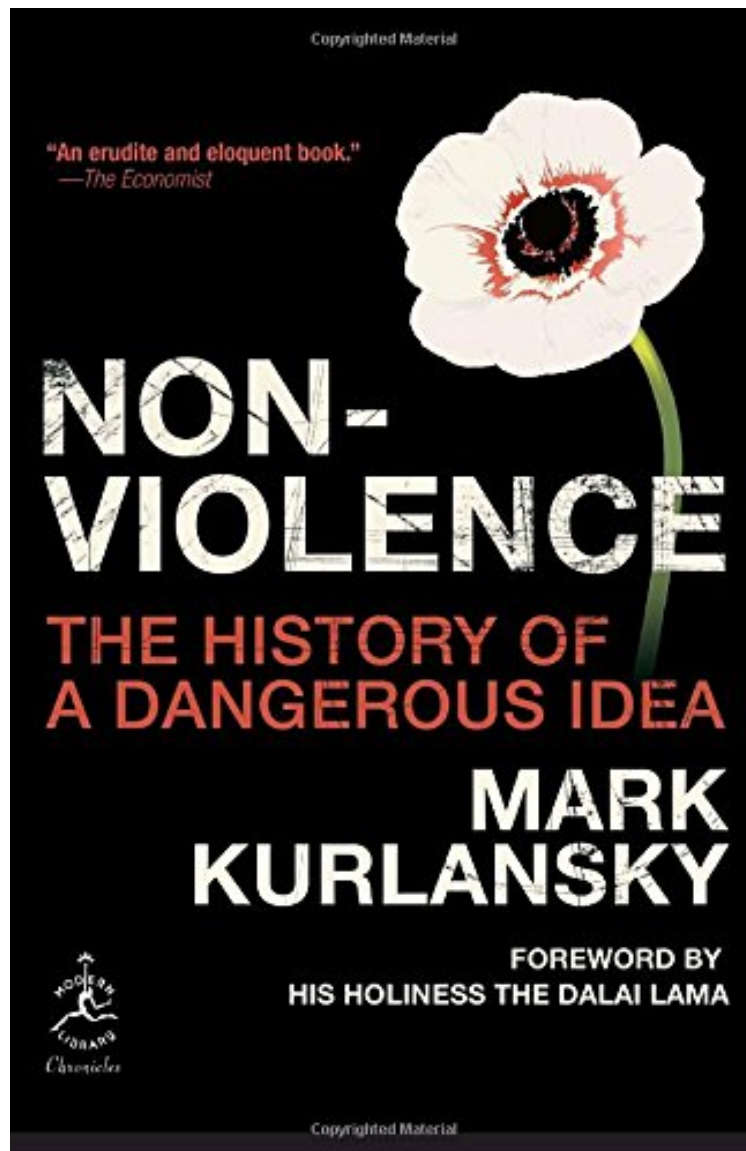


Nonviolence: The History of a Dangerous Idea (Modern Library Chronicles)

Mark Kurlansky

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#198473 in Books Kurlansky, Mark/ Dalai Lama XIV (FRW) 2008-04-08 2008-04-08 Original language: English PDF # 1 8.00 x .44 x 5.191, .42 #File Name: 0812974476224 pages | File size: 54.Mb

Mark Kurlansky : Nonviolence: The History of a Dangerous Idea (Modern Library Chronicles) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Nonviolence: The History of a Dangerous Idea (Modern Library Chronicles):

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. a great guideline By Andy H. It's arguably one of the best

nonviolence books ever written in the 21st century. The teaching of nonviolence is considered to be a critical factor in reducing the violent nature of humans at solving problems. The needs of nonviolence does not imply conflict-free, but a more effective and sophisticated way in dealing with them that could benefit both ends. Kurlansky's illustration of nonviolence is an excellent guide in directing the readers into a world of logics and philosophies. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Interesting but incomplete By TyrantSwine This was a decent book, but it really an American-centric view of the peace movement that often didn't grow beyond reciting key figures and their major works, with a little bit of detail. I would recommend a work that's longer and more in-depth. At less than 200 pages, this doesn't have the room to really get at what nonviolence is and its influence on human society. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Healing for your soul By CustomerHelps clear one's head from the daily onslaught of violence.

