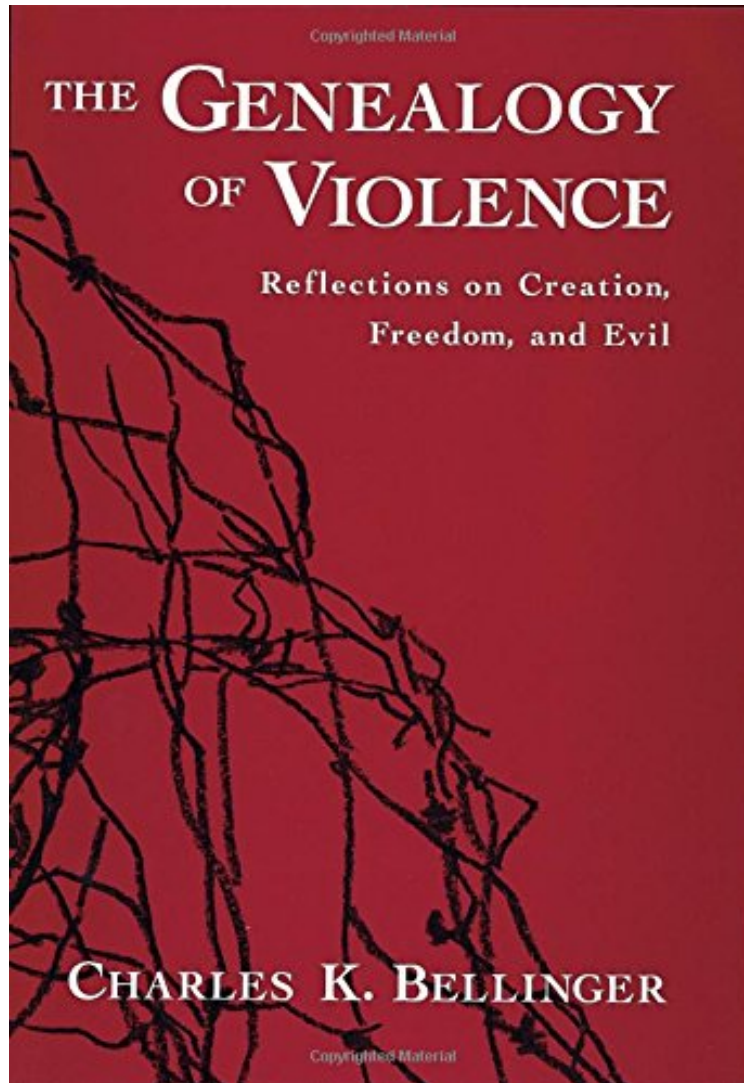


(Library ebook) The Genealogy of Violence: Reflections on Creation, Freedom, and Evil

The Genealogy of Violence: Reflections on Creation, Freedom, and Evil

Charles K. Bellinger

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Charles K. Bellinger : The Genealogy of Violence: Reflections on Creation, Freedom, and Evil before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Genealogy of Violence: Reflections on Creation, Freedom, and Evil:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. A very important bookBy H. VargasThis book is the first of three written by the author as he develops his concept of dimensional anthropology. I read the second book, the Trinitarian

Self, before I knew that it was continuing from the foundation of *The Genealogy of Violence*. TS was such a revelation that I had to read this one to learn more. The first part of this book concisely explains the major secular theories of violence and how they fall short. The author then synthesizes Kierkegaardian thought with Rene Girard's mimetic theory to answer the question, "why are human beings violent?" I learned so much from this book and I highly recommend it as a starting place for anyone who wishes to seriously pursue this line of thinking.³⁵ of 36 people found the following review helpful. Marriage of Kierkegaard and Girard? By A Customer Written by Matthew Taylor