In this timely, highly original, and controversial narrative, New York Times bestselling author Mark Kurlansky discusses nonviolence as a distinct entity, a course of action, rather than a mere state of mind. Nonviolence can and should be a technique for overcoming social injustice and ending wars, he asserts, which is why it is the preferred method of those who speak truth to power. Nonviolence is a sweeping yet concise history that moves from ancient Hindu times to present-day conflicts raging in the Middle East and elsewhere. Kurlansky also brings into focus just why nonviolence is a dangerous idea, and asks such provocative questions as: Is there such a thing as a just war? Could nonviolence have worked against even the most evil regimes in history? Kurlansky draws from history twenty-five provocative lessons on the subject that we can use to effect change today. He shows how, time and again, violence is used to suppress nonviolence and its practitioners Gandhi and Martin Luther King, for example; that the stated deterrence value of standing national armies and huge weapons arsenals is, at best, negligible; and, encouragingly, that much of the hard work necessary to begin a movement to end war is already complete. It simply needs to be embraced and accelerated. Engaging, scholarly, and brilliantly reasoned, *Nonviolence* is a work that compels readers to look at history in an entirely new way. This is not just a manifesto for our times but a trailblazing book whose time has come. From the Hardcover edition.

"This is a magnificent achievement" * Daily Telegraph * "Erudite and eloquent" * Economist * "Kurlansky writes history with his heart firmly on his sleeve, unashamedly hopeful that people are becoming more tired of war, quicker to condemn it" -- Adam Forrest * Sunday Herald * "Short and punchy and has a good heart... fascinating, vibrant and thought-provoking" * Scotland on Sunday * "This book is crammed with historical fact... thought provoking" * Financial Times * About the Author Mark Kurlansky is the New York Times bestselling and James A. Beard Award-winning author of *Cod: A Biography of the Fish That Changed the World*; *Salt: A World History*; *1968: The Year That Rocked the World*; *The Basque History of the World*; and *The Big Oyster: History on the Half Shell*; as well as the novel *Boogaloo on 2nd Avenue* and several other books. He lives in New York City. From the Hardcover edition. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. *Imperfect Beings* "We expect to prevail through the foolishness of preaching." William Lloyd Garrison, Declaration of Sentiments adopted by the Peace Convention of Boston, 1838 The first clue, lesson number one from human history on the subject of nonviolence, is that there is no word for it. The concept has been praised by every major religion. Throughout history there have been practitioners of nonviolence. Yet, while every major language has a word for violence, there is no word to express the idea of nonviolence except that it is not another idea, it is not violence. In Sanskrit, the word for violence is *himsa*, harm, and the negation of *himsa*, just as nonviolence is the negation of violence, is *ahimsa* not doing harm. But if *ahimsa* is not doing harm, what is it doing? The only possible explanation for the absence of a proactive word to express nonviolence is that not only the political establishments but the cultural and intellectual establishments of all societies have viewed nonviolence as a marginal point of view, a fanciful rejection of one of society's key components, a repudiation of something important but not a serious force in itself. It is not an authentic concept but simply the abnegation of something else. It has been marginalized because it is one of the rare truly revolutionary ideas, an idea that seeks to completely change the nature of society, a threat to the established order. And it has always been treated as something profoundly dangerous. Advocates of nonviolence dangerous people have been there throughout history, questioning the greatness of Caesar and Napoleon and the Founding Fathers and Roosevelt and Churchill. For every Crusade and Revolution and Civil War there have always been those who argued, with great clarity, that violence not only was immoral but that it was even a less effective means of achieving laudable goals. The case can be made that it was not the American Revolution that secured independence from Britain; it was not the Civil War that freed the slaves; and World War II did not save the Jews. But this possibility has rarely been considered, because the Caesars and Napoleons of history have always used their power to muffle the voices of those who would challenge the necessity of war and it is these Caesars, as Napoleon observed, who get to write history. And so the ones who have killed become the ones who are revered. But there is another history that manages to survive. It survives, but nonviolence is in fact a marginal rejection of a marginalized concept. Political theorist Hannah Arendt, in her 1969 study *On Violence*, pointed out that while it can be universally agreed that violence has been one of the primary

movers of history, historians and social scientists rarely study the subject of violence. She suggested that this was because violence was such a mainstay of human activity that it was taken for granted and therefore neglected. Violence is a fundamental of the human condition, whereas nonviolence is merely a rarified response to that reality. What does this mean? If we lived in a world that had no word for war other than nonpeace, what kind of world would that be? It would not necessarily be a world without war, but it would be a world that regarded war as an aberrant and insignificant activity. The widely held and seldom expressed but implicit viewpoint of most cultures is that violence is real and nonviolence is unreal. But when nonviolence becomes a reality it is a powerful force. Nonviolence is not the same thing as pacifism, for which there are many words. Pacifism is treated almost as a psychological condition. It is a state of mind. Pacifism is passive; but nonviolence is active. Pacifism is harmless and therefore easier to accept than nonviolence, which is dangerous. When Jesus Christ said that a victim should turn the other cheek, he was preaching pacifism. But when he said that an enemy should be won over through the power of love, he was preaching nonviolence. Nonviolence, exactly like violence, is a means of persuasion, a technique for political activism, a recipe for prevailing. It requires a great deal more imagination to devise nonviolent meansboycotts, sit-ins, strikes, street theater, demonstrationsthan to use force. And there is not always agreement on what constitutes violence. Some advocates of nonviolence believe that boycotts and embargoes that cause hunger and deprivation are a form of violence. Some believe that using less lethal means of force, rock throwing or rubber bullets, is a form of nonviolence. But the central belief is that forms of persuasion that do not use physical force, do not cause suffering, are more effective; and while there is often a moral argument for nonviolence, the core of the belief is political: that nonviolence is more effective than violence, that violence does not work. Mohandas Gandhi invented a word for it, satyagraha, from satya, meaning truth. Satyagraha, according to Gandhi, literally means holding on to truth or truth force. Interestingly, although Gandhis teachings and techniques have had a huge impact on political activists around the world, his word for it, satyagraha, has never caught on. All religions discuss the power of nonviolence and the evil of violence. Hinduism, which claims to be the oldest religion, though its founding date is unknown, as is its founder, does not take a clear stand on nonviolence. This ambiguity is not surprising for an ancient religion that has no central belief or official priests and has a plethora of scriptures, gods, mythologies, and cults. Hindus often repeat the aphorism Ahimsa paramo dharmah, nonviolence is the highest law, but this is not an unshakable principle of the religion. Violence is permissible in the Hindu religion, and Indra is a warlike Hindu god. But there are also many writings of Hindu wise men against violence, especially in a book known as the Mahabharata. Hindu sages tended to see nonviolence as an unattainable ideal. Perfect nonviolence would mean not harming any living thing. The sages encouraged vegetarianism to avoid harming animals. The Jainists, followers of a religion admired by Gandhi, keep their mouths masked to insure that they do not accidentally inhale a tiny insect. But Hinduism recognizes that even the strictest vegetarians harm plants, killing them in order to live. A saint, it is said, would live on air, but Hinduism recognizes that this is impossible. Complete ahimsa is not attainable. Gandhi wrote, Nonviolence is a perfect stage. It is a goal towards which all mankind moves naturally, though unconsciously. He believed human beings were working toward perfection. Violence was a barbaric retrogressive trait that had not yet been shed. The human being who achieved complete nonviolence, according to Gandhi, would not be a saint. He only becomes truly a man, he said. This concept of man as an imperfect being who is obligated to strive for an unattainable perfection runs through most of human thought. The nineteenth-century French founder of the anarchist movement, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, wrote in his 1853 *Philosophie du progrs*, We are born perfectable, but we shall never be perfect. The often repeated argument against nonviolence, that it is in our nature to be violentno doubt why violence deserves its own wordlacks validity in light of the ubiquitous moral argument that it is our obligation to try to be better than we are. Hinduism and Gandhi insist that nonviolence must never come from weakness but from strength, and only the strongest and most disciplined people can hope to achieve it. Those who are incapable of defending themselves without violence, those who lack the spiritual strength to match their adversarys physical brutality, either because of their own weakness or the determined brutality of the enemy, are obligated to use physical violence for defense. In Hinduism, passive submission to brutality is usually considered a sin. Whenever the Chinese denounce the pacifist tendencies in their culture, they usually blame these tendencies on Buddhism. This is because Buddhism is the only important Eastern religion in China that is of foreign origin. Buddha, the sixth-century b.c. founder, was born near the Indian-Nepalese border. If pacifism is a national weakness, many Chinese have contended, surely it is the fault of foreigners. And so Hu Shi, the Columbia Universityeducated Chinese scholar (18911962), said, Buddhism, which dominated Chinese religious life for twenty centuries, has reinforced the peaceful tendencies of an already too peaceful people. His implication was that the rejection of violence makes people passive, and many early-twentieth-century Chinese believed their people had become too passive. This ignored the fact that most religions and philosophies that reject violence do not encourage passiveness but activism by other meansnonviolence. Buddhism forbids the taking of life, but there seems to be a wide range of interpretations of this stance. In some countries it means vegetarianism, but in Tibet, perhaps because of a lack of vegetables, it means that animals must be slaughtered humanely. To a Tibetan Buddhist, however, this means the opposite of what it means to a Jew. To Jews, humane slaughter is the clean slitting of the animals throat and the removal of all blood, whereas in Tibet it means death by suffocation, to avoid the spilling of blood. While the