Charles Bellinger's book joins a very impressive body of work applying the "theological anthropology" of Rene Girard to the problem of human evil and, particularly, violence. Bellinger brings Soren Kierkegaard into the Girardian conversation, arguing that Kierkegaard is an indispensable thinker concerning the roots of human violence, though seldom recognized as such, and that his thought is fully compatible with Girard's. Bellinger's book is rewarding and probably essential reading for Girardians. It serves as a good introduction to Kierkegaard to those who (like myself) have badly neglected him. Bellinger brings Girard's and Kierkegaard's to bear particularly on the most horrible atrocities of the twentieth century, Hitler's and Stalin's. Bellinger overviews some well-known theories of violence to explain these mass murders. While rejecting none of the theories completely, Bellinger nonetheless tries them and finds them greatly wanting. Since violence is the outward manifestation of a moral and spiritual disease that infects all of us, Bellinger maintains that it cannot be adequately approached through the morally neutral language and categories of the social sciences. Theology is not just helpful here; it is indispensable. Bellinger argues, with Kierkegaard, that a violence-prone orientation toward our fellow human beings is rooted in our disordered orientation to God. God wants to cooperate with us in a continual act of loving creation out of the inner void of our being (hence the subtitle of Bellinger's book). Rejecting God's creative work, literally fleeing from it in terror (angst), we opt to perform our own. But in so doing, we are creating, against God, a false knowledge built out of illusions of our own and others' making, in particular the false knowledge of the "crowd." Turning to Girard (whose work is much more familiar to me) Bellinger calls him "the most significant theorist of violence in the twentieth century," and I completely agree. Girard posits that we are "hardwired" for violence in two fundamental ways: 1) we look to others ("mimetic desire") to learn what we want, and are often drawn into rivalry and conflict with them, 2) we may purchase a tenuous "peace" with those with whom we are in conflict by scapegoating a third party. These twin modes of violence (mimetic rivalry and scapegoating) can manifest at different levels: national (as when a disturbed population singles out an entire group for persecution or elimination), local (as when disgruntled villagers turn into a lynch mob), interpersonal (as when two peers solidify their friendship by ridiculing a third party), or internal (as when a disturbed individual seeks a "sacrificial" resolution to his or her psychological torment through murder, suicide, self-mutilation, addiction, etc.). Any theological approach to violence, especially a Christian one, needs to address the violence perpetrated by Christians over the centuries. Kierkegaard and Girard do not flinch here (many of Girard's key examples of scapegoating come from medieval persecutions by Christians) and neither does Bellinger. Where did/do Christians go wrong? While Girard's answer is nuanced and, I feel, very enlightening, this is the one part of Bellinger's book that I might be tempted to call simplistic. Bellinger says in effect that, before Constantine, Christianity was a world-transforming pacifistic sect, but after Constantine became institutionalized, it took on (whether Catholic or Protestant) the violent, sacrificial propensities of every other human institution. Thus, Bellinger implies (I think) that Christ's pacifistic mission seems to be most successfully re-engaged by small, dissenting sects (e.g. Anabaptist). I think this is problematic, both as history and as an approach to Christian violence, and I don't think Girard (a practicing Catholic) would put it like that. Let me just note that small bands of noble-minded Christian dissenters can devolve into scary, apocalyptic cults, while popes (for instance, the present one) can pursue breathtaking, globe-spanning efforts in repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation. Big is not necessarily bad, nor small necessarily beautiful, and Girard has shown that violence and scapegoating take place at all levels. Christianity can fail grotesquely AS an institution. That doesn't mean that it fails because it IS an institution. Another quibble I have is that, while persuasively arguing that there is an important social element in Kierkegaard's thought, Bellinger turns around and says that we can also derive an implicit "individualism" from Girard's. Either I haven't fully absorbed this argument, or I have misconstrued Girard's idea that we are all "interindividuals" (inescapably constituted by others, whether for good or ill). I suspect that here, again, Bellinger is importing Protestant assumptions (which may after all be right) into Girard's thought (which may after all be wrong). The recent publication of Girard's own is fortuitous for Bellinger. Girard's book takes his mimetic theory in a direction that Bellinger anticipates and endorses; that is, Girard throws down the gauntlet and takes an unapologetically theological approach to the problem of violence. Girard also deals with both Naziism and Stalinism in ways that complement and augment Bellinger's book. Does Bellinger get to the roots of human violence? All I can say is that people like Bellinger, who are engaging Girard's mimetic theory, are coming closer than anyone I know of. Do we dare address the magnitude of Hitler's and Stalin's crimes by pursuing such theories? Do we dishonor their victims? Is the evil finally just too hideous and impenetrable? I think the evil is certainly hideous, but perhaps not so impenetrable, because (and I think Bellinger, Kierkegaard or Girard would agree) there is almost literally nothing behind it. There is the pathetic human (which we all are) fleeing from the emptiness inside, feeding on a lot of resentments and illusions, and looking for scapegoats. This is certainly deadly, but maybe it is not so scary after all.

We do no dishonor to the dead by flushing out the grotesque lie that murdered them. 16 of 18 people found the following review helpful. *The Roots of Violence* by Andrew Marr Bellinger is primarily a follower of Soren Kierkegaard and he offers compelling arguments for why SK is particularly helpful in understanding the psychology of human violence. He puts SK in dialogue with several 20th century thinkers, but most especially dialogues with Rene Girard, with references to Schwager, Alison, Bailie, etc. SK has been associated so strongly with the existentialists that it is hard to get people to adjust to a new way of pegging SK, but this book is a great help. He gives a strong argument for the so-called individualism of SK being, in reality, a trenchant social critique. The "individual" for SK is NOT individualistic. Rather, such a one is grounded in GOD rather than grounded in the crowd. That is a fundamental human choice. SK experienced first-hand the bitter rewards of the being himself a victim as a leading periodical in Copenhagen, the "Corsair," launched a scapegoating campaign against SK that became so virulent that it became impossible for him to walk the streets without being surrounded by mockers. This book is challenging, but clearly argued. Highly recommended to anyone interested in understanding violence from a theological viewpoint.

Various historians, philosophers, and social scientists have attempted to provide convincing explanations of the roots of violence, with mixed and confusing results. This book brings Kierkegaard's voice into this conversation in a powerful way, arguing that the Christian intellectual tradition offers the key philosophical tools needed for comprehending human pathology.

"Bellinger's sensitive and insightful book points toward an overarching theory of the fundamental causes and dynamics of violence"--*Journal of the American Academy of Religion* "...this book is readable, powerful, and prophetic. It will challenge Christians to speak not only to the spiritual situation of individuals, but also to the sinful systems of violence in which we find ourselves now more than ever."--*Word World* "[D]emonstrates convincingly that Kierkegaard is a rich-and largely overlooked-resource for understanding the roots of violence."--*Journal of American Scientific Affiliation*
About the Author Charles Bellinger is Theological Librarian and Assistant Professor of Theology and Ethics, Brite Divinity School, Texas.