Buddhist interdiction on taking life was frequently interpreted in China as a condemnation of militarism, this was not the case in medieval Japan. In Japan Buddhism developed the meditation school commonly known as Zen. In the Middle Ages, Zen monks became warriors and monasteries became military fortresses. The original idea of Zen was the suppression of the body in order to reach a higher level of meditation. In the fourteenth century the technique was applied not only to meditation but to swordsmanship and archery. Three centuries later, Zen had become an integral part of the warrior code in Japan. This was neither the first nor last incident of a religion being perverted for military purposes. In Buddhism, as in Hinduism, there is the notion of humans reaching higher levels, and one of the ways this is accomplished is by rendering aid to all beings. But Buddhism is not the only source of nonviolent thinking in China. The position on war and nonviolence in Confucianism, a belief system developed in China from 722 to 484 b.c., is even more vague than in Hinduism. It is not even clear that Confucianism is a religion. Many prefer to describe it as a moral philosophy. Nor is there agreement on the extent of the role of Confucius, whose real name was Kong Fuzi, a contemporary of Buddha, who lived between 551 and 479 b.c. The Analects, a compilation of Confucius's sayings that was assembled long after his death, defined the function of government as providing food and troops and earning the people's confidence. Asked which could be suspended in hard times, he answered, Dispense with the troops. This idea that military is essential to government but less essential than other functions runs throughout The Analects. Confucius was not a pacifist, nor did he teach the power of nonviolence. But The Analects also at times rejects the notion of state violence, saying, If good men were to administer the government for a hundred years, violence could be overcome and capital punishment dispensed with. And when the question comes up of how to deal with neighboring barbarians, the standard rationale for military campaigns in China, the reply in The Analects is: If the distant peoples do not submit, then build up culture and character and so win them, and when they have been won give them security. It is a succinct statement of the nonviolent approach to political activism. But the strongest Chinese stand on nonviolence came in opposition to Confucius, from a man named Mozi, who lived from about 470 to 390 b.c. Mozi frequently attacked Confucianists for being aristocrats, which has led some scholars to conclude that he came from a class of slaves. But like other rebels, including Jesus and Gandhi, he may have chosen to throw in with the poorest class as a protest against their unfair treatment. While Confucius was a voice of the establishment, Mozi was a rebel. While Confucius envisioned a hierarchy of love in which the greatest affection was given to family, Mozi called for universal love, *chien ai*, and emphasized helping the poor. Mozi described the concept of *chien ai*: He throws me a peach, I return him a plum. Mozi saw this concept of mutual love, *chien ai*, as the key to righting the world's ills. From the Hardcover edition.